Fourth Annual CSE Alumni Achievement Awards

CSE honored two extraordinarily accomplished alumni — Anne Dinning and Ed Felten — during its June 15th graduation ceremony. These awards affirm to CSE graduates and students that each contributes to a long, successful line with impact that drives deep and extends far.

Anne Dinning (BS '84)
Finance industry leader, community benefactor

Anne Dinning was finishing her doctorate in computer science and considering faculty positions when she fielded an out-of-the blue invitation to interview at a fledgling hedge fund, D.E. Shaw & Co. Founder David Shaw, a former computer science professor at Columbia University, was staffing the firm with scientists and mathematicians to develop a business strategy based on computational finance and quantitative investment management.

Dinning's award-winning dissertation research (PhD '89) at New York's Courant Institute of Mathematical Sciences caught his eye. She signed on as a researcher when the company had just 20 employees, drawn by the opportunity to help create something from scratch. Today the global investment firm has more than 1,000 employees in North America, Europe, and Asia, and manages $26 billion in investment capital. And Dinning runs the company as "first among equals" on a five-member executive committee.

Respected in industry and government, Dinning served for several years on the Asset Management Committee of the President's Working Group on Financial Markets. In 2006 she received the Industry Leadership Award presented by 100 Women in Hedge Funds.

Dinning is a second-generation UW Engineering alum. Her father was an electrical engineer and missile systems specialist at Boeing. She gravitated into computer science because she enjoyed solving puzzles and wanted a portable skill so she could consult and travel, but faculty convinced her she could do more than programming.

"Professor Richard Ladner, my senior thesis advisor, assigned me to work with the grad students on the text editor for a braille device. Giving me a meaningful project showed he had respect for me, and it was so cool to work on something that would get built," she says.

Dinning is passionate about supporting current CSE students and faculty. She and her husband, Michael Wolf, established an endowed regental fellowship, awarded annually to a first-year graduate student. They also established three endowed professorships in honor of Professor Ladner, Professor Emeritus Jean-Loup Baer, and Anne's father, Bob Dinning. She also has given back to the university through service on the UW Foundation board and the UW Futures Committee chaired by Bill Gates, Sr.

"This committee is encouraging the university to look at new ideas and metrics and how to measure success. We must figure out how to adapt to the funding challenges in higher education. I'm very grateful to the UW, and it's been nice to engage," Dinning says.

In New York, Dinning serves on the leadership boards of Math for America, which advocates for teachers and improving math and science education in public schools, and of the Robin Hood Foundation, which funds efforts to alleviate poverty.

"I appreciate how New Yorkers engage with the city, even in the physical way of taking the subway and walking. In my neighborhood, people know you and say hello," she says. "But I do miss Seattle's beauty and closeness to nature."

Luckily, she returns for summers with Wolf and their two children and enjoys getting back to nature.

Edward Felten (PhD '93)
Computer security researcher, public policy and consumer advocate

Two decades ago Ed Felten decided to focus his career in computer security because it was "newer ground not well plowed," and he wanted to affect policy through research. Now, in an era of massive data mining, cyber attacks, and personal privacy concerns, Felten is a leader in a tumultuous field and an advocate for the rights of the public, technology users, and researchers. The National Academy of Engineering elected Felten to membership this year for his work and its impact on public policy.

"It's great to be recognized in the field and by my peers and CSE. I'm looking forward to coming back to campus and seeing old friends," Felten says.

At Princeton University, Felten is a professor of computer science and public affairs and directs the Center for Information Technology and Policy. Its interdisciplinary research spans security vulnerabilities in electronic voting machines, browser security and privacy, secure cloud-based Web collaboration, technology and public policy in global intellectual property rights, government transparency, and other issues.

In his blog Freedom to Tinker, Felten has sided squarely with consumers in the outcry over locked cell phones, noting how copyright protections limit the freedom to take apart or modify the devices we own. In 2001 the recording industry threatened him and others with a lawsuit related to research on CDs protected from copying under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act. Felten's article in the March 29, 2013 edition of *Slate* describes how the outdated copyright law hurts consumers and cripples researchers.

From January 2011 to August 2012, Felten held an appointment as the first chief technologist for the Federal Trade Commission, whose mandate is to prevent business practices that are anti competitive and unfair to consumers.

"It was a great opportunity to learn how things work in D.C. and see how policy meets the political process. So little of this is visible to the outside," Felten says.

A growing concern is pervasive big data collection and the increasingly sophisticated ways that government, retailers, and those with a criminal bent, can amass and analyze personal information.

"Our laws are out of sync with advances in technology. We need to think more about what privacy means and how to safeguard personal information going forward," he says. "Another issue is how government agencies can be more transparent about how they use data for decision making, so we know the procedures are fairly applied."

Felten's impact and contributions to the public good affirm his decision to switch to computer science after earning his BS in physics at Cal Tech. Seattle's expanding technology sector and the quality of the UW CSE program drew him here. He counts his dissertation advisors, Ed Lazowska and John Zahoran, and general advisor Hank Levy, as prime influencers.

"John urged careful thinking about the core problem and how to narrow it down. Ed knew everyone and everything going on and urged me to get out and get the big picture. Hank's advice was don't be afraid to make mistakes — make them quickly, learn, and race forward into the unknown," Felten says.

CSE's Kevin Ross honored for inspiring K-12 students

A passion for exciting K-12 students about math and science, and a mission to inspire them to become science and technology leaders, has earned Kevin Ross (BS '88) the 2013 Diamond Award for Distinguished Service. Ross first volunteered as mentor for a high school robotics team in 1999 while working as a senior design engineer at Microsoft. By 2002 the excitement and passion he saw in students impelled him to take his volunteer mission statewide by founding Washington FIRST Robotics.

FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) now works with more than 7,500 students and 2,000 volunteers across the state. Mentors encourage students to explore, understand, and become excited about science and engineering by working in teams to build robots and compete statewide and nationally. Now retired from Microsoft, Ross volunteers full-time for FIRST.

His mission is a big one — close to 400 teams are spread over about 30 percent of the state's high schools and 20 percent of elementary and middle schools. The ultimate vision is to have a FIRST robotics team available for every student in Washington.

"We changed the educational and career choices for a significant number of our students. It is a truly profound moment to realize that a student has found a long-term passion as a result of your work," Ross says.

The UW Engineering Diamond Award is the most recent recognition of his work with students. GeekWire named him the March 2012 "Geeks Who Give Back" honoree, with a page in its GeekWire 2012 Calendar. He was a 2011 nominee for the Microsoft Alumni Foundation Integral Fellows Awards Program, which recognizes alumni who are making significant differences in the lives of others. And by popular demand, a former FIRST student recently created a Facebook page honoring Ross, explaining that he "asks for nothing yet gives everything." The site allows students to list him as an "Inspirational Person" on their own Facebook pages.

Read about the 2013 Diamond Award honorees at: engr.washington.edu/alumcomm/diamond/2013honorees.html