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Excellence in Teaching Award Citation for Bradford Rence

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University Award for Excellence in Teaching

Bradford G. Rence, Professor of Biology

"Brad Rence, after an Iowa childhood and an undergraduate degree at the University of Iowa, you migrated west, first as a research associate at the Good Samaritan Hospital in Portland, Oregon and then to earn your Ph.D. and do post-doctoral work at the University of California at Berkeley. It was while studying neurophysiology at Berkeley that you began your life-long obsession with the cricket--not the interminable British game, that is, but the insect by which we are serenaded daily. Crickets in tow, you arrived at Lawrence in 1979, and ever since you have been inspiring students with your breadth of knowledge of animal behavior and physiology.

Your teaching in the biology department follows naturally from your wide knowledge base, often unbounded by traditional organizational lines. Students refer to you, for better or for worse, as the 'animal guy' and you continue to earn this title--not through John Belushi-like antics, but through your work as a teacher and scientist. You inspire students with fast-paced, detail packed lectures in classes ranging from comparative physiology and animal behavior to general zoology and invertebrate zoology and you work closely with students in tutorials on subjects ranging from wolves to bees to prairie restoration. You are now adding an historical component to your teaching, researching the historical interactions of humans and insects such as mosquitoes carrying yellow fever and human marketing of flea circuses for a new course, Bugs and Society, to be taught next year at the London Center.

Your teaching style was cutting edge long before it was fashionable, as you were among the very first to incorporate hands-on, project-based science learning into your courses. Your stewardship of the Lawrence Science building projects reflects your commitment to the integration of laboratories, group activities, and lectures. Thus, we now have spaces and places in which all of these activities can take place to the edification of students and colleagues. You have combined field and laboratory investigations even within a single course, getting students up in the dark to view prairie chicken mating behavior and acting as the Don King of the animal world as your students have studied territoriality and fighting behaviors from fish to mice. Whether it is leading student trips to study redwing blackbirds in Horicon Marsh, investigating damselfish territoriality on the coral reefs of Grand Cayman, or examining insect populations in remnant prairies of Wisconsin, you enlighten students about the behavior of animals in nature.

Although you have wide-ranging interests, your true passion is the study of biological rhythms in crickets. Your work with generations of Lawrence students, showing that patterns of running and calling by male and female crickets are localized in the optic lobes of the brain, has brought international recognition to you and to Lawrence. While your students have demonstrated their ability to manipulate cricket cycles and behaviors, you have manipulated student behavior by holding 7 a.m. and evening classes, which students attend faithfully--a feat not to be chirped at.

Brad, it is a pleasure to recognize you with the year 2002 Excellence in Teaching Award."

Citation read by President Richard Warch at Commencement, 2002