Dr. Carver Honored for Distinguished Teaching

On February 15th, during Dr. Carver's Principles of Child Development class in Baker Hall, Dean John Lehoczky and Associate Dean Joseph Devine announced Dr. Carver as the winner of the 2010-2011 Elliott Dunlap Smith Award for Distinguished Teaching and Educational Service. They were accompanied by a parade of Psychology faculty, graduate students, and staff. Below are quotes from the announcement speech and the official university press release.

Sharon’s accomplishments as an educator are remarkable in both their range and depth. An outstanding course designer and classroom instructor (“without a doubt,” her nomination letter stated, “the most remarkable teacher we know”), Sharon has also masterfully filled the challenging role of Director of the Carnegie Mellon Children’s School, where she mentors a small army of children ages 3-5, as well as preschool teachers, staff, undergraduate students working in the school, and parents. Moreover, she is the Associate Director of the Program for Interdisciplinary Education and Research (PIER) – an interdepartmental graduate training program, funded by the U.S. Office of Education – whose mission is to train Ph.D. students from diverse departments (e.g., Psychology, Human-Computer Interaction, Statistics, Robotics, Philosophy, and Language Technologies) to conduct rigorous research that will lead to scientifically supported innovations in educational practice. Thus, Sharon has had (and continues to have) a profound impact on the lives of countless children, staff, undergraduates, and graduate students of all ages and skill levels at Carnegie Mellon.

Indeed, Sharon’s impact is even felt at the wider community and national level. In this regard, for example, Sharon has acted as Coordinator of Communication and Technology for the International Association of Laboratory and University-Affiliated Schools, and was recently re-elected to the board of the Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children. In 2009, she was selected to serve on the board of the National Coalition of Campus Children’s Centers.

For this award, however, we focus on and praise Sharon the teacher. Her hallmarks are extraordinary dedication to fostering the learning of each individual student, drawing on her extensive expertise and research in cognitive development and learning sciences and applying it to everyday interaction with students. She is vigilant about making herself available to meet individually with students outside of class, both to stay on track in class but also on track in their overall CMU experience. Students note how motivating it is to be so “noticed” and “supported” like this, with challenges and high standards, but also with warmth, sincere concern and substantive guidance. Sharon’s courses are meticulously planned, with clear goals and components linked to those goals. She seeks to accomplish goals that can be applied outside of the context of a particular course, thereby promoting a life-long appreciation and continuation of the learning that begins in her classrooms.

Finally, her nominators note that Sharon is so motivating to be around largely because she so loves what she does in all of her educational roles. This, they note, is “one of the reasons she is not only the best at what she does, but also an inspiration to students, and to her colleagues.”