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Five Berkeley faculty honored for exceptional teaching

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BERKELEY —

Five UC Berkeley faculty — three language experts, one economist and a legal scholar — are being lauded this week, not only for their particular and highly developed expertise but for their exceptional ability to challenge and engage their students.

Receiving the Distinguished Teaching Award for 2012 are: Sally Goldman, lecturer of South and Southeast Asian Studies; Edward Miguel, professor of economics; Joanna Picciotto, associate professor of English; Debarati Sanyal, associate professor of French; and David Sklansky, professor of law. The honors were to be formally bestowed at a ceremony Thursday (April 26) in Zellerbach Playhouse.

The award, instituted in 1959, is given annually by the Committee on Teaching, a standing committee of the Berkeley division of the Academic Senate.

Here's a rundown of the winners, and why they won:

Sally Goldman

A lecturer in South and Southeast Asian Studies, Goldman manages to “engage students in a classical language with extraordinarily complex grammatical structures, syntax and script,” department chair Penny Edwards writes in her nominating letter. That language is Sanskrit, and Goldman is a world renowned expert. She is the author of eight books, including “Devavanipravesika: An Introduction to the Sanskrit Language,” coauthored with Robert Goldman.

What her students say: Beginners and experienced students alike praise her ability to teach them well beyond their expectations.

Writes one: “Sally Goldman is well known as one of the most talented translators of Sanskrit into English. Her Sanskrit course was by far the most effective and enjoyable. What many may fail to appreciate, however, is Sally’s remarkable devotion to individual students. Her guidance was essential at every stage of my



Sally Goldman, lecturer in South and Southeast Asian Studies (Bobby White)

dissertation writing process.”

Goldman on teaching: Her rigorous insistence on students’ finding their own answers is one skill with which she builds not only her students’ confidence but a firm foundation in both a language and the larger world of meaning. In her teaching statement, Goldman writes, “Making the opaque clear, the past alive, and difference familiar — these are the things that I love about teaching. While I never compromise rigor, I find that a dose of empathy and a bit of humor go a long way toward making what seems impenetrable manageable. A good teacher should never forget what it is like to be a student.”

The committee’s view, upon observing her gentle but firm classroom management: “After working an hour on detailed, technical translation exercises, the fully-engaged class took a brief interlude into some collective literature reading. Something, which I obviously missed, was very funny, and the class broke out into a pleasant, relaxed laughter, like a family at the dinner table.”

Edward (Ted) Miguel

Says department chair James Powell in his nominating letter, economics professor Miguel is considered “to be one of the best teachers and advisors in the department. His courses offer careful analyses of pressing challenges for economic progress in developing countries.” With a focus on developmental economics, Miguel is a preeminent scholar and a recent recipient of a Sloan Research Fellowship and the Arrow Award for Best Paper in Health Economics. He makes extensive use of case studies as teaching aides, many of which are based on his own fieldwork in Africa.

What his students say: They frequently write that his course has been one of the best they have experienced at Berkeley, and that his undergraduate course has inspired them to pursue development economics in graduate school.

Writes one, “The instructor asked us to take a big leap and engage deeply on advanced material and the class generally stepped up to that challenge. Fantastic.”

Says another, “Ted is one of the smoothest lecturers I’ve ever had – lucid, engaging, and challenging.”

Miguel on teaching: “I want even the most hardened Ph.D. student to feel emotionally connected to the people whose lives we will be studying over the next 15 weeks. Without that connection, how can they understand which issues really matter? And without that understanding as a compass, what will guide their research?”

The committee view, as one member notes: “Miguel’s lecture on the connection between education funding and subsequent economic progress in developing countries was fascinating. It obviously broke some colloquial understanding I had on the issues—and when combined with the impressive students’ contributions, everyone learned a lot that day.”

