

# THE TEACHING EXCHANGE

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## *The Sheridan Award 2007 Honorees*

The Advisory Board of the Sheridan Center is very pleased to announce the winners of the *2007 Harriet W. Sheridan Award for Distinguished Contribution to Teaching and Learning* at Brown University. The Sheridan Medal will be presented to **John J. Stein, Ph.D.** (*Bio-Med Neuroscience*) and **Meiqing Zhang, M.A.** (*East Asian Studies*) on Monday May 5, 2008 at the annual University Awards Ceremony to be held at 4:30 PM in Sayles Hall. Thanks to an endowment from the late Frederick Lippitt, the two recipients of the Sheridan Award will each receive a stipend of \$2000, as well as the Sheridan Award medal. Mr. Lippitt was Senior Fellow of the University's Board of Fellows and a member of the Sheridan Center's Advisory Board.

**John J. Stein, Ph.D.** (Lecturer, *Bio-Med Neuroscience*) was enthusiastically nominated for the Sheridan Award by colleagues and graduate students in departments across the University. Not only is he well-known among undergraduates for the quality of his teaching, whether in Biology 20: The Foundation of Living Systems or The Brain: Introduction to Neuroscience, but he also enjoys an outstanding reputation for his leadership in the pedagogy of biology, whether in higher or elementary and secondary education. As one colleague described him, he has been "a tireless and inspiring mentor to a small army of graduate and undergraduate teaching assistants during his twelve years at Brown."

Dr. Stein's work in mentoring graduate and undergraduate teaching assistants in responsible pedagogy is founded on his own teaching style. His ability to collaborate with colleagues in co-teaching complex courses models the fundamental collegiality of pedagogy. His work with TAs at all levels inspires teamwork through the exchange of ideas and an understanding that sound pedagogy is based on ongoing reflection and revision. Colleagues accord him high praise for his patient leadership of weekly TA meetings which transform TAs who "by the end of the semester...are confident in how to make teaching decisions, how to organize and present information and how to deal with challenging questions. John's mentoring plays a key role in this transformation." A graduate student observed that his mentoring enabled her to develop an innovative method of teaching which has now been adopted for use by local high school science teachers.

Dr. Stein's support for connecting the pedagogy of biology between higher education and area schools and community programs benefits some 1000 students each

year through Brain Awareness Week. One colleague noted that his commitment to this labor-intensive effort is based on his "deep sense of community and outreach." As a result of his long experience in orchestrating such outreach, in 2006 he and co-investigators in Summer and Continuing Studies and Education were awarded a prestigious NIH Science Education Partnership grant (A.R.I.S.E.) to advance local science education.

Senior colleagues with whom he has worked also credit Dr. Stein for helping them improve their own teaching, whether through example or collegial exchange, especially in interdisciplinary teaching. He is able to bring together colleagues across disciplines to help students understand intellectual connections, rather than mere disciplinary distinctions. In sum, Dr. Stein was universally recommended for the Sheridan Award as a faculty member who exemplifies mentoring which empowers other to teach a broad spectrum of students complex scientific concepts effectively and imaginatively.

Colleagues from the department of *East Asian Studies* nominated Senior Lecturer **Meiqing Zhang, M.A.** for the Sheridan Award in recognition of her skills as a mentor of faculty colleagues in pedagogy and professional development within the discipline of Chinese language, for her work in pedagogical innovation amongst the members of her department, and for her scholarship in pedagogy within her field. Ms. Zhang has taught at Brown since 1988 and during that time her success in training others to be effective instructors of Chinese has resulted in the international reputation of the Brown program. In fact, it was noted that her skills as a mentor and "teacher of teachers" had created a problem - the teachers that she has trained are in such demand that her department must continually replace them!

One colleague cited Ms Zhang as providing a model to colleagues of adaptation to ever-changing pedagogy in her field, whether in the incorporation of new discoveries in cognitive and linguistic sciences or the application of electronic technologies to empower student learning. She was also noted for the quality of her research into pedagogy which has led to the recent publication of an innovative approach to teaching first year Chinese, a new book on teaching grammar, and work on a book on teaching advanced Chinese

Her work in mentoring and training others, both instructors and visiting lecturers, received universal accolades from colleagues. In a department in which there is a constant changeover in instructional staff, her skill in serving as the stable foundation for young colleagues has enabled the Brown Chinese program to be successful for students and instructors. One junior colleague observed that the supplementary materials she creates for classes assist her colleagues to be more effective instructors. She invites junior colleagues to observe her classes and to review and discuss what has been observed. Her openness and directness encourage colleagues to approach pedagogical improvement without anxiety. She meets weekly with these junior colleagues to ensure that they are facilitating student learning in this demanding and challenging field.

In addition, her work was applauded for managing the entire educational experience of the study abroad program. This involved helping colleagues to create stable learning environments for students through thoughtful staffing and mentoring both here at Brown and with colleagues in China. Her ability to simultaneously manage complex and effective learning environments for students in different parts of the world was cited for

ensuring that a Brown education in Chinese will have positive application long after graduation.

The criteria for the Sheridan Award and a list of previous honorees (and their citations) can be found on the Center's web site at: [http://www.brown.edu/sheridan\\_center/award](http://www.brown.edu/sheridan_center/award).