Learning about the universe of concepts about which you teach—including the nature of space, time, energy, and matter—can be intimidating, requiring a quantum jump in understanding for some students. However, for more than four decades, with you as their professor, hundreds of Amherst students at all levels have gained greater knowledge of the natural forces, elements, and laws of our world. As a teacher, according to one of your students, you “pull back the curtain to the world of physics.”

A lecturer and raconteur with a remarkable classroom presence, you have been known to describe waves mathematically and physically, while drawing beautiful illustrations in chalk. One colleague commented on the extraordinary ways in which you “weave problem-solving, big themes, historical asides, demonstration experiments, clicker questions, and the occasional joke.” Your talents and skills are paired with careful preparation, a deep commitment to student success, and an openness to experimentation with new pedagogical approaches. Students and colleagues alike have described you as insightful, empathetic, caring, funny, charismatic, rigorous, and supportive.

Admired and beloved as an advisor and mentor, you inspire as well as guide, and your door is always open to students, alumni, and colleagues. Honors students for whom you have served as a thesis advisor describe their experiences as transformative, as do faculty members who have co-taught with you. The connections that you form with your students often continue for a lifetime. Many have gone on to enjoy careers in physics-related fields, including as professors. One such alumnus, now a member of Amherst’s own Department of Physics and Astronomy, offered the following comment as your sometime student: “There is no chance I would be where I am, doing what I am doing, without Jagu’s counsel and presence in my life. Period. And from talking with other alumni I know that I am not alone in this sentiment.”

Equally at home teaching technically challenging courses for majors and first-year seminars for general audiences, you have played a foundational role in developing the physics curriculum at Amherst. You have worked to foster a culture of inclusion and belonging not only in your department, but across the college.

In recognition of your outstanding teaching and mentorship, the enduring impact that you have had on your students and colleagues, and your myriad contributions to the curriculum and our community, Amherst College is honored to award you the 2024 Jeffrey B. Ferguson Memorial Teaching Prize.