



EASTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

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## NEWS RELEASE

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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### **EASTERN CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY FACULTY MEMBER WINS U.S. PROFESSORS OF THE YEAR AWARD**

WASHINGTON, D.C.— Rhona Campbell Free, professor of economics at Eastern Connecticut State University in Willimantic, CT, is being named today as one of only four national winners of the 2004 U.S. Professors of the Year Award.

The award is being presented at a luncheon at the Willard InterContinental Hotel in Washington, D.C., by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The four winners each receive \$5,000 prizes and were selected for their outstanding teaching, commitment to undergraduate students, and influence on teaching. Forty-six state winners also were selected.

Professor Free won in the Master's Universities and Colleges category, which includes more than 600 colleges and universities across the United States. She is a 1978 graduate of Sarah Lawrence College, and received her master's and doctoral degrees in economics from the University of Notre Dame in 1980 and 1983 respectively.

“Dr. Rhona Free exemplifies all that is good and right about teaching,” says David G. Carter, president at Eastern Connecticut State University. “We are very proud of her for this wonderful recognition as U.S. Professor of the Year; it is an award that is well deserved. Dr. Free's contributions to Eastern over the past 21 years are exemplary. Through her efforts and those of her colleagues, Eastern students are better prepared to be the leaders of tomorrow.”

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## **FREE/POY, Take 2**

Poetry and economics generally aren't considered related topics, but Free has found a link. "In one of the classes I teach about labor; part of it is about our view of work. Is what we do our identity? Where does that come from? We know that earnings vary by race, gender and ethnicity, but is part of that the result of a difference in people's view of work? How important is it?" She uses poems written by people of different cultures that reflect their view of work to stimulate class discussions.

"What makes Rhona Campbell Free unique is the creative and open approach she brings to teaching," says John Lippincott, CASE President. "While she is deeply committed to her discipline of economics, she enthusiastically uses pedagogical approaches and tools more common to other disciplines to reach and motivate students. Dr. Free starts with the premise that all students can be successful in her economics courses, and her optimism enables her to devise different ways of reaching students whose levels of experience and interest vary. As one of her students, Mark Yeomans, said, 'Some professors take a difficult subject and complicate it. It takes a special teacher to be able to take the same subject and make it accessible for all students.'"

"These U.S. Professors of the Year have distinguished themselves in their profession by their commitment to advancing knowledge and to motivating, inspiring and empowering their students, said Lee S. Shulman, president of the Carnegie Foundation. "Through their contribution to excellence in teaching and extraordinary dedication to their students, they have dignified and elevated the profession of teaching and created a legacy of knowledge and practice that others can build upon. In honoring them, we not only recognize the individuals but also maintain the importance of teaching to our nation's future."

Professor Free's classes are "engaging and challenging," notes Patricia Kleine, dean of Eastern's School of Education and Professional Studies. "She not only has significant depth in her field of economics but also a wealth of knowledge in many fields both historic and current — from rap music to fashion, sports to entertainment news — which she deftly uses to teach principles of economics."

The U.S. Professors of the Year program, created by CASE in 1981, is the only national initiative specifically designed to recognize excellence in undergraduate teaching and mentoring.

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### **FREE/POY, Take 3**

This year's winners were selected from a pool of nearly 300 nominees. Campus provosts and academic vice presidents nominated them for the honor, and current and former students, colleagues, and peers from other institutions sent letters of support. Following preliminary judging by CASE, a list of finalists was reviewed by the Carnegie Foundation, which performed the final round of judging and awarded the \$5,000 prize to each national winner. The foundation's sponsorship of the program started in 1994.

The other three national winners include Carl Wieman, professor of physics, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO, who was selected the outstanding professor among Doctoral and Research Universities; Robert Bell, professor of English at Williams College, Williamstown, MA, in the Baccalaureate Colleges category; and Howard Tinberg, instructor of English, Bristol Community College, Fall River, MA, representing community colleges.

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**OF NOTE: On Monday, November 22, 30-minute interview slots are being made available on Eastern's Willimantic Campus for news media seeking additional face time with Dr. Free. To schedule a time, call Beverly Canfield at 860-465-5735. In addition, photos of Dr. Free are available at <http://www.easternct.edu/depts/urel/rhonafreeprofessor.html>**

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**About the Carnegie Foundation:** The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching was founded in 1905 by Andrew Carnegie "to do and perform all things necessary to encourage, uphold and dignify the profession of teaching." The foundation conducts research and policy studies on teaching and learning.

**About CASE:** The Council for Advancement and Support of Education is the largest international association of education institutions, serving more than 3,200 universities, colleges, schools, and related organizations in 46 countries. CASE is the leading resource for professional development, information, and standards in the fields of education fund-raising, communications, and alumni relations.