



RESEARCH AND TEACHING

by Dean Rebecca W. Bushnell

My most recent book, *Tragedy: A Short Introduction*, is the fruit of more than 25 years of both thinking and teaching about tragedy. In the acknowledgements, I thank several generations of Penn students for bearing with my classroom musings and for sharing their own thoughts on the subject. We scholars always cite our sources, so I also wanted to credit my students for their contributions to this work, thus recognizing how my teaching informs and enriches the research I do.

One of the great privileges and pleasures of Penn is that you get to bring your research into the classroom. As a scholar, I always want to test new ideas to see if they make sense and if they matter. And my students will always let me know if they work.

If I teach a Greek tragedy that I've been reading and talking about for years, I'll usually pose some question I've been contemplating to get discussion started. Sometimes a student might come back with a different question, one that I never encountered. Other times a student may share a surprising observation about an image, a line or a character that stimulates a whole new way of understanding the text. Those are great moments. They inspire me as a teacher and a scholar.

That kind of unexpected thinking indicates the excellence of the students we recruit, but it also demonstrates the quality of learning that takes place in the School of Arts and Sciences. Our students learn from researchers who are pushing back the frontiers of knowledge in their fields. Students see firsthand the ongoing work of active scientists and scholars, and they have the opportunity to contribute to emerging ideas.

Physics professor Charlie Johnson was advisor to Sujit Datta, C'08, G'08, last year. According to Charlie, working with undergraduate researchers gives faculty the luxury of following up on "crazy" ideas and performing unusual experiments. The payoff came when they published four papers together exploring properties of graphene, one-atom thick sheets of graphite. Sujit was first author for two of the papers and received the LeRoy Apker Award, the

highest honor granted by the American Physical Society for undergraduate research.

Sometimes people complain about college professors who "take time away" from students by doing research. But I find that I'm a better teacher when I'm involved in writing a book, because I'm thinking, I'm asking questions and I'm energized by the adventure of discovery.

Last year Emma Dillon, an associate professor of music, won both the Ira Abrams and Lindback awards for distinguished teaching. Emma believes the line between research and teaching should be "fluid" and makes a point of bringing her scholarly projects into the classroom. She says it's important for students to see teachers struggling with materials, posing questions and wondering out loud about how and where to find the answers. It shows students that knowledge doesn't come prepackaged in a textbook. It comes from constantly asking questions, a habit that will benefit graduates throughout their lives.

David Karpf is a graduate student in political science whose dissertation probes how the Internet is enabling new forms of political association and participation. Jack Nagel, the Steven F. Goldstone Endowed Term Professor of

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Political Science, is his advisor. David says that close study and long discussions with his mentor have taught him how to be not just a student of politics but a political scientist. As for Jack—who might call himself an old dog who's been teaching since long before the advent of the Internet—he's learned a few new tricks about political blogs and the impact of the Web.

The creation and dissemination of knowledge—research and teaching—is the mission of the School of Arts and Sciences. Each informs the other, and together they make Penn a livelier and more productive place.