THE HUNTER-HAMILTON LOVE OF TEACHING AWARD

The Hunter-Hamilton Love of Teaching Award seeks out and honors teachers who way of life uniquely inspires the full potential of each student. This award is given to a Davidson College faculty member judged by his or her peers to display an exemplary love of teaching.

Sally Gregory McMillen
Sunday, May 21, 2000

“Revise, revise, revise.” So says this gifted and devoted teacher of writing to students who hope to improve. The professor we honor today observes strict standards, tempered by fairness, supported with rigorous instruction, and balanced by copious mentoring. Says one former student, “You have to understand that I never thought of myself as an academic before, but she planted the seeds of confidence in my mind. I rewrote a paper with her help, submitted it, then presented it to a group of professors and graduate students in Charlotte. She even came to the presentation. I will never forget that.”

Generosity takes many forms, but rarely is it linked with practical virtues like organization skills. In this professor, students find an inspiring teacher and a competent person, one who nurtures their spirits, feeds their bodies, and takes them on this school’s most successful field trips. Says one colleague, “There is not one day that I pass by her office that I do not see her talking with students, getting to know them personally, discussing what they think, feel, have on their minds or their horizons.” Writes another colleague, “She requires students to meet with her one-on-one to discuss their papers, spends long hours talking with students about their academic career goals, helps to organize picnics, and even passes out her famous home-made chocolate chips cookies on exam days to encourage students to do their best.” Whatever demystifying the research process, lecturing about the history of the Old South, or gathering students on Pine Road for a home-cooked meal, hers is the life of a true servant.

For this scholar of Southern women, Southern motherhood, and Southern Sunday schools, private and public lives intersect. “To some,” writes a former student, “history is a collection of facts, dates and events. She makes history exciting by stressing the importance of social trends and feelings in history.” Striving to model Davidson College on her own welcoming home, she works for ethnic diversity and for gender equity, seeking to empower minorities and women, as well as individual students. Kelley Scholars praise her keen and responsive attention to their work, the clarity of her instruction, and the job of cooperative learning under her guidance. She helps them aim high. She knows about running marathons.

“Exemplary mentor,” “warm and receptive listener”, “surrogate parent,” and “true friend”—you are as quick to laugh as to scorn injustice. You teach us that the only unacceptable response is indifference—what matters most is feeling something, whether gladness, anger, sorrow, or sympathy. Today we honor you, Hunter-Hamilton recipient for the year 2000 for building community without shrinking from debate, for pushing students beyond their comfort level, for caring more than we have a right to expect, and for knowing what not to revise. Let one more student speak to your contribution: “I never had a teacher who was more in touch with my life outside the classroom than Dr. Sally McMillen.”

Robert F. Vagt, President
Clark G. Ross, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty