Recommendations for Modifications to the GRBrown Teaching Awards

GRBrown Teaching Award Committee: Ann Saterbak (BIOE, Chair), Bridget Gorman (SOCI, Senate), Ed Segner (CEVE), Mark Kulstad (PHIL, Senate), Geoff Winningham (ARTS), Art Gottschalk (MUSI)

Background
In November 2009, Jim Young formed a Senate subcommittee, the Brown Teaching Awards Committee, and gave it the following charge:

• To propose new procedures for the selection of the Brown Teaching Awards, the highest recognitions of excellent teaching at Rice.
• To recommend what body or committee should administer or carry out the procedures, and how the Awards should be announced and presented.

Historical Perspectives on the George R. Brown Teaching Awards
• Awards were established in 1967. Several revisions have been made to the award, and those are documented below.
• The original gift document from the Brown Foundation specified several key features that have remained unaltered over time. These include:
  o There are two levels of awards. The most prestigious one is the “GRBrown Prize for Excellence in Teaching;” only one award is given each year and this prize carries a higher monetary award. There are six additional awards, the “GRBrown Prize for Superior Teaching;” these prizes carry a lower monetary award.
  o As stated in the gifting document, “The awards shall be made on the basis of a poll of the four-year bachelors-degree recipients… The ballot will request a listing in order of the three most effective or outstanding teachings on the Rice faculty.” Throughout the entire history of this award, bachelors-degree recipients have been asked to list three faculty members in rank order. Then, the “votes” for the faculty members have been tallied. For most of the history of the award, there has been a weighted system, whereby the highest ranked faculty member (listed in the 1. position) receives 3 points. The second ranked faculty member (listed in the 2. position) receives 2 points. The third ranked faculty member (listed in the 3. position) receives 1 point. An alternate to this method has been to give 1 point to every faculty member listed on the ballot; the Committee believes that this is the practice currently used. For both methods, points are tallied for all faculty members. The winners are those faculty with the most points (with a few exceptions, see below).
  o Only a faculty member who is teaching at Rice may be a winner of a Brown Award. Retirees, faculty who move to a different university, etc. have always been disqualified from the Awards.
• The original gift document from the Brown Foundation specified several other features, which have been followed at various times. This includes:
  o “The GRBrown Prize will be awarded on the basis of the poll without regard to the academic field. In the determination of the GRBrown Awards for Superior Teaching, the Awards Committee will consider academic areas, as well as the results of the poll, in order to recognize teaching excellence throughout the University.” In reading through documents dating back to the 1970’s, this practice has been following at some times, but not others. When Forman was consulted in 2009, he stated that he did not consider academic area in awarding the Superior Teaching Awards. However, there is some historical argument that can be made to “balance” the winners.
• The original gift document does not specify several things, which are currently in practice today. This includes:
  o Exclusion of non-tenure-track faculty from the award. In fact, in 1972, a non-tenure track faculty member (title of Lecturer) won the award. Also, Brian Gibson won the Award after he stepped off the tenure track. Currently, NTT faculty are excluded per Forman’s policy.
• Several changes have been made to the administration of the awards. These include:
  o The winners were initially decided on by a committee that included Deans. However, this section of the gift was superseded. Presently, the Dean of Undergraduates makes recommendations that are approved by the Provost. Over time, the number of people involved in the decision-making process has shrunk.
  o While the initial gift specified alumni who graduated 3 and 8 year prior, this was changed to 2 and 5 years prior in the early 70’s. This chance was made to try to improve alumni voting yield (percent of alumni who participated in selecting the GRBrown Teaching winners).
  o The monetary awards have increased over time.
  o In 1980, more clarity was added to the process of retiring winners and “spreading out” consistent winners. The current wording is as follows: “A faculty member who has won the George R. Brown Prize for Excellence in Teaching becomes ineligible to receive this prize again until 7 years have elapsed, after which (s)he may receive the award, but then becomes ineligible again for 5 years. A faculty member who has won a George R. Brown award for Superior Teaching 3 times becomes ineligible for this award for 7 years, after which (s)he may receive the award, but then becomes ineligible again for 5 years. A faculty member who has won 3 George R. Brown Prizes for Excellence, or the equivalent in total monetary value in Awards under this program, shall receive an honorary life award - without additional stipend - and be retired from the competition.”
• Several concerns have been raised a number of time in looking through the historical documents.
First, there has always been a concern about low response rates. Alumni response rates have varied from 10% to 36%. The last few years have yielded some of the lowest response rates. In the early 70’s, more recent alumni classes were solicited for faculty member names in an attempt to increase response rates. There is a documented concern that if current students or more recent alumni vote, then assistant professors (who may not get tenure) would win.

There has been continual tension about the fact that many Award winners teach large courses. Various memos document this concern.

At different times in the past, the Award administrators have tried to “balance” the winners, especially among the four main Schools: Humanities, Social Sciences, Natural Science, and Engineering. At other times, this notion of balance has been rejected. There seems to have never been a formal process to try to recognize faculty from smaller Schools, especially Music or Architecture, or who teach smaller classes.

Other Background Information
As part of a NSF ADVANCE mini-grant, Ann Saterbak looked at the winners of the Brown Teaching Awards during 2000-2007 period. Key results include:

- Alumni response rates were 11-14%.
- Up to 25% of faculty members (150-175 different faculty) are nominated by one or more students each year.
- Considering the number of unique winners compared to the faculty in each School, there was an overrepresentation of winners in Humanities (36% winners vs. 28% of total faculty) and Social Sciences (32% vs. 12%); there was underrepresentation of winners from Natural Sciences (18% vs. 22%), Engineering (11% vs. 24%), Architecture (0% vs. 5%), and Music (4% vs. 8%).
- Present policy to exclude non-tenure-track (NTT) women from the Awards disproportionately disadvantages women faculty members. (31% of women faculty are at the Lecturer rank vs. 13% men.)
- Winners teach statistically significantly more students than non-winners.

