

**2008-2009
Ithaca College
Faculty Excellence Award**

Susan Swensen

**Associate Professor
Department of Biology
School of Humanities and Sciences**

Ithaca College is proud to honor Susan Swensen with the Faculty Excellence Award for 2008-2009. Marian Brown, Special Assistant to the Provost, writes, "Susan is well-known to her peers as both a consummate educator and excellent scholar....[and her]...tireless work has helped bring us to the point where Ithaca College is acknowledged as a national sustainability leader." Evidence of her prominence as a researcher is her cover-story publication in the journal *Science*, yet a member of the deliberation group marveled, "I was wowed by this file and kept seeing the reference to *Science* magazine but realized that is not the central thing; for her it was 'OK, Done; what's next?'"

Susan Swensen has taught at Ithaca College since 1993, becoming Assistant Professor in 1996 and department chair in 2008. She teaches in the area of plant and evolutionary biology with a primary focus on diversity among plant species. Her leadership in sustainability concerns at multiple levels integrates her teaching, scholarship, and service. During the discussion a faculty member said, "her work typifies all three areas; what is amazing is that she collaborates extremely well. By this collaboration the groups are able to reach very strong conclusions, more than they could do on their own."

Each nominee for a Faculty Excellence Award was asked to identify teaching, scholarship, or service as an area of distinction. Susan Swensen named scholarship while all reviewers note her excellence in all of the areas. One member of the discussion admired her "laser sharp research agenda; chipping away at a body of knowledge and contributing to it in multiple ways." Her vita lists over two pages of co-authored publications and in the even longer list of meeting presentations, nearly all were formally presented by students. As a researcher in biology it is typical that many of her articles are co-authored; as a faculty member in the Ithaca College Department of Biology, it is typical that many involve students. An example of a less-typical pattern is that she has taken students on four overseas grant-funded field expeditions because, she says, she "firmly believe(s) that students need to see diversity in undisturbed rainforests to truly appreciate and care about its preservation." Another less typical outcome is the fact that even in her relatively brief time at Ithaca College, four of her students who earned Ph.D.s are now themselves faculty members. One, Wendy Clement, described Professor Swensen's guidance of her not only as an emerging researcher and teacher, but more specifically as a first-generation college student. Again, the link among teaching, scholarship, and service is remarkably strong in Susan Swensen's career.

Professor Swensen's teaching "has always been exceptional, and remains excellent despite the demands that additional duties and scholarship place on her time," writes colleague Susan Allen-Gil. Her courses span entry-level and topical courses, for general education and for honors students, classroom-based and in the field.

Students consistently rate her very highly and she has provided significant contributions to the curriculum. The advising element of teaching is clearly seen in the successes of her students past and present.

Service by a faculty member involves citizenship and leadership. Susan Swensen is a fine, committed institutional citizen. She has served on multiple college-wide committees, including the search committees for president and registrar, Admissions Communication Task Force, and President Rochon's Academic Roundtable. It is as a leader that she brings unique gifts to the college. Primarily in the area of sustainability, she has led in organizational and curricular development. With the Partnerships in Sustainability Education she has guided the collaboration between Environmental Studies and EcoVillage at Ithaca from its original National Science Foundation funding to the \$500,000 grant from HSBC Community Foundation. Her leadership in designing and organizing the Finger Lakes Project has provided an annual sustainability training development workshop that enriches faculty here and in the region. Background student research grew, with her leadership, into campus-wide institutional efforts and national recognition for the College's sustainability efforts. In the Center for Natural Sciences she has led faculty and staff to model sustainable decision making and to support applied student projects. Marian Brown writes that "she is a critical element of our success as an organization gaining positive attention for our efforts to become more sustainable and to teach our students a better way to live and be in the world."

Recipients of the five Faculty Excellence Awards were nominated by colleagues and selected by the faculty members of the Ithaca College Faculty Development Committee and recipients of the Excellence Awards from the previous year. Selection was based on excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service as described in the Faculty Handbook. The guidelines also stated:

Candidates should be excellent in all areas and be able to demonstrate distinction in at least one. Examples could include, but are not limited to, the following: innovations in teaching, diversity initiatives, a commitment to sustainability, significant scholarly achievements, experiential and service learning initiatives, effectively incorporating one's scholarship in the classroom, bringing national/international recognition to Ithaca College, and exemplary service commitment to the College community, the larger community, and/or the discipline.

The Ithaca College community extends its congratulations and appreciation to Professor Susan Swensen for her strong commitment to excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service.