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# Harvard physics professor wins \$500,000 Minerva prize

## Mazur developed 'peer instruction'

By **Matt Rocheleau** | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MAY 20, 2014

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KAYANA SZYMCZAK FOR THE GLOBE

**Eric Mazur, a prominent Harvard scientist and researcher, received the honor, which includes a \$500,000 cash prize.**

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A Harvard physics professor was named Tuesday as the first winner of the Minerva Prize, a new award given to a single faculty member worldwide in recognition of “extraordinary innovation” in teaching.

Eric Mazur, a prominent scientist, received the honor, which includes a \$500,000 cash prize. He was picked for a teaching method he developed more than two decades ago called “peer instruction,” which is now widely used.

At points during lectures, students are asked a conceptual question, which they first try to think about and answer on their own, before trying to solve it by teaming up with classmates.

The interactive teaching method can help individual

students quickly identify and better understand concepts they might be struggling with. It can also help professors notice when students are misunderstanding course material.

Mazur said he was surprised, humbled, and flattered by the award. He explained the serendipity behind his development of “peer instruction.”

“I did not develop this because I wanted to change education,” he said. “I developed it because I had a problem in my classroom. I thought I was the greatest teacher in the world based on student reviews and how well they did on my tests, only to discover they didn’t even learn the most basic material.”

Mazur will formally receive his award at an event in October hosted by the Minerva Academy, which is a part of the Minerva Institute for Research and Scholarship, a San Francisco nonprofit that advocates for reform in higher education, including a new online education venture it is spearheading.

Roger Kornberg, head of the Minerva Academy and a Nobel laureate, said Mazur’s founding of the teaching technique “embodies the innovation in teaching excellence that the Minerva Prize was conceived to recognize and promote.”

“Members of the academy unanimously and enthusiastically agreed on the selection of Dr. Mazur as the first recipient of the Minerva Prize,” Kornberg said in a statement. “We are pleased to bestow this honor upon an individual who has contributed so greatly to the advancement of teaching and with such passion for improving student learning outcomes.”

Mazur was inducted as a founding member of the Minerva Academy earlier this year. The nonprofit said it allows members to be nominated for the prize, but those who are cannot participate in the review and selection process.

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