Preserving the Integrity of GRBrown Awards
The Brown Teaching Awards Committee felt strongly that the basic process put in place in the gift to select the winners should remain the same. Specifically, the Committee felt that it was important for the process of soliciting names of faculty members from alumni remains intact and that the winners be directly taken from this ranked list, as described above. Changing this process would alter the award substantially, and likely require permission from the Brown Foundation. The Committee did consider options such as two-tiered ballot. One idea was to use the ballots to identify a group of finalists and then call alumni and ask for more detailed/nuanced feedback. A second idea for a two-tiered ballot was to have current undergraduates vote to get down to a smaller list of candidates and then send those out to alumni. However, both of these
options are fundamentally dissimilar to the process set forth clearly by the gift. The Committee strongly recommends maintaining the process established in the gift, which is to soliciting names of faculty members from alumni and then to use those names to determine the winners directly.

Motivation for Changes
Given that the basic process for selecting candidates for winners remains intact, there are still several areas that the Committee felt could be improved. The Brown Teaching Awards Committee focused its efforts to solve what they saw as the most significant weaknesses in the present system:
A. Low percentage of alumni who vote. With a low turnout, Award winners sometimes receive as few as 10 votes. Proposed changes 2, 3, 5, 6, and 7 address this concern.
B. Addressing “who wins”. Most contentious of the issues, this gets to the heart of what is “fair” in recognizing excellence in undergraduate teaching. We believe that recommended changes 1, 3, 4, 9, 10, and 11 will expand the pool of winners and recognize excellence in its many facets.
C. Survey administration and selection of winners. Specifically requested in the charge from Jim Young, we propose changes 8 and 9.

The following changes are proposed to take effect in the 2010-2011 academic year.

1. **Increase the number of GRBrow winners from 7 (1 GRBrow Prize for Excellence in Teaching + 6 GRBrow Awards for Superior Teaching) to 10 (1 GRBrow Prize for Excellence in Teaching + 9 GRBrow Awards for Superior Teaching).** This can be justified in many ways. First, there has been an increase in the faculty between 1967 and 2010. Second, when up to 25% of the faculty are nominated, it is clear that there is broad excellence in teaching across the campus. Monetary amounts should not be decreased if possible with expansion of the number of Awards.

2. **Increase the number of alumni classes that vote to 3 (up from 2).** We recommend alumni who graduated 2, 5 and 8 years prior be solicited for their most outstanding teachers.

3. **The ballot should solicit the names of 5 faculty** (up from 3). In particular, we would like to request that alumni offer names for faculty teaching 100/200 level courses and also for faculty teaching 300/400 level courses. While not perfect, this distinction should help solicit names of faculty who teach large courses and faculty who teach small courses.

4. **Allow all faculty who meet the eligibility requirement to vote on the Faculty Senate to be eligible for the Award.** This would include some Lecturers, Professors in the Practice and other
job titles to be eligible. For 10 Awards, we recommend that up to 2 NTT faculty be allowed to win.

5. A list of eligible faculty should be provided to the alumni, organized by department. Since many students vote for ineligible faculty (e.g., retirees, faculty who have left the university, currently NTT faculty), this will hopefully decrease the votes that must be thrown out.

6. Increase the visibility of the Award among current students. Suggestions include having a reception to honor the recipients with students invited, running articles in the Thresher, etc. Awards should be announced around April 1. If knowledge of the Award is low among undergraduates, then they are less likely to vote as alumni.

7. Increase the visibility of the Award among alumni. Suggestions include including the winners (with pictures and short bios) in the Sallyport, connecting with the Young Alumni groups to encourage participation, etc.

8. The Dean of Undergraduates Office should continue to solicit nominations of the Award. We recommend using email unless an alum does not have an email address on record; then, we recommend a letter. One or two follow-up emails are suggested. We recommend that the Dean of Undergraduates Office continue to tally all results.

9. The Teaching Committee should select the winners of the Brown Teaching Awards. It is expected that the Teaching Committee would be staffed with faculty from across campus and that any faculty eligible for the Award would be excused from this process. The Dean of Undergraduates would participate as well. Guidelines for selecting the winners would be developed. Likely guidance includes:
   - Top 5 faculty with the most number of votes automatically receive an Award, including the faculty member with the highest number of votes to get the George R. Brown Award for Excellence in Teaching.
   - Some discretion on selection of the other 5 winners that would include number of votes received, School, typical class size, and votes from previous years. It is expected that the Registrar could provide information on class size so that excellent teachers for small classes might be identified. It is expected that faculty ranking 6-20/25 would be examined in this pool.
   - The Brown Teaching Award Committee feels that the Teaching Committee, with its access to information from the Registrar, would be in the best position to select the winners.

A 3 year probationary period could be considered for the turnover of the Awards from the Dean’s office to the Teaching Committee.
10. Slightly modify the existing process for number of sequential awards. It is proposed that an addition restriction be added so that a faculty member cannot be a winner in sequential years.

11. Notify all faculty who made it into the pool for consideration (top 20-25, as noted in proposed change 9).

**Follow-up**
- A meeting was held on 5 April 2010 with Carol Quillen, Robin Forman, Kathy Collins, Ann Saterbak and Bridget Gorman. There was support of the proposed changes by those at the meeting. In follow-up work, Kathy confirmed that the proposed changes would not need to go to the Brown Foundation, nor would they need to go through the Board of Trustees.
- Feedback was received from Jim Young and the Executive Committee of the Faculty Senate in spring 2010 and incorporated into the document.