Summaries of the 2013 Distinguished Educator Award Recipients

Dr. Abigail Cheever, Associate Professor of English and Film Studies
Dr. Abigail Cheever is a renowned educator and scholar of American film and literature. She is the author of *Real Phonies: Cultures of Authenticity in Post World War II America*, which the New York Times Magazine praised as a “fascinating...book...about the American drama of personal authenticity.” It is this drama of authenticity that Dr. Cheever brings to life for students in her courses. Through films, such as *Apocalypse Now* or *All the President’s Men*, students explore the rich interior life of the self and the contemporary search for meaning in modern day America. Students respond to her with enthusiasm; they laud Dr. Cheever as “fantastic,” “phenomenal,” and “excellent,” and describe her courses as both “incredibly enjoyable and intriguing.” In addition to developing a variety of courses on film and literature, Dr. Cheever has written numerous papers and articles on literary and film topics as varied as *Jerry McGuire*, conspiracy theories, and serial killers. She was instrumental in the creation of the University’s Film Studies program, now beginning its fourth year, and launched its production curriculum two years ago. In addition, she has chaired the Tucker-Boatwright Festival of Film and mentored several students in their honors theses or independent research projects. For her seamless integration of teaching and scholarship and for her leadership in bringing the study of film to the University of Richmond, Dr. Abigail Cheever is recognized as a distinguished educator.

Dr. Wade Downey, Associate Professor of Chemistry
A first-rate scholar of organic chemistry and devoted mentor of student research, Dr. Wade Downey has consistently made outstanding accomplishments in the integration of teaching and research. Dr. Downey’s courses are known for their rigor, but are so popular with the students he consistently has to grant overrides. Indeed, his goal has been to infuse his courses with enthusiasm and engagement so that students feel emboldened the challenging subject matter. Dr. Downey does this through both dedication and creativity. The night prior to a major exam, he is known to stay on campus long after working hours to answer questions and do practice problems with students, and students rave about his lectures, which enlivens with puppet shows and guitar performances. In addition, his student research groups have presented at several regional and national meetings and are active in the various on-campus research symposiums. His students are accepted into the finest graduate schools and medical schools across the nation, and they reflect on his skill in the classroom and the lab with gratitude. One student wrote, “He is a genuinely open person, willing to help his students reach their full potential.” Another said, “Dr. Downey was the most influential, and simply the best professor of my college career. He allowed me the independence to figure out difficult problems on my own while still being a constant source of advice and encouragement.” Such comments are a testament to Dr. Downey’s excellence in the classroom and the research lab.

Dr. Jeffrey Harrison, Professor of Management
Dr. Jeff Harrison joined University of Richmond in 2004 as W. David Robbins Chair in Strategic Management. Since then, Dr. Harrison has taken on leadership roles in teaching and learning in the Robins School of Business. He teaches Strategic Management and Entrepreneurship courses and serves as coordinator of the Strategic Management capstone course for all business majors. He works to ensure its consistent delivery and manages the McWick Case Competition in which all Strategic Management students compete each year. He recruits Robins School faculty and executives from major firms in the Richmond community to judge the competition and choose a winner. The external judges are often startled by the quality of analysis and the students’ poise. Dr. Harrison was also instrumental in creating the highly successful track in Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and he has supervised 19 MBA capstone projects. His teaching record is characterized by rigor and a high level of student accomplishment. By providing students with a rare blend of expertise firmly grounded in theory and practice, Dr. Harrison
routinely receiving evaluation scores that rank him as one of the most effective teachers in the Robins School. The open-ended student comments provide an overwhelming evidence of the students' admiration for his skill and efforts. Outside the classroom, he maintains an active national and international presence in scholarship and service to the profession, and indeed he has done some of his best scholarly work since his arrival at the University of Richmond. Dr. Harrison, in sum, epitomizes leadership in teaching.

