

Memorial Resolution for Professor Richard Vinci

It is with great sadness that I enter this memorial resolution on the behalf of the Materials Science and Engineering Department [and the entire Lehigh community](#) for our good friend Richard Vinci, professor and distinguished scholar, who died on March 13 after battling Lou Gehrig's disease (a.k.a. ALS) for nearly three years.

Those of us who were fortunate enough to work closely with Rick know that he was an extraordinarily accomplished scholar, a beloved teacher, a cherished friend and a deeply valued member of the Lehigh community. He is leaving his mark on this institution through his research, his work as director of the Mechanical Behavior Laboratory and the Center for Advanced Materials and Nanotechnology, by his passion for teaching and by the relationships he forged with fellow faculty, staff and generations of students. He will be greatly missed.

Throughout his time at Lehigh, Rick's research focused on the processing and properties of thin films and other small volumes of material, with an emphasis on characterizing and modifying mechanical behavior. His work was funded through competitive research grants from the National Science Foundation, U.S. Army Research Office, Department of Commerce, and Defense Advance Research Projects Agency, as well as equipment grants from the Office of Naval Research and National Science Foundation. He had also obtained numerous non-competitive grants, training grants and contracts from government agencies and industry sponsors.

He had published more than 90 technical papers, co-authored an engineering textbook titled, "Deformation and Fracture Mechanics of Engineering Materials, 5e (Wiley, 2012), and was the co-author of two U.S. patents.

Rick also organized numerous professional symposia, including the 2008 Gordon Research Conference on Thin Film and Small-Scale Mechanical Behavior, and served as guest editor for a special issue of the MRS Bulletin on mechanical behavior in small dimensions. He was a member of the Materials Research Society, American Ceramic Society, ASM International, TMS and the American Society for Engineering Education.

From 2001-2003, Vinci held a P.C. Rossin Assistant Professorship at Lehigh University, and was the Class of 1961 Associate Professor of Materials Science and Engineering from 2004-2006. Among his numerous awards and honors, he received the ASM International Bradley Stoughton Award for Young Teachers, the Outstanding Young Member Award from the Lehigh Valley Chapter of ASM, the ASM Lehigh Valley Chapter Bradley Stoughton Award, the Lehigh University Junior Award for Distinguished Teaching, the P.C. Rossin College of Engineering Teaching Excellence Award, the Lehigh University Donald B. and Dorothy L. Stabler Award for Excellence in Teaching, as well as his department's Gilbert E. Doan Award, which is given by the graduating senior class.

Rick has been a co-advisor for the ASM Summer Materials Camp for high school students at Lehigh, as well as faculty advisor to Lehigh's student chapter of the national engineering honors society Tau Beta Pi. He's also been featured in several PBS productions, including "NOVA: Secrets of the Samurai Sword," which aired for the first time in 2007, as well as "Treasures of the Earth: Gems" and "Treasures of the Earth: Metals," both of which first aired in 2016. He served as a consultant for a 2009 NOVA program, "Last Extinction," and for a 2011 NOVA four-part series, "Making Stuff Stronger, Smaller, Smarter, Cleaner." Locally, he has served as an organizer of the DaVinci Science Center's NanoDays student outreach event.

Confirmation of the high esteem in which students held Professor Vinci is found in the nominations for his 2011 Stabler Award for Excellence in Teaching. The students noted his "charisma, enthusiasm and clarity of thought to his art," along with a style of teaching that lead young minds "on a journey that challenges, enlightens and ultimately shapes (the) thought process." He was also praised as "a man of great patience and creativity who saw himself as an educator and mentor outside the classroom, sharing his craft and perpetuating the art that is research science." Another wrote of his astonishing ability to teach complex engineering theories in a way that was both instructional and exciting. "I can honestly say," wrote one former student, "that he is by far the most influential professor I had while at Lehigh, and he remains so to this day. He is one of the most brilliant intellects I have ever had the honor to know, and he shares a passion for learning that I only wish I could emulate."

Dean DeWeerth has announced that, to honor Rick's legacy, the Rossin College has renamed its annual teaching award as the Richard P. Vinci Award for Educational Excellence.

Rick's health struggle was chronicled in an [April 2018 Boston Globe article](#) following his decision to take part in a late-stage clinical trial at Massachusetts General Hospital. It is believed to be the first of its kind in the U.S. to treat the rare disease that attacks the nervous system, and ultimately prevents the patient from being able to speak, eat and breathe. At that time, Vinci was upbeat, wearing a t-shirt that said "positive state."

He leaves behind a wife, Michelle Geoffrion-Vinci, a professor of Spanish and Department Head at Lafayette College, and two daughters.

A memorial celebration of the life of Richard Vinci has been planned for Wednesday, May 1, at 4:30 p.m. in Packer Memorial Church. There will be a memorial reception immediately following in Butz Lobby at Zoellner Arts Center.

--adapted from Linda Harbrecht on Lehigh News
[<https://www2.lehigh.edu/news/remembering-richard-vinci>]