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SPIG veteran accepts group's 2010 teaching award

By James Simon

Brian Steffen was quick to share credit with his many long-time colleagues in SPIG when he received the group's Teacher of the Year award at the AEJMC conference in Denver.

"This is an incredible honor. I am incredibly touched," Steffen said at an awards luncheon held Friday, Aug. 6, 2010. "When I was notified in May, I was half expecting the next call to say, 'Just a joke.'"

"This group has meant more to me over the years that you will ever know," he said. "I've learned a lot about teaching. I've learned a lot about mentoring and the value of what we do."

One judge noted that Steffen has been "a stalwart supporter of SPIG for years. He's a tremendous leader in the student media field, and he's a helpful and thoughtful colleague, which his nominators and the judges clearly recognized. This was much deserved."

A colleague at Simpson nominated Steffen, saying: "Brian's vision for a multi-platform media program at Simpson and his success in its implementation is the reason that I left a decade-long career as a television news anchor to teach at Simpson. Transitioning to any new career can be a bit bumpy and at times I have more questions than answers. Brian has helped me with patience and insight. He has challenged me with increasingly difficult assignments, inspiring me to work harder."

In his acceptance speech, Steffen thanked his long-time friends in SPIG, some of whom he has known for more than 13 years. He referred to some of his students as "some of the greatest kids in the world."

Steffen recalled that a day earlier, at the SPIG business meeting, one member came in from another division meeting and said, "I am so glad to be here." Steffen replied, "I couldn't agree more."

The Steffen File

- Journalism professor at Simpson College in Indianola, Iowa since 1989. Named department chair in 1999. Recipient, Simpson's Distinguished Teaching Award in 2002 and 2008 – both times winning in his first year of eligibility for the award.
- Guided a massive revision of Simpson departmental curriculum, leading to creation of Department of Communication & Media Studies in 2008.
- Served as chair of Small Programs Interest Group in 2001-2002. Also served as SPIG secretary-treasurer, research chair, membership chair, listserv administrator, and vice chair. Served as both the president and the executive director of the Iowa College Media Association and as a member on both the Student Press Law Center Advisory Council and the Associated Collegiate Press Advisory Council.
- Served as executive director of the Iowa College Media Association. Led efforts to establish greater ties between Iowa journalism educators and newspaper professionals through the creation of the Iowa Newspaper Foundation Student Journalism Committee.
- One-time desk editor for the Associated Press in Des Moines, the associate editor, Ames (Iowa) Daily Tribune and editor of the Adel (Iowa) Dallas County News.
- Ph.D., University of Iowa in Iowa City. M.S., B.S., Iowa State University in Ames.
- Research interests include defamation law in general and specifically as it pertains to private plaintiffs, including the free-speech and free-press rights of students.