

2012 Sitterson Award

The Sitterson Award recognizes excellence in teaching first-year students by two tenured or tenure-track faculty members in the College of Arts and Sciences. One of the 2012 recipients is Dr. Mark Peifer, the Michael Hooker Distinguished Professor of Biology. The universal theme that pervades comments about him is that he excels at teaching difficult material effectively – and with ease.

In writing about Dr. Peifer, one student said, “As a first-year student in his course, I was nervous about entering the college world and worried about getting lost in the crowd. He set up his course in a way that the students were able to get to know him as a person, not just as an instructor and also get to know other students in the course. Many instructors I’ve had since then had the same goals, but did not succeed in the way Dr. Peifer did with class discussion.” Another wrote that “He showed me how biology is so much more than a subject taught in the classroom, and how schooling is here to prepare me for the rest of my life, a life that I now see in a different light thanks to his teaching and counseling.”

Some students reflected that Dr. Pfeifer made them think harder and more critically and didn’t give them points for participation for simply raising their hands in class. They mentioned that he challenged them in the classroom and out and high expectations for how much effort they needed to spend on his class – and at the same time they were rewarded. “The confidence Dr. Peifer instilled in me, especially as a first-year” a student wrote “has been one of the greatest gifts of college thus far.”

Widely regarded by majors and graduate students for his expertise in cell biology and cancer biology, Dr. Peifer has also become widely acclaimed for inspiring first-year students. Dr. Bill Kier, chair of the department of biology suggested developing a first year seminar with Dr. Peifer a few years ago on the topic of infectious disease in the developing world using Dr. Paul Farmer’s *Mountains Beyond Mountains*. Drawing on perspectives from biology, public health, medicine and entrepreneurship, Dr. Peifer helps his students understand how critical it is that the United States develops a greater commitment to the developing world, especially in the area of basic health care.

Dr. Mark Peifer received his undergraduate degree at St. Olaf College and his Ph.D. is from Harvard University. He has been on the faculty at Carolina since 1992 when he arrived as an assistant professor. Elected to membership as a Fellow in the American Association for the Advancement of Science 2009, he is *proof* that great scientists can also be great teachers.