

2013 Board of Trustees' Award for Outstanding Teaching Recipient

Mark Richman

Mark Richman brings to the table nearly thirty years of experience as an instructor, mentor, and leader. He has well earned his place in the rich tradition of excellence in engineering instruction that goes back to the earliest days of WPI. Generations of students have learned both fundamentals and advanced material from him and enjoyed the experience due to his ability to, as one of his nominators put it, “combine humor and rigor in just such a way to enliven difficult lectures and to demonstrate that learning can and should be fun.” As a long-time instructor of the fundamental engineering courses Statics and Stress Analysis, Professor Richman has been described as “something of a magician in class.” If there is such a thing as a natural teacher, Professor Richman probably qualifies as he was heard to say that “once I have a piece of chalk in my hand, the lecture seems to give itself. A former student who also served as his teaching assistant wrote the following.

“Professor Richman is an outstanding instructor who is kind of old school, in the sense that he does not use unnecessary electronic aids to get his message across. My enduring images of him will be watching him teaching a large undergraduate class in a classroom such as HL 218 and the packed class listening to him in rapt attention.”

Professor Richman’s teaching techniques emphasize the connection between the mathematics the students learn early in their undergraduate years and the engineering problems they will face later on in their academic and professional careers. He stresses to his students that limitations on their math skills will ultimately limit the complexities of the physical problems they will be able to solve. With an energized teaching style he keeps the students interested and constantly reminds them that the problems they will face in their careers will be matters of safety to people.

Besides teaching large sophomore engineering courses, Professor Richman has also excelled in a variety of advanced undergraduate and graduate courses with an unusual ability to “connect mathematics to the physics of engineering problems.” He has also taken his act on the road to teach courses at Electric Boat, Sikorsky, and Raytheon. In addition, he has served as the chair of the Mechanical Engineering graduate program and was credited by his former department head with growing the BS/MS program from a few students a year to over thirty students a year. A major factor in this growth is Professor Richman’s belief that each student is different and has individual needs that need to be treated differently.

Professor Richman has a long track record of service to WPI as an active participant in faculty governance. Most recently, faculty meetings were enlivened during his term as Secretary of the Faculty when we got a taste of his use of humor and rigor. We are proud to recognize his excellence with the 2013 Trustee's Award for Outstanding Teaching.