

## **2011 Board of Trustees' Award for Outstanding Teaching Recipient**

### **William Farr**

An outstanding teacher is impossible to define but William Farr has come to embody everything an outstanding teacher should be. Engaging, dedicated, caring, and demanding, Professor Farr has done so much for WPI and its students in the classroom and beyond.

A colleague of Professor Farr described him as a “student oriented teacher” which can be hard when you’re teaching in a large lecture hall. One student recalls him knowing many of the names of the students in his class, an impressive feat when there are more than 100. These classes are often introductory Calculus courses with students from a variety of backgrounds going into all different fields, and yet, he engages all of them with his passion and clarity.

Professor Farr is always concerned with the students’ learning and does whatever he can in order for them to learn, often providing more than one approach to a problem. His lectures are a blend of derivation and pertinent examples, going over everything in detail while remaining engaging aided by his sense of humor and deep appreciation for mathematics. Students praise him for always being there in his office when they need him, going “over and above the call of duty as a teacher.” He is very patient and kind, which can go a long way when a student can’t comprehend the material. He is a demanding professor, but that is probably what makes him such an outstanding teacher, creating challenges for students to overcome. Many of those that take a class with Professor Farr recommend him to all of their friends and, sometimes, anyone who will listen.

As an administrator outside of the classroom, Professor Farr put in place many of the learning tools that students have come to associate with the math courses at WPI by integrating developing technologies, all of which aid in the students’ understanding of mathematics. For example, the introduction of WeBWorK has helped supplement courses by providing instant feedback to students. WeBWorK has also become a way to standardize calculus placement for freshmen before they enter the school, providing a better opportunity for kids to succeed. This all would have been impossible without the work of Professor Farr. A colleague acknowledged that it took “a lot of hard work and attention to detail to bring” WeBWorK to fruition and that Professor Farr “took the lead several years ago” with countless contributions from Farr himself.

Even before the introduction of WeBWorK, he led the way for Maple, a computer algebra program that helps students visualize the calculus equations, to be integrated

as a part of the math courses at WPI. Professor Farr has also provided the Basic Skills exam for Calc I and II to ensure that students proceeding to Calc III and IV are fully prepared for those courses. This has allowed for a higher pass rate for those taking Calc III and IV.

Even if students never take a course with Professor Farr, they will have benefitted from his contributions to the mathematics department. This has led many of them to greater success not only in mathematics, but also in other courses across campus because those math courses are fundamental to many of the other majors.

A man who genuinely cares for his students and works hard to make sure they understand, described as personable, awesome, and geeky, he is truly “the man,” as some students know him. His dedication and interest resonate with students in all the right ways and we are so proud to award William Farr with the 2011 Trustees’ Award for Outstanding Teaching.