

2000 Romeo L. Moruzzi Young Faculty Award for Innovation in Undergraduate Education Recipient

Dr. Karen M. McNamara

The Moruzzi Young Faculty Award is presented in memory of Romeo L. Moruzzi, a dedicated professor and a founder of the WPI Plan. WPI is pleased to present the 2000 Moruzzi Young Faculty Award for Innovation in Undergraduate Education to Professor Karen McNamara of the Department of Chemical Engineering.



Professor McNamara has taken an approach to education that truly defines the word "innovative." In 1999, she developed and taught a course titled "Material Science of Art and Historical Objects." While preparing the course she explored a variety of ways to encourage active participation from the students. Thus she planned hands-on and interactive activities such as field trips to museums, sessions with museum staff, and laboratories. However, although she believed that these activities would succeed in engaging students in the course, Prof. McNamara believed that more could be done. And it is here that her innovative idea turned an interesting course into a true educational experience for her students. She went to an antique store and purchased an item for each student, purposely choosing artifacts with which the students would not be familiar. At the first class meeting of the term, each student was given an object and told that by the last day of term he or she would produce a report addressing what the object was, what it had been used for, what it was composed of, and when it was produced. The results were impressive and fascinating. One student, given an old makeup compact, showed that the item dated to the 1920s based on the chemical composition of makeup residue. Another proved that his antique cameo was given out by MGM during the promotion of "Gone With the Wind." Professor McNamara stimulated the curiosity of her students, who then willingly supplied the effort needed to complete their projects. This ability is the heart of teaching.

In addition to creating this course, Professor McNamara has initiated cooperative IQP and MQP projects with the Worcester Art Museum that involve students in both authentication and restoration of historically significant objects. What a thrill it must be for a student to make such a valuable contribution to society in the course of his or her university project.

WPI is proud to recognize the creative teaching of Professor Karen McNamara by presenting her with the 2000 Moruzzi Young Faculty Award for Innovation in Undergraduate Education.

