William Kalley Mahony

It would seem as if the Hunter-Hamilton Award were tailor made for this professor. Since his arrival at Davidson in 1982, he has become a teacher of legendary proportion. Now completing his sixteenth year, he brings to his teaching a combination of wisdom, compassion, enthusiasm, and quiet authority. One student writes, “...every cell in his body exudes his love of teaching.” He may well be the most sought-after teacher at Davidson, and each semester more than 300 students sign up for the thirty or so places in each of his classes. During drop-add the lines are long outside his office, and sometimes students so passionately want to get into his courses that they simply sit in the class and stay. Invariably, he will give in and accept them if they are this committed. Perhaps his greatest gifts are his ability to relate his courses to his students’ lives. Virtually every student who wrote letters spoke both of his compassion and his teaching the need for compassion. Writers also emphasized his remarkable capacity for introducing students to radically different world views than their own while at the same time respecting the views which students hold.

An internationally known scholar in his field, respected by his peers, he is able to take his scholarship and make it accessible to all students—not only the gifted but those at every level. Students who take his courses “just
to fulfill an area requirement” are astounded by how interested they become in his specialty. One writer said that this professor “offered an exquisite learning experience, balancing the personal with the academic, the wonder and mystery of religion with the analysis of the academy. It was such a show of educational mastery we students could only benefit, sometimes extraordinarily, from the experience.”

And finally, his former students write that he has been to them, to quote one, “teacher, guide, counselor, and friend.” His students go to his office to talk not only about courses but about ethical and spiritual issues in their own lives. They find his gentleness and his wisdom both soothing and inspiring.

And so, the 1998 Hunter-Hamilton Love of Teaching Award goes to this extraordinary master of Buddhism and Islam, Hinduism and Confucianism—a man who teaches us both by precept and example that the Sacred Quest takes many forms—William Kalley Mahony.