Joanna Picciotto

A scholar of 17th and 18th century literature, Picciotto, an associate professor of English, is lauded by department chair Samuel Otter for her inventive critical energy, her intellectual passion and her generosity of response: “We think we would be remiss if we did *not* nominate her, since at the time of her tenure decision reviewers at every level made it a point to note that she was an obvious candidate for this honor.”



Edward (Ted) Miguel, professor of economics

Her first book, *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England* (Harvard University Press 2009), has been called by one reviewer “the most important contribution to Milton studies in years.” The book is “itself an example of what it is about: a field of vision awash with insights.”

What her students say: They are as ecstatic in their praise as her book reviewers.

Writes one: “I’ve never had a teacher put so much dedication and time into correcting our papers.”

Says another: “She asks us to write weekly reading responses and then ... tailors that day’s lecture/discussion around our thoughts. It’s very effective — everyone is always actively participating.”

Picciotto on teaching: “Marks on the page only become literature when encountered by an attentive reader; the more involved a student is in class, the more likely she is to become such a reader. I thus revise my lectures every semester to respond to the issues my students raise, so that even when I’m lecturing I’m not really the only one speaking.”

A committee member’s view: “The energy level of Picciotto and intensity of the material was unparalleled. All 40 students engaged, participating and collectively reworking their individual understanding of the complex reading done in preparation for the lecture.”



Joanna Picciotto, associate professor of English

Debarati Sanyal

The associate professor of French is “an undisputed master of her material,” says department chair Timothy Hamptons. “The care and intelligence she brings to her courses is exceptional and her effect on students is deep and powerful.” Sanyal uses cutting-edge literary, cinematographic and philosophical works, dealing with political and social disasters, to challenge her students, taking them beyond simple textual study and engaging them in analysis of major ethical problems of the modern era. She is a repeated invitee to the prestigious summer Institute for French Studies in Avignon, France, run by Bryn Mawr College. In a review, the program director wrote, “Her course on ethics in the modern novel, despite its severe subject matter and its drab syllabus, elicited such unmitigated praise on the part of the students that I am now begging her to come back and participate in the program next year.”

What the students say: They mention her mastery of political history, keen ability to make different theoretical arguments accessible and her deep sensitivity to their needs.

Notes one: “The course was extremely thought-provoking. All the material was dense, fascinating, and discussed in length.”

Sanyal on teaching: “I think of myself as a mediator who provides background, opens up lines of inquiry and activates the material if it seems remote. Something magical happens when a class begins to take on a life of its



Debarati Sanyal, associate professor of French

own.”

The committee watched her in person and observed: “The rapport was electrifying, with all students participating in the end-of-class discussion (in French), centered on the formation and violent end of Paris Commune.”

David Sklansky

Of this former federal prosecutor and specialist in criminal law, Berkeley Law Dean Chris Edley writes, “Sklansky communicates complex legal concepts to large classes of students and encourages their serious analysis of often politically and emotionally charged issues of criminal law, criminal procedure, and evidence.” Sklansky, whose research focus is criminal procedure and policy, is the author of three books, including a popular casebook, *Evidence: Cases, Commentary, and Problems*, which many students cite it as “one of the best casebooks” used in law school.

What his students say: They praise his ability to incorporate tough, lightning-rod topics into his lectures.

Writes one, “Prof. Sklansky is really good at talking about difficult issues. He exposes critical issues in evidence law. He is sensitive to issues of race, class, and culture; and whether the system of evidence is truly serving the purposes of justice.”



David Sklansky

Sklansky on teaching: “A truly successful class is necessarily a new class; something is happening that has never happened in exactly the same way ever before. Keeping the classroom experience fresh is a constant challenge, but that challenge is a big part of why I find teaching so joyful, so rejuvenating, and so deeply rewarding.”

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The committee view, in one member’s words: His ability to take a student’s answer and mold it into the next question and subsequent discussion was very impressive. It was incredible how many times this happened, and yet the overall flow and direction of the lecture seemed to stay perfectly on a logical course.”

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