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Belmont's Giordano is chosen Tennessee's professor of the year

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Belmont University professor Pete Giordano could be described as unassuming. His demeanor is affable; his clothing, a vintage jacket and slacks, is simple and scholarly; his students call him "Dr. G."

Giordano also could be described as the best professor in [Tennessee](#), thanks to an award from the Council for Advancement and Support of Education recognizing its annual U.S. Professors of the Year. Today, Giordano, along with 40 other state and four national winners, will be recognized at a reception in Washington, D.C.



In typical fashion, he downplayed the honor's significance.

"It's something that might bring some positive attention to things I've done over time," Giordano said. "It's just nice to be validated, I guess."

Giordano, 50, has served as the chairman of Belmont's psychology department for the last five of his 18 years at the school. He has also served as the director for the school's Teaching Center, which nominated Giordano for the award this year.

According to the [Web site](#) for the awards, CASE, a Washington-based international higher education organization, and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching

select state and national winners. The criteria for professors: involvement with students, a scholarly approach to learning, contributions to the institution and support from colleagues and students.

In September, the two organizations notified Giordano he was the Tennessee Professor of the Year, after he had already given up hope of winning.

"I thought it was water under the bridge and that it didn't happen, which was kind of what I expected," Giordano said. "I was totally surprised."

Letter helped him win

A student-turned-colleague directly helped Giordano win the award.

Two years ago, Giordano's recommendation letter helped Radha Dunham gain admission to the University of Miami as a graduate student. She returned the favor to Giordano, writing a letter to CASE to support the Teaching Center's nomination.

"He's really invested in the growth of his students," said Dunham, who's studying to become a clinical psychologist. "He's interested in not just being a good teacher, but a good mentor."

Giordano is one of six Belmont professors, all from different disciplines, who have met monthly for the last 18 years to talk about teaching. The conversations have spawned some interesting ideas, Giordano says, including when the professors enrolled in each other's classes "just to remember what it was like to be students again."

"He's often the one with the comment that sparks everyone's discussion," said math and computer science professor Joyce Blair Crowell, a 20-year professor at Belmont and member of the group. "He's an excellent teacher, and he's also an excellent reflector about his own teaching."

Aside from his loves of writing, hiking and [University of North Carolina](#) basketball, it's obvious Giordano's passion lies in interacting with his students.

"It's the students — that's what keeps me coming back," Giordano said. "As the department chair, there are administrative hassles you have to deal with, but I get to talk every day with college-aged kids."

Senior psychology major Shandus Valentine has been meeting with Giordano every week since her sophomore year.

Through their conversations, Giordano helped Valentine earn an internship in Alberta, Canada, that aided her honors thesis on student affairs.

"If he sees you in the hallway or on campus, he's asking students how they're doing, what's going on in their lives," said Valentine, a Paris, Tenn., native. "With me, I feel like he's a colleague just as much as he's a professor."