



# MINERVA

## ACHIEVING EXTRAORDINARY

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

#### **\$500,000 Minerva Prize for Advancements in Higher Education to Be Awarded to Dr. Eric Mazur**

**San Francisco, Calif. – May 20, 2014 – [The Minerva Academy](#)** today announced Dr. Eric Mazur as the first winner of the *Minerva Prize for Advancements in Higher Education*. In recognizing Dr. Mazur for his significant contributions to improving higher education, the Academy specifically noted his development of Peer Instruction, an innovative teaching method that incorporates interactive pedagogy into the classroom and has been recognized worldwide for driving dramatic improvements in student learning. Dr. Mazur is the Balkanski Professor of Physics and Applied Physics and Area Dean for Applied Physics at [Harvard School of Engineering and Applied Sciences](#). The Minerva Prize, which opened for global nominations in April 2013, recognizes one faculty member from any institution worldwide who has made a significant impact on student learning experiences through extraordinary innovation in higher education. The Minerva Prize will be officially awarded to Dr. Mazur at the Minerva Academy Summit in October 2014. He will receive a \$500,000 cash prize as part of the award.

“Members of the Academy unanimously and enthusiastically agreed on the selection of Dr. Mazur as the first recipient of the Minerva Prize,” said Dr. Roger Kornberg, Nobel Laureate and Governor of the Minerva Academy. “His development of the Peer Instruction teaching methodology, now broadly adopted, embodies the innovation in teaching excellence that the Minerva Prize was conceived to recognize and promote. We are pleased to bestow this honor upon an individual who has contributed so greatly to the advancement of teaching and with such passion for improving student learning outcomes.”

The Academy considered a large number of impressive nominations from around the world. The three primary criteria considered in selecting the winner included: the innovation itself, the impact of the innovation on students, faculty and institutions around the world, and how the innovation has inspired both faculty and students more generally to achieve improved learning experiences. In addition, the Academy members considered the strong positive influence Dr. Mazur has had on the learning of his own students.

Dr. Mazur was honored earlier this year along with thirteen other esteemed academics when he was inducted as a Founding Member of the Minerva Academy. Academy members were invited based on their contributions and innovative thinking in the area of teaching excellence. The rules for the Prize stipulate that Academy members are eligible for consideration, but any Academy members who may be nominated are not allowed to participate in the review and award process.

More than twenty years ago, while teaching at Harvard, Dr. Mazur developed a question-based active learning method called Peer Instruction as an alternative to the traditional lecture-style class. With Peer Instruction, the instructor “flips” the classroom, using class time to engage students in interactive discussions about the subject material. In classes that use Peer Instruction, students prepare for class by either reading or watching videos covering the desired content. Classroom time is devoted to deepening the understanding of the material from the pre-class assignment. Presentations by the

professor are interspersed with conceptual questions designed to expose common difficulties in understanding the material. Students are given one to two minutes to think about the question and formulate their own answers; they then spend two to three minutes discussing their answers in groups of three to four, attempting to reach consensus on a viable answer. This process forces the students to think through the arguments being developed and enables them (as well as the instructor) to assess their understanding of the concepts.

Two decades of research support the effectiveness of Peer Instruction across disciplines. Nearly 1,500 papers have been published in peer-reviewed journals and numerous books have been written on Peer Instruction, including guides for educators to incorporate Peer Instruction into their classrooms. Mazur's 1997 book, *Peer Instruction: A User's Manual*, has been translated into four languages. According to an article by Dancey & Henderson in 2010, Dr. Mazur's Peer Instruction methodology has helped transform more college physics classrooms than any other effort. In addition to disseminating Peer Instruction methodology, Dr. Mazur founded the Peer Instruction Network, a global network for educators who utilize Peer Instruction.

"Eric's innovative thinking has been disruptive in the best sense of the word," said Cherry A. Murray, Dean of Harvard School of Engineering and Applied Sciences. "He has used a scientist's mindset to formulate and perfect a new approach to teaching that complements what we already know about how students learn. That's catching on internationally because it prepares graduates to engage with difficult problems beyond the classroom walls."

Dr. Eric Mazur is an internationally recognized scientist, researcher and professor. He leads a vigorous research program in optical physics and supervises one of the largest research groups in the Applied Physics Area at Harvard School of Engineering and Applied Sciences.

### **About Minerva Institute for Research and Scholarship**

The Minerva Institute for Research and Scholarship, led by Executive Chairman Bob Kerrey, is a non-profit with a tripartite mission that includes (1) facilitating low cost, high quality structured curricula delivery to the highest potential students in the world; (2) providing a vehicle for any researcher to easily and efficiently manage grant funded research while maintaining ownership of their intellectual property; and (3) advocating for broad reform in higher education including promoting the importance of effective teaching across academia. The Minerva Institute houses the Minerva Academy, an honorary institution dedicated to promoting and rewarding extraordinary advancements and innovation in higher education teaching around the world. Nobel Laureate Dr. Roger Kornberg leads the Minerva Academy. For more information please visit: [www.minervaproject.com/institute/](http://www.minervaproject.com/institute/)

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