

Thomas Jefferson Award
Citation for Madeline Levine
April 22, 2005

The Thomas Jefferson Award honors the UNC faculty member who, “through personal influence and performance of duty in teaching, writing and scholarship has best exemplified the ideals and objectives of Thomas Jefferson.” Jefferson was a complex man, a man of his time who nonetheless transcended it. Although he helped to define the new American nation, he saw himself as a part of a global network; he built institutions but believed that governments should serve the cause of liberty and justice rather than the other way around. The person we honor today exemplifies a commitment to justice, to international understanding, and to service, here at UNC, in the broader community, and around the world.

Madeline Levine, Kenan Professor of Slavic Literatures, has made her career here at UNC since 1974. Her training in Politics at Brandeis University, and in Soviet Regional Studies and Slavic Languages and Literatures at Harvard, and her postdoctoral research in Cracow, Poland, prepared her to bring strong leadership to the Department of Slavic Languages, which she chaired for the first time while still an Associate Professor; she would eventually spend 15 years, nearly half her time at Carolina, in that position. Beginning when the Cold War was still raging, and continuing through the emergence of the Solidarity movement in Poland and Perestroika in the Soviet Union, she helped our students stretch their imaginations to Eastern Europe and beyond. A mentor to graduate students and professionals in East European Studies, she has influenced careers and programs across the nation and around the world. In ways Thomas Jefferson would surely have admired, Professor Levine has continually explored how works of literature reflect and influence historical and political currents. Her scholarship and teaching focus on the literary representation of the Holocaust and on Polish-Jewish relations in its wake. She has also assisted the circulation of global ideas through her translations of Holocaust survivors’ narratives and fiction, and of the works of Nobel-Prize-winning Polish poet, Czeslaw Milosz. In the words of his Nobel Prize citation in 1980, Milosz’s poetry offers proof “that borders may be crossed, understanding and sympathy fostered, and animating, living contacts or correspondences created.” In her work with Milosz, as in her life and career at Carolina, all who know her can attest, Madeline Levine exemplifies the same values.

Renowned as a teacher, mentor, and leader, she has been praised by one of her colleagues for “her personal warmth coupled with her commitment to rigorous, engaged” teaching. Rigor, warmth, and engagement characterize her service to the university on a number of other fronts as well. She has served on a remarkable array of university committees, including the Chancellor’s Advisory committee, on which she is completing her second three-year term twenty years after her first; the Faculty Council (two terms), the Administrative Board of the Library, the Educational Policy Committee, and the Faculty Hearings Committee, which she chaired with distinction from 1994-95. She has served generously on search committees for the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences (twice), the Provost, the University Affirmative Action Officer. One of the founding

planners for the Institute for the Arts and Humanities, she served on its advisory committee as well as the advisory Board for the Program in the Humanities and Human Values. She worked to implement the International Center, to review the International Studies Program, and to establish the Jewish Studies Program. Perhaps her most absorbing and important service to the University of North Carolina system has been her work on the Board of Governors for the University of North Carolina Press, where she has been a member since 1988 and Chair since 1999.

In all these endeavors, Madeline Levine's leadership has exemplified the qualities this award was designed to recognize: she has been instrumental in maintaining and enhancing the academic excellence of our Press, defending the integrity of the campus personnel process, planning for and protecting important institutions of our university life. She is a leading figure in her own academic field and in the international literary world through her work as a translator; her advice is sought on matters of importance on our campus and beyond, and she gives her time generously for these worthy causes. In 2004 she was presented with the University's highest award for outstanding accomplishment by a woman. She honors us with her collegueship even as we honor her with this award.