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Contact: Bill Giduz 704/894-2244
or bigiduz@davidson.edu

“No [one] can be a good teacher,” writes Bertrand Russell, “unless he has feelings of... great affection toward his pupils and a... desire to impart what he himself believes to be of value.” So it is with the professor we honor today. Students throughout his distinguished career have recalled both their affection for him and their conviction that they have learned from the best, a professor whose talent and passion for teaching match his knowledge and mastery of subject. His reputation has been that of mentor, master, and friend, because he inspires great performances from average students and because he challenges the brightest young minds to fulfill their own high potential. Indeed, in some ineffable way, he convinces all his pupils that they must become their own best teachers.

In the classroom, this Hunter-Hamilton winner improvises, drawing upon examples from television, movies, classical history, and current events. One former student writes, “I can still picture him sitting on top of a table with his feet propped on a stool and grinning out at us” as he made the complex language of his subject into something comprehensible and beautiful. “It is his gift,” says another, “to orchestrate all the chaotic misunderstandings of college students into a discipline—a way of seeing and hearing and understanding what we had missed in our lives before Davidson.” Certainly his professional colleagues agree, insisting that this much-appreciated instructor loves teaching the novice as much as he enjoys discussing theory with senior majors.

Outside the classroom, he is ever active, giving up holidays to travel with students, sharing his own talents with the wider community, and serving as both ambassador and explicator for his discipline and for Davidson. “I don’t know what other learning experience has had such a long-lasting effect on me,” writes a recent alumna, describing a common theme in his
letters of nomination—a spring break spent touring with this professor and an ensemble of like-minded students. Another says, "I was the unartistic student in a group of talented overachievers, amazed at the risk he took by including me and forever grateful for his confidence in my ability to learn."

It is just this combination of patience and daring, performance and practice, that we find in all great teachers. Without trumpeting his own accomplishments, the man we recognize today puts himself into the teachable moment and gently insists upon excellence. He was born to teach and born to play—and to make no significant distinction between the two. At a college where superb teaching is the expectation, this classroom performer stands out. He is our professor of note, our "doc" for cures of mind and spirit. We are all the beneficiaries of his prodigious talent; and it is fitting that, for every graduating class, he is the last professor they hear. Thus this afternoon we take great pleasure in bestowing the 2005 Hunter-Hamilton Love of Teaching Award upon Professor William D. Lawing.