Undergraduate Research Mentor Award

Geoscience Division
Council on Undergraduate Research

2011 Award Winner
John Brady, Smith College

The Geoscience Division of CUR annually recognizes an individual who serves as a role model for productive and transformative student-faculty mentoring relationships and for maintaining a sustained and innovative approach to the enterprise of undergraduate research.

Evidence of transformative student-faculty mentoring relationships include: leadership in fostering and sustaining the undergraduate research enterprise, student-mentor collaborations culminating in presentations at national or regional meetings and/or publication with student co-authors in peer-reviewed journals, and innovative approaches to involving undergraduates in research experiences incorporating research activities into the classroom and service learning.

The 2011 Undergraduate Research Mentor Award is presented to Professor John Brady, Department of Geosciences at Smith College. John’s nomination package assembled by former students and current colleagues speaks of transformative experiences (e.g., “John Brady changed my life”) and a style of mentoring that motivates a range of students and instills ownership of and a life-long passion for science. John has advised over 50 special studies and honors thesis students as well as developing a first-year seminar “Geology in the Field” that introduces women to science; it starts by making observations in the field and transitions to quantitative analysis and construction of geological narratives. One of the goals of the course is to get the students to believe that they can become scientists.

John credits his own undergraduate research experience, one that involved fieldwork examining amphibole mineral assemblages, in shaping his approach. John learned field techniques, laboratory equipment skills, and how to take the initiative to ask questions and explore on his own. He feels that students must be given a good problem to investigate, balanced with the right amount of mentoring versus freedom of exploration and ownership of the work. In an interview with John, he stated, “Having an undergraduate research experience was the best part of my going to college.” No doubt many of the students John has mentored are making that same exact statement today.