DONALD L. KIMMEL, JR.

At the heart of great teaching lies a great mystery that manifests itself through its power to reveal, illuminate, inspire, transform. The master teacher whose achievements we celebrate today wields that power in classroom, laboratory, and office. In his eyes, students are not empty vessels waiting to be filled with information delivered through the professorial pipeline; they are his partners in exploration and discovery. His lectures, informed by research and enlivened by experience, challenge students to seize the initiative and actively participate in learning. “In class,” wrote a former student, “he gets everyone to make a contribution without drawing attention to those students he is trying to get to speak more often.” “Through his courses,” wrote another, “I gained a deeper respect for the miracle of life and also for my fellow students. He taught me how to explore and question a new subject and how to discuss it with others.”

Not for him the ivory tower. His accessibility is legendary, and students who seek him in his office will find an open door and a hearty welcome. A man of robust hope and enthusiasm, he is convinced that in every student there is a spark of unique ability waiting to be coaxed into flame. Wise mentor and dispenser of good counsel, he knows how to listen, and his practiced eye discerns the insecurities and frustrations that afflict first-year students and seniors alike. In the words of a recent graduate, “He was encouraging when I needed it and helpful when I was confused. Honest
feedback is always an opportunity for self-exploration and growth. He gave me some of the best feedback, on a personal level, that I received at Davidson. I truly believe that he earnestly listens to students because he really cares about them.” Another alumnus, apparently realizing that despite the laborious composition of two handwritten pages and the exhaustion of his store of accolades, he still had not come near to plumbing the mystery of his old professor’s art, was inspired to conclude by writing simply, “He is a teacher. A true teacher.”

Time is the best arbiter of reputation, and this teacher’s reputation is his monument. For a quarter of a century he has, with absolute constancy, followed his vocation at Davidson College and his students, equally constant in their admiration, have reserved for him their highest praise. Scholar, mentor, friend, “true teacher,” we salute you, Donald L. Kimmel, Jr., and name you recipient of the Hunter-Hamilton Love of Teaching Award for 1997.