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[Students](#)
[Faculty & Staff](#)
[Alumni & Supporters](#)
[Visitors](#)
[Home](#)
[About the SAS](#)
[Academics](#)
[News & Events](#)
[Honors & Awards](#)
[Rutgers Publications](#)
[Rutgers Events](#)
[New & Noteworthy](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[Search SAS Site](#)
[Search Rutgers](#)

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SAS 2007 Teaching Awards

The 2007 SAS Awards for Distinguished Contributions to Undergraduate Education

Congratulations to the winners of this year's awards!

Scroll down, or click on a name to read the citation from the award presentation ceremony.

Professor: **Janos Komlos**

Associate Professor: **Terry R. McGuire**

Associate Professor: **Nicholas A. Rennie**

Assistant Professor: **Ethel Brooks**

Assistant Professor: **Lisa L. Miller**

Teaching Assistant: **Lara Pudwell**

Lecturer-Assistant Professor: **Paul R. Sprachman**

Professor

Janos Komlos, Mathematics

Professor Janos Komlos joined the Rutgers faculty in 1988. He has played a leading role in the development of the summer Research Experience for Undergraduates program. In addition, he has been the driving force behind the creation of the honors track in the department of mathematics.

In developing the Research Experience program, Janos has increased the participation of Rutgers undergraduates, working closely with each group of students. He also internationalized the summer program, bringing in Czech students. This program is now considered a pioneering international undergraduate research program by the National Science Foundation.

When an honors track in mathematics was under discussion, Janos launched a student seminar allowing freshman and sophomores to work closely with faculty, giving presentations on a unified body of sophisticated pure mathematics. He also introduced an honors version of the Mathematical Reasoning Course suitable for identifying and training students appropriate for an enriched program. The honors track itself took shape around this core, incorporating existing honors courses and a further student seminar for 3rd and 4th year students, and the established honors program now leads to the B.S. degree. This spring, members of the honors track were accepted for graduate work at Berkeley, Chicago, CMU (Carnegie-Mellon), Maryland, Michigan, Princeton, UCLA, San Diego, Urbana, U. Penn., and Yale.

The final word may be left with one of Janos's students from the honors track, who wrote:

Before I took his honors section of math 300 I had little specific interest in math as an abstract discipline. He showed me a world beyond memorization of formulas, integration rules, rote calculation, and the like. ... His explanations of new and nebulous concepts consistently delivered clarity and illumination. He taught me how to think, and how to get excited about math. He was a demanding teacher, forcing students to learn the material until they understood it. His influence on my life has been indelible. Next year I am pursuing a PhD in math, and I know that without him this would not have been possible. I am forever grateful.

Janos Komlos's contributions inside and outside the classroom make him a very deserving recipient this award.

Associate Professor

Terry R. McGuire, Genetics

Terry McGuire has been a member of the Rutgers faculty since 1979. He is an outstanding classroom teacher, implementing innovative methods that have made him a national leader in genetics instruction. Moreover, as Vice Chair of Undergraduate Education in the department, he has introduced both transformative changes and constant incremental improvements to its undergraduate curriculum.

Terry's activities have significantly increased student satisfaction and produced high levels of student involvement in departmental activities. For example, Terry advises the Association of Undergraduate Geneticists, a student group that sponsors lectures, trips and even "genetics" dances. Terry's activities have measurably improved the quality of instruction, bringing acclaim to the department as a leader in preparing students for careers in research. The largest identifiable group of undergraduate majors in Genetics (approximately 40%) goes on to Ph.D. programs. This year Genetics, a relatively small department, sponsored 9 Henry Rutgers Scholars.

Terry led the development of the highly successful two-semester core course for majors, Genetic Analysis I and II, and his involvement in the NSF-sponsored program of Science Education for New Civic Engagements and Responsibilities has brought well-deserved recognition to Rutgers. He is also a one of the first 23 National Bio-sci-Ed-Net Scholars whose role is to mentor and lead university faculty in transforming undergraduate education through regional and national outreach efforts.

Terry is an outstanding, motivational, and innovative teacher. For his commitment to undergraduate education at Rutgers and nationwide, we are pleased to present Terry McGuire with this well-deserved award.

