Campus Awards
for Excellence
In Graduate Eduation

Huseyin Sehitoglu

considers his role in mentoring and advising graduate students as a commitment to advance each individual to the highest level in knowledge, research, and teaching skills. His approach was honored with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Campus Award for Excellence in Graduate Student Mentoring.

The Nyquist Endowed Chair in mechanical science and engineering uses an analogy to the "classical period, the middle ages, and the renaissance" in describing the phases of graduates students' development—demonstrating how they first emulate their advisor, but develop their own direction and style as they build knowledge and confidence.

"It is very satisfying to see my students grow as we also build lifelong collaborations and friendships," he said. The 25 PhD students he has advised consistently comment that Sehitoglu is willing to invest whatever time is necessary toward their progress, often spending hours with them in word-by-word manuscript review, for example. His rigorous, caring approach ensures they are well-prepared for positions in academia, industry, or with national research labs.

"Part of the legacy of my students' time at Illinois is the ways they share the collaborative environment and mentoring style they found here when they move forward in their own careers," he said. In fact, more than one-third of the students Sehitoglu has mentored are now professors themselves.

So it's little surprise that he also continues to play an active role in helping junior and senior faculty members understand the importance of graduate student mentoring. His "Guidelines on Mentoring of New Faculty" has been in use in his department since 2000.

Jiawei Han

is certain his graduate students enrich his research and teaching with their interdisciplinary expertise and variety of life perspectives. This appreciation undoubtedly contributed to Han's selection for the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Campus Award for Excellence in Graduate and Professional Teaching.

The professor of computer science became involved in data mining research when the field was in its infancy, authoring the world's first textbook with his former student in 2000 before joining the U of I. Now in its third edition, "Data Mining: Concepts and Techniques" is used at colleges and universities worldwide and described by Amazon.com as the "preeminent textbook and professional reference on data mining by the recognized authority."

"There is much competition for admission to the data mining doctoral program," Han said. "Because data mining touches every aspect of society today, there is a constantly evolving need to develop scalable, robust tools to help companies get knowledge from data."

In return for their contributions to this dynamic, changing field, Han, an Abel Bliss Professor of Engineering, fosters close collaborations among the students in his research group. As they take part in weekly seminars, sharing papers and information from various conferences, the students learn from one another and further develop strengths in communication and teamwork— attributes that enhance their career preparation.

The past year's 10 graduates are now employed as assistant professors at major universities, in Microsoft Research, in high-tech firms such as Paypal and Twitter, as well as in Fortune 500 companies such as Caterpillar.