

Distinguished Graduate Mentor Award Recipients



Thomas Daniel

Judith Howard

David Notkin

Noel Weiss

Dean's Statement

The University of Washington is an institution that prizes not only traditional classroom and research activities but also the mentoring of its graduate students. It is fitting that a great research university publicly recognize the intense, one-on-one relationship that is the hallmark of graduate education. The Distinguished Graduate Mentor Award, established in 1999, is one of the most prized awards given at UW. Recipients of the award are faculty members who have made outstanding contributions to the education and guidance of graduate students. The Graduate School and the University have been proud to present the award to Professors Noel Weiss (1999), David Notkin (2000), Judith Howard (2001), and Thomas Daniel (2002), as well as twelve other faculty recognized with Honorable Mentions.

Criteria used in evaluating nominees for the award are that the nominee:

- Provides intellectual leadership
- Respects students' goals and helps students to work towards them
- Is supportive at a personal as well as a professional level, is a good advocate for students
- Actively guides students' research and training; clearly articulates expectations and holds students to high standards
- Actively seeks financial support for students' graduate study and research
- Actively involves students in teaching or research
- Actively recruits and encourages applications to the unit's graduate program
- Is accessible for advice and assistance, whether student is in residence, on leave, is or is not 'one of theirs'
- Actively involves students in professional conferences

- Actively involves students in publications
- Helps students to overcome problems, discord, and barriers
- Provides good model of professionalism
- Helps students to ‘network’ with other relevant professionals and faculty
- Assists students in career preparation
- Alerts students to career opportunities; helps students secure post-degree employment
- Provides assistance in post-degree professional work

Each of the aforementioned recipients exemplifies these qualities of fine mentoring, and we are publishing their essays in order to capture and publicize best practices in graduate mentoring. Preceding each essay are comments from their students that demonstrate the positive impact faculty mentoring has on students and the professional community. We hope that these awards will inspire the community of scholars at UW to continue debating what constitutes excellence in graduate mentoring and following through on their own mentoring practices.

Our awardees are highly recognized in their respective fields as scholars and as mentors.

Thomas Daniel takes the view that, rather than guiding his students’ research, they guide his. He sees himself as a partner to the graduate and undergraduate students working in his lab. “The research machine at this University is a complete and utter partnership with graduate students. We couldn’t do what we do without that brain power.” Students testify that he encourages them to focus on projects that interest them. A zoology doctoral candidate who was left without an advisor found a home in Daniel’s lab. He encouraged her to pursue her own research interests without trying to squeeze them into the lab’s designated research area. Daniel has helped graduate students financially as well, by donating money from his 1996 MacArthur “Genius” Award to support the work in areas outside the scope of traditional grants. His support also

extends to inviting students home for the holidays, talking them through rough patches, and encouraging them to pursue career paths that will make them happy, whether inside the academy or beyond.

Judith Howard's enthusiasm for working with graduate students has lead her to serve twice as her department's Graduate Program Coordinator, organize graduate student workshops on such topics as preparing for job interviews and applying for grants, and inform students constantly about new hires, new course offerings, job opportunities, workshops of interest, etc. It's all part of Howard's philosophy of mentoring, which she says is "making sure that grad students, while they're in the program, develop skills that they need, many of which are not just about academic content." Her students have gone on to careers at non-research-oriented as well as research-oriented institutions and to careers outside the academy. "These are very important relationships that you develop through mentoring," Howard says. "When I learned about the award I was higher than a kite. I said to various colleagues that I couldn't imagine receiving an award that would matter more to me."

Professor Notkin, whose specialty is software engineering, adopted his mentoring philosophy from his own adviser at Carnegie Mellon University. "He used to say that you should focus on graduating terrific students, and then you'll have terrific research," Notkin said. "But if you focus on just the research, you might not get terrific students." Along those lines, he said he tries to get students to pursue topics that interest them rather than him. Again and again, Notkin's current and former students recount invitations to dinner, informal gatherings to celebrate milestones, social introductions and personal and career advice, in addition to exceptional academic guidance, as hallmarks of their time at the UW and important factors in their success after graduation. Some now collaborate with one another, even though they weren't at the UW at the same time. Notkin, they say, is the catalyst behind the network.

