
2008 Eugene P. Odum Education Award

Stuart Fisher

The Eugene P. Odum Award recognizes an ecologist for outstanding work in ecology education. Through teaching, outreach, and mentoring activities, recipients of this award have demonstrated their ability to relate basic ecological principles to human affairs. This year's recipient is Stuart Fisher.

Dr. Fisher is an exceptional teacher and mentor who has influenced a striking number of today's eminent ecologists. These include Peter Vitousek, Nancy Grimm, Steve Carpenter, Jon Cole, and Bob Howarth. Dr. Fisher worked with these scientists when they were undergraduates at Amherst and Hampshire Colleges. His ecology courses were so stimulating that he inspired bright young people to become ecologists, often changing previous career plans to become physicians or lawyers. Without exaggeration, it is hard to imagine what ecosystems ecology would be today without these ecologists and without Dr. Fisher's very positive impact on his students' careers.

Dr. Fisher's essential quality as a mentor is one of engagement. It is notable how much time he spends with his graduate students. With the great demands made on a faculty member's time, it is important to consider the great value of simply spending time with graduate students to help, challenge, and just talk with them. Many of Dr. Fisher's Arizona State University students mention the dinners he hosted, where students cooked together and discussed papers, as formative experiences in their development as ecologists.

Former students have also described how Dr. Fisher teaches strong writing and editing skills to his students and what an important asset these skills are throughout their professional lives. He has been described as "a genius when it comes to thinking through the educational process" and as someone who helps his students develop the skills needed to carry out work that is collaborative, scientifically rigorous, and innovative. For example, for each class of IGERT students, he lays out a series of principles of learning and makes clear his view that "we are all teachers, and we are all students; I will learn from you as much or more than you will learn from me."

