



## Carnegie Mellon

### Fischbeck Honored As Elite Educator

■ Bruce Gerson

For Professor Paul Fischbeck, an expert in decision analysis and determining chance and probability, being named this year's recipient of the university-wide William H. and Frances S. Ryan Award for Meritorious Teaching was a decision whose time had come. He will receive the award at the Celebration of Teaching at 4:30 p.m., Wednesday, April 21 in Rangos 1 & 2.

It's a fitting award for Fischbeck, an outstanding teacher in two departments and two colleges who is praised by his peers and pupils for his mastery of the classroom and his astute expertise in leading team project-oriented courses that teach students problem-solving skills, one of the hallmarks of a CMU education.

A faculty member in the College of Engineering's Department of Engineering and Public Policy (EPP) and the College of Humanities and Social Sciences' Department of Social and Decision Sciences (SDS) since 1990, Fischbeck is known across campus for his Decision Analysis and Decision Support Systems (DADSS) and EPP project courses.

Using different aspects of campus

life as a topic of study, DADSS provides students with a fundamental knowledge of decision analysis, and hands-on experience with analytical methods and procedures while learning to work in small groups. Students have studied usage of the library and weight room, jaywalking and eating habits on campus. Once completed, the studies often inspire campus improvements.

Howard Heinz University Professor Baruch Fischhoff, said students in Fischbeck's classes "use more of Excel's capabilities than most people realize is possible."

Also legendary is Fischbeck's grading system for multiple-choice exams in DADSS. Rather than just picking the correct answer, students must assess the probability of each answer being correct.

Students and colleagues agree that Fischbeck gets the most from his students and they get the most from him.

"He is able to understand what his students need on an individual basis and connect with each and everyone of them," senior business administration and decision sciences major Raunaq Palejwala wrote in an email supporting Fischbeck's nomination. "The way that he teaches material, especially material as difficult to grasp as this [in the DADSS course] is truly unique. He uses everything he's done in the past as part of his unique academic palette, which makes learning form him extremely fun, down-to-earth and easy to relate to.

"Professor Fischbeck is the finest professor I have ever had. He is the unique breed of professor that gives this university the reputation it has earned," Palejwala said.

"It [DADSS] was a stimulating, challenging, 'dig into your brain and your psyche' class whose subject matter, techniques and real-world applications I will remember for the rest of my life," said Laura Seitz, a 2008 graduate who majored in civil and environmental engineering and EPP.

Junior Kate Smith said DADSS embodies the Carnegie Mellon philosophy of practical, technical learning.

"I think Paul's passion for education is responsible for my own appreciation of — and commitment to — rigorous quantitative research, my desire to pursue a Ph.D. to continue pursuing important research questions, and my desire to teach with the same interest in my students and passion for my subject," wrote Ryan Menefee (HNZ'09).



PAUL FISCHBECK

PHOTO BY KEN ANDREYO

Michael Cushman, a mechanical engineering and EPP major who earned his bachelor's degree last year, took DADSS as well as an EPP project course with Fischbeck. "He has an amazing ability to bring order and consistency to what can be unclear and confusing. During the project course, Professor Fischbeck let us decide where it was going, but told us how we could get there," he said.

Like his students, Fischbeck's col-

leagues in EPP and SDS believe he is among the elite professors at Carnegie Mellon. In their nominating letter, Emeritus Professor Francis Clay McMichael and professors M. Granger Morgan, head of EPP, and John Miller, head of SDS, wrote that he is an "accomplished educator of the highest rank.

"His enthusiasm for pedagogy, innovative teaching methods, articulate and expressive style, unfailing dedication to students in and out of the classroom, and his ability to generate genuine excitement among students all qualify Paul for this significant recognition as a teacher," they said.

While his teaching talents are unquestioned, he's also an exceptional client for seniors in the capstone project-based course "Information Systems Applications," said information systems professors Randy Weinberg and Jeria Quesenberry. Students in the course work in small teams to design and implement an information system to help solve a problem for a local non-profit organization or university client.

Quesenberry said Fischbeck has consistently supplied innovative challenges as a client, and provides exceptional supervision, guidance and assistance to the student teams. One project involved investigating traffic fatalities based on gender and demographic issues. Another involved using gender and demographics to investigate mortality rates in general.

The Web site [www.DeathRiskRankings.com](http://www.DeathRiskRankings.com) allows users to query publicly available data from the United States and Europe, and compare mortality risks by gender, age, cause of death and geographic region. The Web site not only gives the risk of dying within the next year, but it also ranks the probable causes and allows for quick side-by-side comparison between groups.

"I have seen, time and time again, how skillfully Paul works with our students and faculty advisers," Weinberg said in a supporting letter. "His vision has driven several IS student projects to fruition in recent years and it has been a great delight to see some of these projects receive national, and indeed, international attention.

"Very simply, I would say Paul Fischbeck is the 'best of the best.' He is tireless and his dedication to student achievement at the undergraduate and graduate levels is, at least within my field of vision, almost unsurpassed."



CELEBRATION  
of  
TEACHING