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2022-2023 Teacher Recognition Award Presented to English Professor Rebecca Mazumdar



On Monday, December 5, 2022, [President Russell Hotzler \(/president-office/president-bio.aspx\)](#), Associate Provost [Reginald Blake \(/about-us/leadership.aspx\)](#), and Dean of Arts and Sciences [Justin Vazquez-Poritz \(/saas/dean.aspx\)](#) presented English professor [Rebecca Mazumdar \(/faculty/RMazumdar\)](#) with the 2022-2023 Teacher Recognition Award (Provost [Pamela Brown \(/about-us/leadership.aspx\)](#) was under the weather but present in spirit!). The ceremony included a fond introduction from Professor [Suzanne Miller \(/faculty/SMiller\)](#), Chair of the [English Department \(/english/\)](#), and gracious remarks from previous Teacher Recognition Award recipient Professor [Ashwin Satyanarayana \(/faculty/ASatyanarayana\)](#), Chair of the [Computer Systems Technology Department \(/computer-systems/\)](#), after which Professor Mazumdar gave a talk titled "An Active Pedagogy for the Post-COVID Classroom."

Professor Mazumdar explained the ways in which she has encouraged students to make unexpected interdisciplinary connections, how a single subject can be approached through myriad disciplinary lenses, and the importance of empathy in teaching. She paid touching tribute to the numerous influential teachers in her own life and included a presentation slide listing their names.

Appreciative attendees, including City Tech alumni from Professor Mazumdar's classes, adjourned to the Janet Lefler Dining Room for a dinner reception with lovely food and service by [Hospitality Management \(/hospitality/hospitality-management-btech.aspx\)](#) students, supervised by Professor [Robert Walljasper \(/faculty/RWalljasper\)](#) and Department Chair [Karen Goodlad \(/faculty/KGoodlad\)](#).

Rebecca Mazumdar began teaching when she was 8 or 9 years old, assigning homework to the assortment of teddy bears she had arranged in rows of silent, attentive students. Never interested in dreaming only halfway, she then completed the students' homework assignments before stepping back into the teacher role and grading the work. Her career at City Tech began in 2010, after completing her Ph.D. in English at the University of Connecticut.

In the Department of English, she teaches classes in literature and composition, including Law through Literature, Introduction to Literature – Fiction, Perspectives in Fiction, and an occasional special topics course on graphic novels. She has published two articles on teaching and learning, including one co-authored with colleagues across disciplines. She has also given conference papers about her pedagogy, presented a workshop on effective writing assignment design to math faculty at West Point, and given invited guest lectures on American literature and cold war culture at Smith College, LaGuardia Community College, and Drew University (via video).

Her approach to teaching emphasizes connection, empathy, curiosity, and transparency. Centering the English classroom at the nexus of students' interdisciplinary experiences of college, she challenges students to connect literary themes and class discussions with their chosen careers and majors.

Incorporating long-standing principles of WAC alongside a playful pedagogy founded in what might best be described as controlled cognitive dissonance, Professor Mazumdar coaches her students through the writing process, leading them to write creative, unconventional texts that impact students' thinking long after the semester has ended. A classroom activity where students compete to identify ways that a politician is like a clothes hanger may lead to discussions of how seemingly disparate concepts can illuminate each other through proximal analysis. In such a classroom, a game of Bingo can lead to close-reading lines from a novel; a game of Jeopardy becomes a discussion about the different ways a text can be interpreted.

Professor Mazumdar embodies City Tech's "dedication to high quality.... professional education" through her fundamental belief that critical thinking, creative problem-solving, and clear communication are essential in any academic program and every profession. Her approach to the classroom is based on mutual respect and the celebration of unexpected and underappreciated perspectives.

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