

2008 Board of Trustees' Award for Outstanding Research and Creative Scholarship Recipient

Professor Joel J. Brattin

Professor Joel Brattin is internationally recognized for his scholarly work on the writings of the famous 19th century novelist and social activist, Charles Dickens. Professor Brattin is a leading figure in the international community of Dickens scholars, has brought important acclaim to WPI for his Dickens work, and through his research has successfully promoted appreciation of Dickens in the classroom, on campus, and among wider audiences.



As pointed out by one of his colleagues, Professor Brattin's scholarship is "as meticulous as it is bold, for he bases his analyses and interpretations on firsthand knowledge of Dickens' own working manuscripts of his novels – and not merely on readily available print sources (which may often be unreliable as a record of the authors' final intentions)". Another colleague noted that Professor Brattin "is a true pioneer in studying Dickens' manuscripts, study based on a solid grounding in the life and writings of the author himself, and this has made him a true authority of a caliber that few literary scholars can claim".

It is well-known that Professor Brattin's reference books are of an importance that will endure long into the future, and that his editorial and bibliographical work on the novels *Our Mutual Friend* and *Little Dorrit* will be of permanent importance. Professor Brattin's selection as editor of these books confirms his stature as a well-known and respected Dickens scholar. Professor Brattin's efforts in producing indispensable Dickens texts has positioned him among Dickensians as a lead proponent in the great debate in Dickens studies – namely, whether Dickens was more interested in plot or in character. Professor Brattin's study of the author's manuscripts has helped form the consensus that Dickens was always most interested in character, despite the many wonderful stories he produced, including those for which he is best remembered, *Great Expectations*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *A Christmas Carol*.

In addition to his scholarly work, Professor Brattin has been active for over a decade as a strong leader in the International Dickens Society. His efforts as scholar and Dickens community leader were recognized by his peers in 2000, when he was named President of the Dickens Society of Americas. He has been frequently interviewed in both print and in electronic media – most recently in the Worcester Telegram and

Gazette on the subject of *A Christmas Carol*, and was featured as a guest on WBUR's national news and interview program, *Morning Edition*.

Professor Brattin's blending of scholarship and service to the community and WPI is perhaps best exemplified by his success in bringing the Fellman Dickens Collection to WPI. The Fellman collection is the best Dickens collection in the Americas and is rivaled in importance only by a small number of collections in Britain. The collection has become the jewel of Special Collections at the Gordon Library and has established WPI as a mecca for Dickens scholars and a location for international Dickens conferences.

Professor Brattin's other area of scholarly work and expertise is perhaps less than obvious – he is a leading authority on Jimi Hendrix, who has been hailed by critics and by the many guitarists who have imitated his sound and technique, as the greatest rock guitarist ever. Professor Brattin's work on Jimi Hendrix is as rigorous and meticulous as his work on Dickens. His scholarly integrity and his musical talent – he has composed, performed and recorded several CDs – have been integrated with great success into the classroom and into student projects. As one of his colleagues has noted in reference to his many interests and talents, “to be a practicing musician of Joel's standard is an embarrassment of riches”.

In recognition of his significant contributions in both 19th century literature and contemporary music, the significant breadth and quality of his scholarship, and his integration of discovery and creativity, it is with great pride that Professor Joel Brattin is named the recipient of the 2008 Board of Trustees' Award for Outstanding Research and Creative Scholarship.