Professor Weiss has a worldwide reputation among his students in the public health field. Legendary for his “open door policy” as a teacher and for research projects with his graduate students, he continues to provide career advice and guidance on grant applications for his former students worldwide. Students who take his epidemiology courses earn what Weiss calls their “union card,” described by one former student as “a lifetime contract for continued assistance and mentorship.” Even more than a decade after leaving the UW for professional posts all over the world, Weiss stays in touch with many of his former students, some on a weekly basis. Among other things, he alerts them to developments in related fields, continues to review draft manuscripts and grants, and shares not only scientific expertise but also insights and advice on building a career in academia and research. Weiss’ students say that he remains a key advisor, generous colleague, and inspiring role model in their lives and work.

Thanks to the successful mentoring they have received, the students of these mentors are able to give back to their professional communities and act as role models for other young professionals in their fields. The relationship between a graduate student and a faculty advisor is one that can have a profound, lifelong influence on both parties. At its best, this mentoring relationship inspires and gives confidence to the student and provides the faculty member with a valued colleague. Therefore, it is with great pleasure that I recognize these recipients of the Distinguished Graduate Mentor Award.

—*Marsha Landolt*
Dean, The Graduate School



Distinguished Graduate Mentor Award Recipients

- 2002** Thomas Daniel, *Professor of Zoology*
- 2001** Judith Howard, *Professor of Sociology*
- 2000** David Notkin, *Professor of Computer Science
and Engineering*
- 1999** Noel Weiss, *Professor of Epidemiology*

Honorable Mention Recipients

- 2002** John Berg, *Chemical Engineering*
Raimonda Modiano, *English and Comparative Literature*
Lynne Werner, *Speech and Hearing Sciences*
- 2001** Avery Guest, *Sociology*
Chadwick Oliver, *Forest Resources*
Gerold Schubiger, *Zoology*
- 2000** Richard Kenney, *English*
Julie Stein, *Anthropology*
Gerald Baldasty, *Communications*
- 1999** Tom Daniel, *Zoology*
Lewayne Gilchrist, *Social Work*
David Notkin, *Computer Science and Engineering*
Robert Paine, *Zoology*
Robert Dunnell, *Anthropology*



Thomas Daniel

Professor of Zoology

Comments from Students and Peers

That he donated funds from [his MacArthur] award to the department to provide support for graduate research is a testament to his devotion to graduate students.

A student will walk into his office, down because an experiment won't work, some equations won't yield a solution, or simply because life in science seems too much to handle. A conversation ensues, and ten minutes later the student emerges renewed, curious again and hopeful.

This is the kind of thing one hears all the time around here—that the reason there is now a student on a particular departmental committee or that there are free donuts on the fourth floor every Friday is because Tom decided to make it happen.

He even invited me to his home for Thanksgiving dinner. Bear in mind I didn't mention to him that I didn't have time to go home for the holidays. Rather, he came by my office and checked to see if I was going home.

While Tom has provided me with all of the foundations for an extremely successful academic career...he has also been supportive of my explorations into alternative careers...he has encouraged us to follow the path that we believe will make us most happy.

Although his own lab is chronically bursting at the seams, Tom always makes room for graduate students in need.

Tom has unfailing commitment to his students...just yesterday he opened his schedule to help one of his students who finished 6 years ago build a “better” version of her thesis model.

...in awe of this crazy guy’s energy and enthusiasm.

Few people personify the word “mentor” as he does.

Awardee's Statement



Tom Daniel
Professor of Zoology

I have been associated with some of the most inspiring graduate mentors both here at the UW and at Duke where I received my Ph.D. I run a research and teaching program that draws on a few common themes that seem to unite these mentors: provide students with considerable intellectual freedom, encourage them to follow their noses in research, give them pride and ownership of their degrees, and most importantly, develop a partnership with students in research and teaching that fosters independence and leads to a win-win situation where they bring to us incredible new perspectives and ideas. What had seemed like a deep secret held by the best mentors is actually simple: surround yourself with excited and energetic students, enjoy the intellectual challenges they put forward, and celebrate the frontiers they conquer. It is so easy it almost seems like cheating.

