



CITATION

MARCH 1, 2008

In keeping with the resolve of the Mathematical Association of America to take substantive action each year to honor extraordinarily successful teaching at all post-secondary levels, the Northern California, Nevada, and Hawaii Section of the Association is pleased to identify

JOHN THOO

as the recipient of its MAA Sectional

**AWARD FOR DISTINGUISHED COLLEGE OR
UNIVERSITY TEACHING
OF MATHEMATICS**



WHAT IS EXTRAORDINARY ABOUT Dr. Thoo's nominating documents for the Award is the uniformity of the comments made by his students, departmental colleagues, college administrators, and off campus professional colleagues. Strongly favorable comments are not unusual coming from one or two of these groups or from a subset of one of them, for example, students in remedial classes or maybe students planning to do graduate work in mathematics. But it is unusual to see praise for someone from all categories and covering a wide range of ways of reaching students at various levels of proficiency.





Students from pre-algebra classes praise him as the first (and sometimes only) teacher who was successful in getting mathematical ideas across to them when they have in the past experienced only frustration and failure in mathematics classes. We see student comments like “The instructor was the best Math [teacher] I’ve ever had.” On the other hand, students usually good at mathematics say that they had been used to getting their A’s easily—until they took a class from Dr. Thoo. He takes them up to the point where they feel challenged and gives them further assignments so they’re always learning something new. His colleagues talk about students asking to have harder topics covered, material not included in the textbook. And when that is not enough, Dr. Thoo starts them on special problems that have, on occasion, even led to publication. They cite coauthored articles in *Primus* or the *College Mathematics Journal*. He’s creative in finding ways of expanding their skills—requiring class journals to improve their mathematical writing, or expanding their problem solving techniques.

Best we conclude that he spends all of his time with students, we hear about his inspiring his colleagues with his enthusiasm for mathematics, his willingness to try new ideas, and his ever present sense of humor. At the same time, of course, he is writing, speaking at conferences, participating in the life of his college, and carrying a heavy load of service by refereeing manuscripts. He is effective at teaching prospective elementary school teachers and in working with various projects and institutes regionally to improve standards. We have no room here for a long recitation of the evidence of his participation in the professional community. His colleagues attest to this. But it doesn’t get in the way of his day to day teaching. One colleague says that it “is difficult (if not impossible) to capture [in a letter] the magic of John’s classroom teaching.” Sitting in on his classes sounds like something all of us would like to experience.

We are proud to present this year’s Section Award for Distinguished College or University Teaching of Mathematics to John Thoo of Yuba College.

