

Faculty Fellow Marina Bers Receives Presidential Award

Tisch College Faculty Fellow Marina Bers, Assistant Professor in the Child Development department, this summer was one of 20 academics nationally to receive the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers, the highest honor bestowed by the United States government on scientists and engineers beginning independent careers.



Awardees were chosen from a group of about 400 assistant professors throughout the United States who received grants in 2005 from the National Science Foundation's Faculty Early Career Program.

The NSF grant, on which Bers is principal investigator, is funding her work at Boston's Children's Hospital.

Professor Bers originated the Zora technology — named after the imaginary city which Italian author Italo Calvino depicts in his book, "Invisible Cities" — to build the identity construction environments while doing doctoral work at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. She has continued to develop the technology since joining Tufts in 2001.

Tufts' Pre-Orientation Program Plays a Role in Research

Bers, now in her second year as a Faculty Fellow, has engaged incoming Tufts first years in her ongoing development work. While the patients at Children's Hospital with whom Bers will work will be 11 to 15 years of age, she noted that Tufts students encounter similar issues: they are looking to connect and form social networks.

"Last year we developed a pre-orientation program for incoming students, called Active Citizenship through Technology," she explained. "The freshmen used Zora to develop and discuss the campus of the future, and they created a social support network. Some of them are due to come back at the end of this month to help us lead a similar course for this year's freshmen."

Bers said Academic Technologies, a university-wide resource that supports Tufts faculty in their teaching and research with guidance and advice, and Tisch College "have been extremely helpful," a point she made in the speech accepting the presidential award.

After receiving the award in July from President George W. Bush, she said, "This award is, for me, a recognition of four different things. One, women can do good science; two, women can be spouses and mothers of three little kids and still do good science; three, Latin American immigrants to this country can make a career and contribute to their own discipline and society; and, four, none of the above can be done alone."