I am fortunate to be positioned in a department that attracts some of the best graduate students in the country. They bring experiences drawn from outstanding undergraduate research programs around the world, as well as ideas gleaned from their travels, from readings, and from faculty mentors elsewhere. In turn, we benefit by promoting new partnerships in our research programs here. Programs like the Achievement Rewards for College Scientists (ARCS) and training grants from NSF and NIH allow us to attract these students and support them in ways that give them freedom and encourage them to learn new disciplines.

It helps as well to encourage partnerships between graduate students and undergraduates in the laboratory. The graduate

students not only help the mentor to guide these budding scientists, they also are inspired by watching undergraduates get completely stoked about doing science, thinking about science, and talking about science. It is that excitement and passion that we all aim to develop in ourselves and in our students. When graduate students become party to the process of fostering that passion, they benefit in the same way faculty mentors do.

Fostering partnerships between students and collaborators around the world makes it even more exciting to be part of graduate training. Like pollination processes, students can transfer fertile ideas from one lab to another. That exchange promotes some of the best scholarship and fosters professionalism among the students. Reaching the point where students present papers at international meetings on an annual basis gives even greater recognition of their scholarship and greater pride in what they have accomplished.

Realizing that a Ph.D. is more than a training ground for clones of ourselves, graduate programs are made richer by recognizing the diverse career paths that can follow from a rigorous research program. Some students take that training to become our best ambassadors, writing science for the popular press, teaching science in inner city schools, or keeping the research bar high in government and industry positions.

Probably the most exciting part about being a mentor is just the fun of doing what a university should do: discover and disseminate knowledge and make a difference in our world.



Judith Howard

Professor of Sociology

Comments from Students and Peers

[T]he word “mentor” is insufficient to describe the role Judy has played in my career. ...Judy’s mentoring has never ended. Even though I have been teaching now for twelve years and even chair my own department, I still seek her input and ideas whenever I need them. To this day, I consider her a friend, a colleague, and an intellectual guide.

Judy is of course a tremendous advocate for taking teaching seriously, and provides a great deal of academic, intellectual, and moral support for an activity at which graduate students spend much of their time... And it goes without saying that I have learned tremendously as an instructor from her mentoring.

She continues to offer guidance to students, even those who are simply thinking about applying to graduate school at UW. For example, she has encouraged and advised one of my current students at Evergreen; Judy’s openness and friendliness is one reason why this student decided to apply to UW’s Sociology graduate program.

*Virtually every student in sociology—whether one of Judy’s formal advisees or not—receives guidance from her...
Clearly, mentoring such a wide variety of students goes beyond the call of duty.*

The time, energy, and commitment she puts into her work and her relationships with students are truly inspiring. She has tremendous respect for students: she really listens to them, engages with them, but doesn’t baby them.

Not only did we know our questions would be treated with respect, but we knew we would receive the advice needed to resolve our problems.

As a woman of color, I work best with a mentor; I found the professional socialization process extremely alienating, and Judy has helped me through that transition and continued to be accessible for me.

Awardee's Statement



Judith Howard
Professor of Sociology

I suspect my philosophy of mentoring is much like my philosophy of friendship. There are some ways in which I work differently with every student I have, just as each friendship has its own nuances, but there is some common core as well. For me, mentoring entails working with students, over an extended time, in developing what really constitutes a theory of one's professional self. Mentoring is deeply rewarding; it generates bonds that combine lessons of the academy and our professional lives with the lessons of life. Some of the things I try to attend to:

- I ask the student to think about her/his goals and how best to work toward accomplishing them. I also ask the student to reflect on the department's goals, and when the two seem to be in conflict in some respects, we work together to recognize that conflict and make informed choices and decisions.
- I try to be aware of what students do and do not know, and help them find information/have access to resources with which they might be unfamiliar. Examples: alerting students to career opportunities; helping students to "network" with other relevant professionals and faculty; instructing in norms about publishing and providing assistance and support at each stage in this process; providing information and assistance in teaching support.
- I try to be clear with my students about what I and the department expect—what are reasonable standards for research, for teaching, for general involvement in the graduate

program and profession? It seems important to me to have high standards, but also, crucially, individualized expectations. And equally important, I ask my students to think about what they expect from me, and to communicate those expectations.

