
Charles L. Brewer Award for Distinguished Teaching of Psychology

The American Psychological Foundation (APF) Charles L. Brewer Distinguished Teaching of Psychology Award recognizes an outstanding career contribution to the teaching of psychology. The 2008 recipient of the Distinguished Teaching Award is Scott Plous.

Dorothy W. Cantor, president of the APF, will present the APF Teaching Award at the 116th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association on August 15, 2008, at 4:00 p.m. Members of the 2008 APF Board of Trustees are Dorothy W. Cantor, president; William Howell, vice president/secretary; Charles L. McKay, treasurer; Elisabeth R. Straus, executive vice president/executive director; Norman Anderson; Camilla Benbow; Charles L. Brewer; Patrick H. DeLeon; Anthony Jackson; Steven E. James; Gerald Koocher; Ronald F. Levant; Sandra Shullman; Philip G. Zimbardo; and Melba J. T. Vasquez, APA Board of Directors liaison.

Scott Plous

Citation

“This award celebrates Scott Plous as a master teacher, a developer of premier Internet resources in psychology, and a pioneer of action teaching. At Wesleyan University, Plous is known as an extraordinary lecturer and dedicated mentor of teachers. He is also the founder of Social Psychology Network, a set of innovative Web sites used each day by thousands of students and instructors. And he has advocated socially engaged “action teaching” that leads not only to a better understanding of psychology but to a more just and peaceful world. Together, these efforts have had a significant influence internationally on the teaching of psychology.”

Biography

Scott Plous was born on November 2, 1959, in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, where he grew up with his mother Lois, father Jim, and younger sister Wendy. He attended college at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, studying psychology under Kenneth MacCorquodale, a legendary scholar and former student of B. F. Skinner. In part because of the quality of teaching and advising MacCorquodale provided, Plous graduated summa cum laude from the university with a bachelor’s degree in psychology in less than two years.

After college, Plous was intent on pursuing a career in psychology, but before attending graduate school, he spent a few months enjoying budget travel in Europe. This trip

introduced him firsthand to life in other cultures, and it ignited a lifelong interest in international travel, both for fun and to broaden his understanding of the world. Among his travels, Plous has hiked the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu, climbed the Great Pyramids in Egypt, photographed mountain gorillas in Rwanda, conducted survey research in Russia, visited Arab and Jewish territories in Israel, toured the Galápagos, camped in the Serengeti, trekked in Nepal, and been the guest of indigenous families in the Amazon. These experiences helped shape his appreciation for cross-cultural exploration, international psychology, and foreign exchange programs, all of which he avidly supports.

In 1981, Plous enrolled as a graduate student at Stanford University. After initially studying personality psychology, he began researching the social psychology of international conflict and became an academic advisee of Philip Zimbardo, who had won the APF Distinguished Teaching Award a few years earlier. Under the tutelage of Zimbardo, Plous learned about teaching from one of the most inspired and inspiring masters of the craft. Since those days, Zimbardo and Plous have remained close friends and have collaborated on a number of projects, most recently IraqTheVote.org (an educational Web site and antiwar petition signed by thousands of psychologists, students, and others).

Following graduate school, Plous received a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in International Peace and Security, which allowed him to remain at Stanford for two years as a postdoctoral fellow with offices in psychology and the Center for International Security and Cooperation. He then held a two-year visiting professorship in psychology and arms control at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign before joining the faculty at Wesleyan University, where he has been since 1990.

Plous is a fellow of the American Psychological Association as well as of the Association for Psychological Science, and he has received a number of professional awards, including the 1984 Gordon Allport Intergroup Relations Prize and the 1993 Otto Klineberg Intercultural and International Relations Award (both from the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues), the 1993 William James Book Award (from the Society for General Psychology for his book *The Psychology of Judgment and Decision Making*; Plous, 1993b), the 1998 Binswanger Prize for Excellence in Teaching (from Wesleyan University), and the 2004 Award for Distinguished Service to the Society (from the Society for Personality and Social Psychology). He was also named Connecticut Professor of the Year in 2006 by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advance-



Scott Plous

ment of Teaching and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education.

Among psychology educators, Plous is perhaps best known for developing Social Psychology Network (SPN), a set of nine interlinked Web sites that contain a searchable open-access archive of over 15,000 resources related to psychological research, teaching, and advising. On average, the pages of these Web sites are visited roughly 70,000 times per day from people in over 100 countries—a cumulative total of more than 130 million page views since the network was first established.

In addition to its searchable archives, SPN includes student and professional discussion forums, a psychology news service with 6,000 subscribers, an interactive directory of nearly 1,500 psychology professionals, a job posting board, student tutorials, online quizzes, and other features. Many of these resources were developed with funding from the National Science Foundation, and since 2005 (when SPN became a member-supported organization), more than 2,000 students, teachers, and researchers have become dues-paying members of the network.

As stated on its Web site, the mission of SPN is “to promote peace, social justice, and sustainable living through public education, research, and the advancement of psychology.” To fulfill this mission, SPN offers a large number of free resources and programs for psychology teachers and students, including

- Thousands of peace and social justice links, lesson plans, classroom activities, student assignments, and interactive demonstrations on SocialPsychology.org and UnderstandingPrejudice.org;
- The SPN Mentorship Program, an international volunteer network of over 400 faculty members pro-

viding career assistance to students from underrepresented groups; and

- The SPN Action Teaching Award, honoring psychology teaching that leads to “a more just, compassionate, and peaceful world” (in 2000, Plous coined the term *action teaching* as the educational counterpart to Kurt Lewin’s term *action research*).

Although SPN is a sizable undertaking, Plous is quick to point out that many other people have contributed to it over the years: “SPN began in 1996 as a simple one-page Web syllabus for my introductory social psychology course, but thanks in large measure to Steve Breckler, the National Science Foundation started funding SPN in 1999. This funding allowed me to hire two unusually talented Web professionals, David Jensenius and Mike Lestik, who have contributed immeasurably to SPN and to pro bono projects like IraqTheVote.org. Equally important, over 50 Wesleyan students have helped build and maintain the Network, and SPN has received kind support from Wesleyan’s Information Technology Services; from my departmental chairperson, Ruth Striegel-Moore; and from professional societies, charitable foundations, academic publishers, and SPN members.”

In addition to acknowledging these contributions, Plous credits his teaching accomplishments to academic role models such as MacCorquodale, Zimbardo, David Myers, Robert Feldman, and Jeremiah Sullivan and to the support he receives from his wife, Allison Plous, and daughter, Fijare Plous. “Without these role models and my family,” Plous says, “SPN would probably still be a one-page course syllabus.”

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