

2005 Board of Trustees' Award for Outstanding Teaching Recipient

Professor Robert L. Norton

Since joining the Faculty in 1981, Professor Robert L. Norton has dedicated himself to a key principle of the WPI Plan: the combination of theory and practice in a project-based learning environment. This year, we recognize Professor Norton not only for his outstanding teaching at WPI, but for his contribution to the education of mechanical engineers worldwide.



Students, alumni, and colleagues alike regard Professor Norton as a highly gifted and caring teacher who brings his industrial experience, deep technical knowledge, and love of engineering design to the classroom and projects. Perhaps the best way to characterize Professor Norton's teaching is "rigor with vigor." An alumnus states, "He is demanding and challenging, but this helps his students rise to their potential. I honestly feel that I wouldn't be half the engineer I am if I had not been a student of Professor Norton." His letters of nomination convey the long hours he spends with students and his passion for teaching, with comments such as "he is one of the most concerned and caring for his students," he "makes time at the end of the day, regardless how late," and he "always has time to help a student."

As an MQP advisor, Professor Norton truly excels. He has a distinguished record of fostering MQPs with industry and directs the Gillette Project Center. Each year, he advises a large number of design projects that are viewed as outstanding by colleagues and external reviewers alike. Students know that Professor Norton's demands are high, but "lead to greater understanding." While students are pushed toward critical thinking and self-learning, they are bolstered by the fact that Professor Norton "shares his enthusiasm" and that "his technical knowledge is nearly endless."

Professor Norton is one of the most sought-after academic advisors in the Mechanical Engineering Department, evidence of the relationships he builds with students and his concern for their lives and careers. Indeed, alumni provided more than one-third of the nominations, demonstrating that Professor Norton's impact is felt and appreciated not only during students' time at WPI but throughout their professional careers.

Professor Norton also touches mechanical engineering students and faculty worldwide through his textbooks. A colleague states, "In Norton's case, it is quite literally true that he wrote the book on mechanical design and kinematics of mechanisms." His book on design holds about a third of the market in the U.S. and has been translated

into multiple languages. His stature as an educator of world renown is not matched by many, either here at WPI or at other institutions.

For his tireless dedication to the lives and learning of his students, for his excellence in teaching and project advising, and with admiration for his contributions to mechanical engineering education worldwide, we proudly present the 2005 Board of Trustees' Award for Outstanding Teaching to Professor Robert L. Norton.