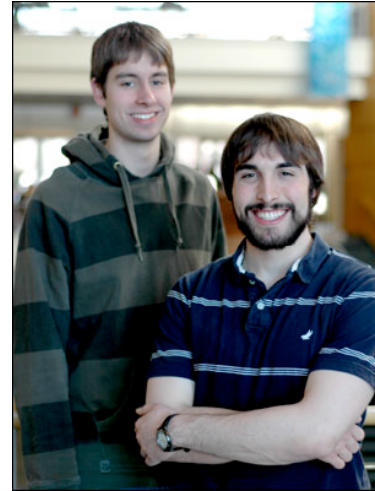


## Great Conversation announces students of the year

By Margaret Wade '08

March 7, 2008

This year's Great Conversation Student of the Year event not only revealed which two students had won the award, but also included the announcement that Professor of Religion and Philosophy Edmund Santurri is stepping down from his role as director of the program.



Sophomores Matthew Jobe (left) and Cody Venzke are this year's Great Conversation Students of the Year. Great Conversation students, faculty, alumni and guests gathered March 5 for the annual event to announce the recipients of the Lowell and Barbara Johnson Endowed Scholarship for the class of 2010.

In his opening remarks, Santurri emphasized the role of the learning community. "The award could go in many different directions," he said. "We celebrate each student as exemplars of the larger community." He named Cody Venzke '10 (Manly, Iowa) from the Kildahl cohort and Matthew Jobe '10 (Rochester, Minn.) from the Ellingson cohort Great Conversation Students of the Year.

After hearing their names, Jobe and Venzke made their way to the front of the room amid enthusiastic cheers to say a few words. "I just want to underscore the idea that we are representatives of a great community," Venzke said. "If the Great Conversation program was just one person, we'd be insane. We've encountered great works and great thinkers, but the people have made a huge difference. To my fellow Kildahlans who have had to endure my company for the past year and a half, and to the students of Ellingson (although there's some rivalry), we owe ourselves a great deal of applause. I'm eagerly anticipating our last semester together."

Next Jobe shared his appreciation. "First of all, I want to say thank you to those that have provided this scholarship," Jobe said. "I have grown a lot personally. It has impacted who I am and challenged my

perspective on life -- not just from reading the work, [but because] I go to class and I learn so much more from my classmates. The best part is conversing with them."

### **Selecting students**

In a program with so many excellent students, how can faculty single out a student from each cohort? "Selecting the Student of the Year is an exceedingly difficult task and an onerous one in the sense that none of the faculty wished to pit the excellence of one top student against another," said Professor of Music Kathryn Ananda-Owens. "There were several students who could easily have been chosen; moreover, all of the students in the cohort excel in one fashion or another and deserve recognition for their contributions to what has, for me, been an extraordinary experience over the past two years."

There was an overwhelming feeling of community and togetherness as students celebrated each other's achievements. "The Student of the Year is to me not so much the winner of a merit contest as the realization of a shared ambition," said Professor of Religion David Booth. "So in celebrating this student, we will be celebrating the ideal of great conversation."