Associate Professor

Nicholas A. Rennie, Germanic, Russian & East European Languages & Literatures

Nicholas Rennie joined the faculty at Rutgers in 1997. With his exemplary classroom teaching in the German, Comparative Literature, and Honors programs, his distinguished service as Undergraduate Director of German and as Acting Chair of the Department of Germanic, Russian, and East European Languages and Literatures, and his energetic participation on numerous university committees, he has made a tremendous contribution to undergraduate studies at Rutgers.

Nicholas offers an impressive repertoire of interdisciplinary courses in the German, Comparative Literature, and Honors programs, appealing to large numbers of students. Innovative courses like "Madness and Perversion," "Bargaining with the Devil," "Wise Fools," and "Big Bang: The Literature of Chaos and Order" challenge students to think about literature, philosophy, and ethics in new and exciting ways. As one student comments, "Professor

Rennie brings out the best in students. He asks clear and important questions that help engage the class in discussion. The reading list is totally state of the art. I think I'll leave Rutgers this May believing, somehow, that I am educated."

In his capacity as Undergraduate Director of German and his four semesters as Acting Chair of the Department (1999-2000), Nicholas has been instrumental in invigorating the German program at Rutgers. In addition to introducing internal curricular innovations, he has worked to develop numerous interdisciplinary initiatives with other departments. A co-developer of the very successful German Special Interest Housing option in the dorms, he has promoted the study of German in extracurricular student life as well. Under his sound leadership, the undergraduate German and German Studies majors and minors have grown enormously: the department routinely has 35-40 majors enrolled every year. This success is due in large part to Nicholas's stalwart efforts.

His contributions to undergraduate education at Rutgers extend far beyond the German Department. He is a member of the Core Faculty of Comparative Literature, and has been very active in the Rutgers College Honors Program. He also has served on numerous university committees charged directly or indirectly with improving undergraduate education at Rutgers. He approaches these service assignments with the same sincerity, passion, and effectiveness that animate his classroom teaching. An astute comment from one of his student evaluations poignantly summarizes his extraordinary commitment to both teaching and service: "Professor Rennie has a profound streak of goodness that cannot be overlooked."

We are pleased to recognize Nicholas Rennie's enduring commitment to undergraduate education, and the excellence of his contributions, with this award.

Assistant Professor

Ethel Brooks, Sociology, Women's & Gender Studies

Ethel Brooks has taught across all levels of the curriculum – from introductory undergraduate courses to advanced graduate colloquia – since joining the faculty in 2001. One of the terms most frequently used by students to describe Ethel's teaching is "awesome." Her teaching engages some of the most difficult but compelling topics of the day, taking on gender, war, terrorism, displacement, and the impact of globalization on the everyday lives of ordinary people.

Her choice of texts is not only intellectually demanding and diverse but also creative – she draws on the work of scholars, activists, novelists, and filmmakers to show students how ideas manifest themselves in a variety of settings. She also incorporates her own original research into her courses, affording students rich opportunities to see how innovative scholarship can transform popular understandings of the world.

In her undergraduate course evaluations for Comparative Feminisms and the Dynamics of Race, Class and Sex, many students noted that she introduces them to new perspectives, and challenges them to examine their assumptions, and they consistently write that she has helped them rethink their entire worldviews. The high esteem which Ethel's students have for her is reflected in the large number of invitations she receives to speak to student groups outside the formal classroom. As impressive as these numbers are, what is perhaps even more remarkable is that Ethel tries to accept as many of these invitations as possible. She has been generous with her time and her expertise, delivering a wide range of talks to students, demonstrating the breadth and interdisciplinary scope of her work as well as her desire to make complex ideas accessible to a diverse audience.

Her expansive knowledge of both classic and cutting-edge scholarship, her rigorous intellectual discipline, as well as her courage in asking difficult questions make her classes lively and sophisticated sites of learning.

Ethel Brooks is in every way an extraordinary teacher, and we are pleased to present her with this award.

Assistant Professor

Lisa L. Miller, Political Science, Criminal Justice Program

Lisa Miller came to Rutgers in Fall 2004 from Penn State, where she was a tenure-track assistant professor in the Department of Sociology and Crime, Law and Justice. Although her SAS appointment lies entirely within the Department of Political Science, half of her teaching duties are in the Criminal Justice Program. Lisa has been a stellar contributor to both undergraduate programs, redesigning and developing new courses, helping to shape the curricula, and advising and mentoring students and supervising research projects. She has consistently received excellent evaluations from her students.