- A number of students express difficulties in having regular access to the faculty with whom they work. I try to be as accessible as I can. At the same time, it also seems important to model appropriate principles of accessibility. Being eternally accessible probably isn't healthy for either student or faculty; practicing very difficult or inconsistent access poses real problems for the student.
- In general, I try to model behaviors that students would do well to follow, both in negative as well as in positive situations. In other words, I try to encourage students to persevere in the face of adversity and learn from it. For example, it can be very useful to be reminded that every one who is a successful academic has experienced rejection often. The key is developing skills to learn from those experiences and try again.
- I also try to go beyond the strictly academic. Willingness to engage about nonacademic life, or negotiating personal difficulties within the academy, can be extremely valuable.
- One other thought. The norm in the academy is that a student will have one primary mentor. I encourage my students to develop mentoring relationships with a variety of faculty members; I think this deepens the graduate experience and encourages a habit of collaboration and collegiality.
- I also celebrate the changes that take place in my relationships with my students. What may begin as a fairly formal relationship marked by a considerable degree of hierarchical distance can evolve into a mutually supportive and collaborative relationship of peers and colleagues. Some of my most valuable relationships are with former students of mine who have gone on to careers of their own.



David Notkin

**Professor of Computer
Science and Engineering**

Comments from Students and Peers

Meeting David has been an awesome experience for me. Here I was with a prominent leader of the software engineering research community, and he and I were talking about my research and my ideas about how software should be written. I was stunned by how seriously he took my work.

[A] challenge that we face in computer science is a gender imbalance... I could easily have been part of this shrinking pipeline. But, with David's support and encouragement, getting a Ph.D. and now being a role model for other women just seemed easy and natural.

He is an enthusiastic facilitator, not a boss. Indeed, David kiddingly called me "Boss" as a student, having a subtle but pronounced effect over time in letting me know that it was my research. It's no surprise, then, that David's students not only originate first-rate results, but they learn research skills that last a lifetime.

He offered my family a room in his house until we could find a house. And he helped us find a house, too.

David is not just a fine research mentor and advisor, he is also a friend. He expresses this by inviting me to his house for Thanksgiving dinner and other occasions, by taking his collaborators out for a beer when we pass a milestone, by offers of assistance when I am sick, and in innumerable other ways from the large to the small. ...His array of friends, on campus, in the city, and around the world, is a testament to his worth as a person.

I learned to anticipate that teaching can and should be joyful and that moments of excitement can occur in the classroom as well as in the pursuit of research results.

*I unequivocally believe that David has **the best track record in the nation today** in advising students in software engineering.*

David's most unusual and valuable talent is to cause his students to rise up beyond reasonable expectations. His track record of producing so many successful Ph.D. students is evidence of that.

Awardee's Statement



David Notkin
Professor of Science and
Engineering

“What is it about designing or evolving software that makes you angry?” That is the question that I ask every graduate student who expresses interest in becoming my advisee.

I ask this question for several reasons. First, getting the student engaged immediately is a critical step in developing the give-and-take relationship that I find best for graduate advising. Second, over time—sometimes a few weeks, but often over many months or even a year or two—the students’ answers to this question lead to a dissertation project in which they have genuine personal interest; that is, it becomes a problem that they want to solve, rather than one I want them to solve. Finally, it works: I’ve been able to recruit first-rate students, they’ve written terrific dissertations and gone on to successful careers, and it has led to the best research I’ve been involved in.

