Professor Sergey Nizkorodov wins Professor of the Year award for teaching

The UCI chemistry professor’s teaching draws on 20 years of discovering what works best for students.

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Two of his students nominated Professor Nizkorodov for the honor.

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Professor Sergey Nizkorodov of the UC Irvine Department of Chemistry just won the Professor of the Year award from UCI as part of the university's 2022 Celebration of Teaching. It's auspicious timing, because this year marks the 20th anniversary of Nizkorodov's teaching at UCI — two decades that have seen Nizkorodov evolve from a teacher who preferred smaller, less imposing graduate-level courses to one who now regularly helms large introductory chemistry courses for undergraduates.
"There are so many things that make teaching enjoyable," said Nizkorodov. "I find a lot of intellectual satisfaction in coming up with interesting assignments for my students to work on. I love the moments in the classroom when complicated concepts start making sense for students, creating murmurs of excitement and interesting questions after the lecture." This is especially true for students who come to his classroom from backgrounds that, for whatever reasons, have left them less prepared to tackle a college chemistry course than their peers. Nizkorodov carries a special affinity for such struggling students, as he's a first-generation faculty member who knows how difficult it can be to navigate something like a college course without having much support. To that end, Nizkorodov constantly innovates when he's in the classroom. Rather than relying on a traditional, uninterrupted lecturing style, Nizkorodov fosters active participation from students by using in-class polls that allow for active feedback from students who, as a result, tend to come to class more regularly. He also gives quizzes that are open book and open discussion — a format that fosters the learning of different approaches to problems that students may not have acquired if they were on their own. Nizkorodov's classes are living, evolving spaces that adapt to help as many students succeed as possible.
"The fact that I am helping students achieve their dreams makes all the hard work on preparing and delivering lectures absolutely worth it," he said. "I am thankful for a career I can truly love!"

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