What emerges clearly from student comments is a picture of a professor who poses difficult but manageable intellectual challenges for her students, sets high standards, cares sincerely for her students and is able to communicate this care and deep respect, and gives her students the confidence and assistance they need to work up to their potential. One typical comment from "Constitutional Law" last semester reads:

I took this class as a Criminal Justice requirement and had no prior interest or knowledge in the subject matter, but I have learned more in this class than any other class this semester, and I actually enjoyed coming to it. Helpful, friendly professor with unbiased views. Rutgers needs more professors like this.

Another comment reads:

Challenging and interesting, Professor Miller is a brilliant lecturer and a great legal scholar as well. I'm going to study constitutional law at law school next year; so she changed my life for real.

Lisa represents a model of what we hope our junior colleagues will be able to achieve in the classroom, in one-to-one engagement with our undergraduates, and in contributing to wider improvements in undergraduate education at Rutgers.

We are pleased to present this award to Lisa Miller, an inspirational, extraordinary teacher.

Teaching Assistant

Lara Pudwell, Mathematics

Lara Pudwell is a fourth-year graduate student at Rutgers. She is a graduate of Valparaiso University with a B.A. in Computer Science and a B.S. in mathematics, both summa cum laude, and a minor in Humanities. She received a Torrey Graduate Fellowship at Rutgers, won a TA Teaching Excellence award from the math department in Spring 2006, and is a Rutgers fellow in the new Carnegie Academy for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. She has received a PEO Scholar Award for her research, and is also the author of 6 research articles, one of them co-authored with a computer.

Lara has served as Graduate coordinator of the summer mathematics program at DIMACS, as a Teaching Assistant and Graduate Assistant since 2005, and as a Head TA in Spring 2006. In her work, she has been very involved with the integration of computer technology into the third and fourth semesters of the calculus sequence, serving as a particular resource for instructional technology among other course-related issues.

Those calculus courses incorporate problem-sets using the mathematical software package "Maple." Lara took a leading role in the development of new problem sets, and designed web pages to supplement them. She then compiled a comparative survey of student reactions to the old and new sets, leading to the adoption of the new sets by the department.

Lara is enthusiastically praised by both the instructors and students she has worked with as a TA. An instructor who observed her session introducing students to the Maple program called her "a master of the subject, and a master teacher." The students agree: in some sections of that course she has received a perfect rating of 5.0.

This outstanding work with her students, and her assistance in developing the math curriculum overall, makes Lara Pudwell a deserving recipient of this award.

A special award in the category of Lecturer-Assistant Professor

Paul R. Sprachman, Middle Eastern Studies

Paul Sprachman has served Rutgers University since 1988, first as a member of the ESL faculty, then as an instructor of courses in Middle Eastern Studies and Persian language. His extensive and intimate knowledge of the languages, cultures, politics, and religions of the area have made him an invaluable founding member of the Middle Eastern Studies program at Rutgers. He has developed and taught Introduction to the Modern Middle East, a course required for the major or minor in Middle Eastern Studies, as well as seminars for honors students and an impressive list of novel courses on the culture of the Middle East. His students' instructional rating forms amply testify to his successes in the classroom.

As the Vice Director for Undergraduate Studies since 2004, Paul has tirelessly recruited, counseled, supported, and challenged students, both in Middle Eastern Studies and university-wide. He has supervised both the creation and cross-listing of new courses, and the hiring of new faculty that have led the Center for Middle Eastern Studies to become a successful unit, with a total of over 1,400 enrollments. He has been instrumental in building bridges with other departments within the University as well as collaborating with other universities, such as the University of Pennsylvania with whom he co-taught Modern Middle Eastern Literature in Translation for several years.

For his academic integrity, for his passion for education and his excellent service to the Center for Middle Eastern Studies, its faculty, and its students, and for his contributions to the Rutgers community in general, we are happy to honor Paul Sprachman with this special Award for Distinguished Contributions to Undergraduate Education.

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[\[Back \]](#)