

The Tradition of the “Last Lecture”

The “Last Lecture” began in 1996, when a simple event was held to honor the recipient of the university’s most prestigious teaching award: The Provost’s Award for Excellence in Teaching. To highlight the award recipient, this new event was launched with previous Provost Award recipients invited as the guests. Each, in turn, was asked to bring a junior faculty member as a guest. The purpose of this event continues to be emphasizing the importance of teaching excellence at California State University, Fresno. The assembled faculty members gather to recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of the individual named as the Outstanding Teacher of the previous year.

The culmination of the evening’s festivities is the “Last Lecture” presentation. The Provost’s Awardees for Excellence in Teaching are given this challenge: *“If you had the opportunity to give but one more lecture, what would you say?”* The intent, obviously, is not to imply that these outstanding members of the faculty will not be delivering another lecture, nor is it to constrain them in their selection of topics. It is more a challenge to develop a lecture that conveys their sentiment about any subject of their choosing. The lecture does not have to be about teaching. It is, rather, an opportunity to share whatever thoughts they may have on any topic. In this sense, the presentation may accurately be depicted as a “First Lecture.” The “Last Lectures” have been as unique as the outstanding faculty delivering them. They’ve created the tradition.