As part of the Teaching Excellence Award Scheme, the Outstanding Teaching Award (OTA) signifies the University’s commitment to recognising and promoting excellence in teaching. The Award comprises individual and team awards, with the latter encouraging collaborative effort and achievement in enhancing teaching and learning. This year, six teachers and one team have been selected to receive the Award.

Nominations for the Award were considered by a Selection Panel chaired by the Vice-Chancellor. Members of the Panel comprised Professor Amy TSUI, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning), Professor Grahame Tony BILBOW, Director of the Centre for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, Dr David Martin POMFRET, 2012 UGC Teaching Award recipient and 2010 OTA recipient, Ms WONG Yee Man, a student representative nominated by the Students’ Union and Professor Michele D MARINCOVICH, the external member. The University is indeed grateful to Professor Marincovich, Senior Advisor to the Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education at Stanford University, for providing her expert advice for three years from 2012.

The Panel was deeply impressed by the awardees’ dedication to their students, their creative and tireless efforts to make learning enjoyable and challenging, and the impact that they have made on their students’ learning. The Panel was confident that all award recipients would continue to contribute significantly to the enhancement of teaching and learning at HKU.

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Mathematics is a logical game. It is also like a language. It has its own logical structure and convention, and it needs some getting used to. Many may find it difficult to master a new language, but once we develop some sense out of it, very soon we would be able to appreciate its intrinsic beauty and usefulness. Likewise, to learn and master mathematics, the sense or insight or feeling is more important than the sophisticated techniques. In mathematics, detailed and rigorous arguments would easily hinder the understanding of the essential idea behind the scene, and blur the flow of thinking. If a student can put aside the rigour and just go for the ideas, mathematics can be truly enjoyable, fun, and beautiful. So the core of my teaching is to nurture the sense or insight in mathematics.

I teach from the perspective of the students. I would give timely motivation on what they are going to learn and why they are learning the materials. From time to time, I would also give a bird’s eye view of where the subject is within mathematics and sometimes even beyond mathematics, and illustrate to the students which directions one can go from there and how far one can go in each possible direction. I use layman terms to illustrate abstract concepts, and translate intricate ideas into simple pictures. Instead of teaching the materials, I demonstrate to the students how to think. I encourage questions but I would not give a direct answer. I would try to hint the students and lead them to finding out the solution themselves, so as to nurture their sense in mathematics. As a teacher, I strive to infect the students with my own passion towards mathematics, and to open up new dimensions of thinking of the students.