Flinders don a class above

Ebru Yaman

KEEPING the attention of a large group of students — who can range in age from 17 to 36 plus — when the subject material is complex is just one of the skills a university teacher needs.

According to Mark Israel, getting these lessons to resonate outside the lecture theatre is another. "I see my teaching as part of my broader commitment to the more general part of student's lives," Professor Israel said yesterday. "My interest is in not only getting something over to them in class but nurturing a lifelong interest in learning."

Professor Israel, who teaches criminology in the faculty of law at Flinders University in Adelaide, yesterday won the $35,000 Prime Minister's Award for University Teacher of the Year, the nation's highest university teaching prize.

He said he liked to allow students to relate subjects to their own lives and leave them with skills for further investigation of the areas that interest them most.

Six academics, one team of indigenous university teachers and four university teams were honoured in the federal Government's 2004 Australian Awards for University Teaching, sponsored by The Australian. They collected a total of $515,000.

The awards, which have been running for eight years, are intended to raise the status of university teaching and reward those who have "demonstrated the highest levels of dedication, professionalism and enthusiasm for their efforts on behalf of their students".

Receiving his award at a function in Canberra, Professor Israel praised the "high quality and dedication" of Australia's university teachers but said he believed there was room for greater collaboration across disciplines. "Good teachers work in teams," he said.

Professor Israel also won a teaching award in the category of economics, law, business and related studies. His two awards will deliver him $75,000, which can be used to continue work in his field. Winners in the teaching award categories receive a grant of $40,000 each. Institutional award winners receive $50,000.

Professor Israel is a graduate of Cambridge and Oxford and started working at Flinders in 1993. Since then, he said he has been encouraged and supported to "strike a balance" between teaching and research.

"I definitely see myself as a researcher-teacher, not just one or the other," he said.

"But it can be difficult [for some university teachers] to integrate both."

For a full list of individual and institutional award winners and categories, go to:


Dedicated: Professor Israel collects the Prime Minister's Award for University Teacher of the Year yesterday