

4-30-2008

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### Recommended Citation

University Marketing and Communications, "04/30/2008 - One-time Reluctant Teacher Receives Distinguished Faculty Award" (2008). 2008. 34.

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## **One-time Reluctant Teacher Receives Distinguished Faculty Award**

*Apr-30-2008*

Robert "Bud" Fischer may think he has people fooled; however, his friends and colleagues beg to differ.

"Behind his sometimes gruff exterior is a patient and generous soul," said Bonnie Irwin, dean of Eastern Illinois University's Honors College. "His students appreciate his genuineness as much as his obvious knowledge and talent."

Andrew Methven, chair of EIU's Department of Biological Sciences, concurred. "I've known Bud for more than 10 years, during which time I have interacted with him as a colleague and peer. I've found him to be an inspiring teacher, exceptional researcher and superior leader.

"Clearly, he is a unique and talented faculty member, and I can think of no finer example of academic excellence and leadership for young faculty to emulate than Bud Fischer," Methven added.

These testimonials, plus others from equally admiring contemporaries and students, serve as reminders as to why Fischer has been named Eastern's Distinguished Faculty Award recipient for the 2007-2008 school year. The irony is not lost on Fischer who, less than 20 years ago, was saying "no way, no how" to the thought of being in front of a classroom.



Bud Fischer

After nine years as a research coordinator for the University of Georgia and the Department of Energy, he fought his boss's recommendation that he apply for a part-time university position teaching biology to non-majors. When that recommendation turned into a mandate, he reluctantly turned in his application and was hired.

Then came the surprise.

"I had never even thought about teaching," Fischer said. "But that immediate feedback! Seeing that light go on in my students' eyes as they begin to understand what I'm telling them -- that's the most exciting moment of my day and makes the job very rewarding for me."

Eastern was one of three universities that offered Fischer a full-time teaching position. He chose the central Illinois campus because of its size, diversity of majors and coursework, and opportunities for research with both graduate and undergraduate students. He taught upper-level aquatic courses such as fisheries ecology and management, ichthyology and stream ecology, as well as environmental life sciences for major and non-majors alike.

And his professional life continued to evolve.

"I think it was a matter of meeting the right person at the right time," Fischer said. "I started having conversations with individuals on campus about a wide variety of educational issues, and began trying to think of ways to move the university forward, as well as the department."

Before long, Fischer was being recognized as a force to be reckoned with -- both inside and outside the Department of Biological Sciences where he currently serves as associate chair.

"Sometimes Bud Fischer is the only voice of reason in meetings," Irwin said.

But, she added, "sometimes Bud's is the voice that we do not want to hear because he always speaks the truth. When he sees a problem or need on campus, he tries to address it and challenges

the rest of us to step up and give of ourselves, too."

Irwin recalled serving with Fischer on Eastern's Faculty Senate. "He has always been a senate workhorse, generating ideas and, more importantly, working tirelessly to implement them," she said.

In addition, the two have worked together on several university initiatives that have since come to fruition, including the National Student Exchange, the freshman reading program, the Faculty Fellows program in the residence halls and more.

"I have seen Bud mobilize faculty and staff, generate student interest, and cajole administrators when necessary, all for one over-arching goal: to enhance the academic environment of EIU for the purpose of providing a better education for our undergraduate students," Irwin said.

Fischer will officially receive this year's Distinguished Faculty Award during commencement ceremonies on May 3. Two days later -- on his 48th birthday -- he'll be on the road to the University of Alabama at Birmingham, where he'll tackle his next major career challenge. His appointment as department chair there goes into effect June 1.

"It's a big step, but one that I feel it's time to take," he said.

He knows it will be hard to leave Eastern -- especially the people -- behind.

"But I'll be back," he said, sporting his characteristic grin. "Our only daughter, who's living here in Charleston, is about to give birth to our first grandchild (due in August). My wife's not leaving until the baby is born, and I'll be back to see the baby, of course."