



# Teaching Concerns

Newsletter of the Teaching Resource Center for Faculty and Teaching Assistants

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## *Mark Edmundson, NEH Distinguished Teaching Professor*



In 1994 the Teaching Resource Center won a Special Challenge Grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. This grant, together with gifts secured by the Dean of the Faculty of Arts

and Sciences, enabled the creation of three rotating U.Va. NEH Distinguished Teaching Professorships (DTPs). Each endowed chair, awarded to an associate or full professor for a three-year period, recognizes excellent undergraduate teaching in the humanities. Recently two NEH DTPs were awarded: to Brian Balogh, the 2004- 2007 Richard A. and Sarah Page Mayo NEH Distinguished Teaching Professor of History, and to Mark Edmundson, the 2004-2007 Daniels Family NEH Distinguished Teaching Professor of English. This issue of *Teaching Concerns* features Mark Edmundson; a profile of Brian Balogh can be found in the Fall 2004 edition.

Describing himself as a "pedagogical pragmatist," Mark Edmundson argues that "pursuing meaning is a splendid and useful thing, but we must go beyond meaning to ask questions about what value literature and history and philosophy might have for conduct in life." Mark views the ultimate goal of teaching in the humanities as helping students become aware of and able to articulate the values and assumptions with which they enter and leave the classroom. To this end, he works to establish a classroom environment that promotes candid discussion, where a student could speak honestly without fear of becoming a scapegoat. Mark does so even while challenging students to move beyond just interpreting a work, inviting them to

examine "Is the work true?" or "Does it contain live options?"

While an NEH DTP, Mark hopes to promote a larger dialogue among his colleagues by asking questions of value and use as well as questions of meaning and interpretation. In this way, he wants to encourage others in the humanities to become self-conscious about what they are doing as teachers, scholars, and students and why.

Those interested in more information about the Chair's duties can contact TRC Director Marva Barnett. Questions about the nomination and selection process should be directed to Karen Ryan, Associate Dean of the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, 924-3437.