GAIL MCMURRAY GIBSON

Just as a master chef gathers many ingredients to produce delectable meals that delight the palate as well as strengthen the body, so too the effective teacher artfully brings together diverse ideas, information, experiences, and intuitions and presents them in a way that propels the student’s search for understanding.

The professor to whom this year’s award goes is just such a master at nourishing students’ intellectual growth by delighting their minds. Her courses and her engaging conversations with students present true food for thought. It may be no coincidence that the writing seminar she teaches for first-year students is based on the theme of food. She is influential as a teacher, in part, because of her own deep love for the life of the mind and her own joy in relishing the many flavors of that life. A renowned and influential specialist in medieval literature, drama, and religious ideas, she is equally fascinated by the spiritual dimensions of contemporary culture, just as she is of the philosophies and histories of the ancient world. She herself thrives on the process of learning, for she is always hungry for new knowledge and shares this enthusiasm with her students, who then find that their own taste for learning is impelled, fed and refined. Not content with merely discussing Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, for example, she teaches her students how to speak in Middle English and opens her house to them for an extravagant feast for which she prepares all kinds of medieval foods. As one student has said, she “made medieval literature come alive — literally, with her annual Chaucer feast, and figuratively with the impassioned lectures she gave.”
Students take her courses because she makes everything she talks about fascinating, immediate, and compelling. Remarkably innovative in her teaching style, she brings to the intellectual table not only great works of literature and the visual arts but also ingredients drawn from popular culture in such a way that students gain new appreciation for the human experience in all of its many expressions. Whatever she teaches, she presents in a lively manner. As one student wrote, “to watch her give a lecture is to see performance art that fully engages the class.”

This year’s Hunter-Hamilton Love of Teaching Award goes to a professor whose devotion to teaching is more nourishing than the fullest of feasts, for it is reflected in everything she does. As one student has said, “to be of service to students and to their learning is a way of being for Dr. Gail Gibson.”