Of course, mentoring my graduate students goes far beyond attention to their dissertations *per se*. They need to learn a lot about themselves: What problems attract them? What kinds of solutions are they most able and apt to find? What are their strengths and their weaknesses? How do they improve in their weak areas while simultaneously playing to their strengths? What do they want to do after graduation? And what do they need to learn about the discipline of computer science (and the subdiscipline of software engineering)? What problems, when solved, will fundamentally advance the field? What kind of dissertations will be best received by the kinds of organization that they want to work for after graduation? Who are the key people and what are the key organiza-

tions in the field? How do they meet these people and get visibility in these organizations? How does one most effectively convey research to the community? This list is by no means exhaustive, but it captures the kinds of topics I cover with my students during their graduate years.

I've developed a set of techniques over the years to gear students up in these dimensions. Perhaps the most important—beyond individual meetings on a regular basis, of course—is taking students, ideally as a small group, to major conferences. I work with them before the conference to understand their responsibilities (e.g., identifying a set of people in the field they'd like to meet), what talks to go to (and not to go to), how to handle expenses, etc. I try to check in with them fairly frequently during the conference, finding out what cool ideas they've heard, introducing them to key people, getting their insights about the conference, etc. Other than the people they meet, the key to going to a conference is learning that they are plenty smart enough to make critical contributions to the field: although the field is populated with really smart people, the students learn that they can compete successfully in the discipline. This confidence, developed first hand, goes far beyond anything I can provide as an adviser and mentor.

Mentoring graduate students has been and continues to be by far the most rewarding and productive aspect of my years in academia. The introspection I've done about mentoring over the past few years has been valuable to me and, I hope, to my current and future graduate students.



Noel Weiss

Professor of Epidemiology

Comments from Students and Peers

Noel was (and remains today) an inspirational teacher and mentor. ... [T]he quality that makes Noel truly extraordinary is his generosity in time and attention to his graduate students, whether they currently or formerly worked with him.

While I cannot begin to express my appreciation of Noel's mentoring, I know I am not alone. As word of this award spread among alumni, people I do not even know felt compelled to tell me how Noel impacted their lives and careers, through single helpful encounters to decade-long relationships.

He helped me bring several of my early papers to publication; he was always willing to edit without expecting to be a coauthor.

He possesses the rare and precious ability of successfully cooperating with others to achieve consensus and common goals.

Noel is exceptional in the way he always makes his students' work a priority over his own. By doing so, he places value on a student's work that serves to encourage the student to do his or her best, while instilling in the student confidence in his or her own epidemiologic skills

He is uniquely able to take people "where they are" and provides thoughts and cogent suggestions from that perspective.

Throughout my fifteen plus years as both a student and a colleague of Noel's, he has reviewed manuscripts and grants within almost a 24-hour period, providing meaningful, detailed, and thorough feedback.

He has always been very giving of his time. He continues to say that "my union card" (having been a student with him) entitles me to call him whenever I need help. What can I say, more than he's not only a superb teacher but a true "Mensch."

Awardee's Statement



Noel Weiss
Professor of Epidemiology

My philosophy in mentoring graduate students is nothing other than the Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. And, if I were a graduate student once again, how is it that I would like to be “done unto”? I’d like my mentor to:

- Make clear what is expected of me as a graduate student, while at the same time leaving up to me the specific means of achieving those expectations and the pace at which that happens.
- Be available to answer the many questions that arise in a new endeavor of this sort.
- Offer guidance in identifying a topic for my thesis or dissertation research, a topic that is simultaneously instructive, relevant, and feasible.

- Closely scrutinize work I produce, or ideas I develop, and provide input in a timely, constructive, and kind way.
- Make sure I'll have the skills needed to get off to a good start in my post-UW career (recognizing that I'll expect to be learning progressively throughout the whole of my professional life).
- Help me think through career options, including the ways in which these will bear upon my nonprofessional goals.
- More broadly, be mindful of the fact that I left many potential roads untraveled so that I might journey down this one, and so do everything possible to make my graduate experience as rewarding and enjoyable as possible.

Photos

*LaMerle Belcher, Mary Levin, Kathy Sauber, Cathy Schwartz,
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