Dr. Peter Kaufman, Professor of Leadership Studies
Dr. Peter Iver Kaufman studies conflict and authority in late antiquity, including religion, politics, and drama in Elizabethan England —topics that may, at first glance, seem only remotely related to leadership and to students’ customary interests. But Dr. Kaufman, by skillfully guiding student discussions, framing age-old questions in ways that underscore their contemporary relevance, and passionately analyzing issues he has studied all his academic life, transforms even the most historically disinclined of students into engaged scholars of the past. His classroom is the site of vigorous debate—between professor and students, students themselves, and thinkers and leaders long dead, or (as Dr. Kaufman puts it) "very dead." His excellence in teaching is corroborated by a variety of sources, including the most important source of all: his students. One wrote: "I had never seen such a passionate professor. You think you read and understand an article, and as soon as you get to class he brings life to whatever topic you're doing." And another provides the highest compliment any student can pay a teacher: “Thank you Dr. Kaufman for making me a smarter human being. I am truly grateful for it.” The epitome of the educator/scholar, Dr. Kaufman is also an internationally recognized expert on religion and political leadership. The author of a half-a-dozen books and enumerable papers and chapters, he is editor-in-chief of the journal *Religions*. Founder of the Scholars Latino Initiative, which has chapters in North Carolina and Virginia, Dr. Kaufman also teaches and consults on immigration and education.

Dr. David Leary, University Professor, Department of Psychology
During an over thirty-year career in higher education, Dr. David Leary has held numerous leadership positions, including the Dean of the School of Arts and Sciences at the University of Richmond and the coordinator of the Core course. An acclaimed scholar in his field, Dr. Leary has also compiled a long list of scholarly publications – including five books and numerous articles and book chapters – and has been recognized by his peers with a lifetime achievement award from the Society for the History of Psychology. But it is in the classroom where Dr. Leary’s dedication to the liberal arts ideal is most evident. With degrees in philosophy, psychology, and history, Dr. Leary brings intellectual breadth and depth to his students. In his courses, he skillfully weaves together works of literature, philosophy, and social science in order to guide students through the rich diversity of human intellectual thought. Time and again, Dr. Leary demonstrates he is deeply devoted to his students’ development as thinkers. For example, in his First-Year Seminars, Dr. Leary requires students to submit a full-page, typed response for each day of class, and in return, he provides feedback on students’ writing quality and their understanding of the material. Students respond enthusiastically to the challenge, and in fact, it is claimed that Dr. Leary has never received a single negative course evaluation at the University of Richmond! With a remarkable career of scholarship, service to the University, and commitment to teaching, Dr. Leary is the very definition of distinguished.

Noah Sachs, Professor of Law & Director, Merhige Center in Environmental Law
Colleagues often characterize Professor Noah Sachs as a “rock star” and one of the most sought-after teachers in the T. C. Williams School of Law. Students consistently comment on his enthusiasm, command of the material, and ability to make the law “real” by infusing the legal material with exposure to the real world. What does that mean? It means that in his environmental law classes, he takes his
students on field trips—to Dominion Power’s Chesterfield power plant to see how environmental statutes apply to a major industrial facility; to Washington, D.C., to see Supreme Court oral arguments on an environmental regulation case; and to the James River to see how law shapes water quality and land protection on the ground. It means that in his environmental lawyering class, students study environmental law in practice—through case studies of the brownfields revitalization effort at the Port of Bellingham, Washington; through analysis of climate change legislation pending in Congress; and through simulations of conflicts between the Environmental Protection Agency and polluters. And it means that in every class, Professor Sachs brings in guest speakers from the community to help bridge the divide between theory and practice. The director of the law school’s Robert R. Merhige Center for Environmental Studies and author of numerous law review articles and an internationally recognized expert in his field, Professor Sachs makes the world of environmental law come alive for his students. He exemplifies “leadership in teach and learning” and “effective integration of teaching and scholarship.”