



PAIDEIA

TEACHING & LEARNING AT MOUNT ALLISON UNIVERSITY
THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PURDY CRAWFORD TEACHING CENTRE

TEACHING AWARDS . . .

Do awards play a direct role in *improving* teaching? Would the absence of teaching awards actually discourage teaching excellence?

In 1995, Alan Wright and Carol O’Neil published the results of an extensive international survey that asked respondents to rank the potential of a variety of programmes, policies, and initiatives to improve teaching practice.[§] Surveys were completed by 331 respondents.

In Wright and O’Neil’s tally of results, teaching awards did not rank very high for their potential to improve teaching; indeed, they came 30th out of 36 possible items. Ranked number one was “Recognition of teaching in promotion and tenure decisions.” Teaching improves when professors have confidence that their efforts are valued and when they see that their institution fosters the kind of environment that supports and recognizes the importance of teaching.

[§] Wright, W. A. & O’Neil, M. C. (1995). International Perspectives, in W. Alan Wright & Associates, *Teaching Improvement Practices: Successful Strategies for Higher Education*. Bolton, MA: Anker.

Since we reward what we value, such a supportive environment must exist before a teaching award has real meaning.

While we may be fairly certain that the mere prospect of winning a teaching award is insufficient incentive for professors to aspire to excellence, we can also be fairly certain that awards have a very powerful *indirect* effect on the quality of teaching and learning. Award criteria, for example, help us to focus on and define what constitutes excellence. A corollary effect, of course, is that award-winning teachers have a pervasive and positive influence on teaching: they are often invited to present to colleagues, to act as peer consultants or mentors, to serve on teaching committees, and so on.

This special issue of **PAIDEIA** focuses on award-winning professors from the Atlantic region and from Mount Allison. Dr. Helen Pridmore (Music) and Dr. David Fleming (Physics), recipients of the Paul Paré Excellence Award, inhabit opposite ends of the campus yet share a common vision of teaching excellence. They inaugurate our new interview feature, “In Their Own Words.” This issue also contains the call for nominations for the J.E.A. Crake Award, which recognizes excellent teaching in the Faculty of Arts.



Atlantic Region Teaching Award Winners

Every Fall, before the Association of Atlantic Universities' Teaching Showcase, award-winning teachers from across the region gather for an annual retreat. Their discussions are summarized and published in an annual bulletin. The October, 2005 Retreat was co-facilitated by Dr. Roger Moore from St. Thomas University and Dr. Susan Drain from Mount Saint Vincent.

Asked toward the end of the discussion what one point must not be omitted from a bulletin that reflected the afternoon's discussion, participants named two main areas:

- 1) the mentoring of faculty*
- 2) the valuing of teaching in the processes of hiring, tenure, and promotion.*

This account is reprinted with permission from the AAU Faculty Development Bulletin, Fall 2005.

Devotion to their profession kept fifteen faculty around the table despite sunshine which would have lured less committed individuals into the beautiful grounds of the Nova Scotia Agricultural College. They participated keenly in discussion which raised both familiar issues and novel questions: is there, for instance, a correlation between positive experience in high-school physics and the winning of institutional teaching awards?

Seeking help and feedback on work in progress is an accepted part of the process of research and publication, but it is less common for us to ask for help or feedback on our teaching. Even in institutions with strong faculty development programs, we feel the need for mentoring: when it works well, such a relationship is beneficial to both the novice and the experienced teacher. The dynamics of such relationships pose particular challenges: determining when the

offer of help is actually helpful, and when it is interference or imposition, requires a degree of trust and tact that is unlikely to be developed by fiat. Thus, we are anxious that any mentoring system not be systematic, or at least, not overly formalized. Mentoring relationships should be encouraged, logically, at the departmental level, where the challenges of teaching in a particular field are familiar, and where discussion and mentoring of research may already take place.

However logical it may be to locate mentoring in the department, separating mentoring from assessment – the formative evaluation of the novices' teaching from the summative evaluation of it – poses a challenge, for without that separation, it is hard to develop the trust which is necessary for the mentoring to work. Novices' openness to critique or willingness to experiment and take risks in their teaching must not be turned to negative criticism in a file. Even when there is no paper trail, it may still be hard to maintain the trust required when the mentor has a say in the novice's contract renewal, tenure hearing, or promotion application. For this reason, mentoring relationships outside the department may be a desirable option. It is not uncommon for recently appointed faculty to participate in formal or informal networks of new faculty, but we look for opportunities for new faculty to connect with experienced faculty outside their own departments.

We call for institutional support for the mentoring role, but we suggest that, for the most part, such support will be indirect: no one is proposing the establishment of an award for "Distinguished Mentor of the Year." However, offices or committees of faculty development can build into their programmes the kind of opportunities we mention above: for example, workshops can be followed by email discussion groups where contacts may be followed up.

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Modest resources might be made available within or across departments for faculty to share materials or approaches. Such informal mentoring is more likely to have incremental rather than swift or dramatic benefits, but it will help develop a climate in which teaching is a subject worthy of discussion and debate, not just in the abstract, but in concrete and everyday experience.

A good mentor is one who helps a novice identify and apply the unwritten or abstruse laws that govern the community, so that the novice may survive and come to thrive. In most of our universities, the cynics among us perceive that a good mentor would quickly dissuade the novice from anything more than minimal concern for teaching, since for the most part – even in institutions which do not describe themselves as research-intensive – it is through grant-getting, research and publication that novices will assure their career.

We urge our colleagues to place more importance upon teaching in hiring and in tenure and promotion reviews. None of us would argue that research is overvalued; few would disagree that good researchers are often good teachers (and vice versa).

However, hiring and tenure/promotion decisions do not reflect the importance that we think teaching has for the institution or for the profession. To rectify this imbalance requires action on a number of fronts: for example, we can have a say in the writing or revision of the articles in collective agreements which govern tenure and promotion; we certainly have a say in actual hiring and review decisions.

We can demand thoughtful and thorough teaching portfolios of all our colleagues; we can expect teaching programmes as well as research programmes. We can pay our students the compliment of taking their evaluations seriously, and we can devise other forms of assessment to supplement student evaluations. We can

contribute to the scholarship of teaching, and respect and support our colleagues' efforts in this area.

Though mentoring and the valuing of teaching in the profession came top in our list of concerns, our discussion ranged through a number of issues. Some of these are perennials, and some reflect the changing reality of the university. We draw them to the attention of our colleagues in faculty development offices and committees, as issues that deserve further attention.

We are concerned about the demographics of our incoming students, their preparation, and their expectations: individual faculty can reach across the gap, but to narrow the gap requires more than individual effort.

We are all struggling with the challenges that large classes face: the difficulties of responding to written work, of ensuring skill development, and of engaging students in their own learning. We are prepared to believe that large classes can be made to work, but are less convinced that they can work well on these measures.

We find that the pressure to adopt new educational technologies often outstrips our opportunity or our capacity to assess them, or the degree of support provided for us to explore them.

We are concerned about our universities' reliance on part-time faculty. Hiring and assessment processes for part-time faculty are not as rigorous as those for full-time faculty, and the availability of qualified part-time faculty varies throughout the region. Part-time faculty enable us to get through the programme, but we wonder whether the students' experience suffers.

We are in agreement that teaching is more than "getting through the programme"; our concern

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for promoting our students' learning expressed itself in a number of ways. We want to share with our students our love of our discipline – to remove barriers so that they can “rip into” the study. We want them to become independent of us. We want them to become critical thinkers (though we confess that there is considerable uncertainty among us and our colleagues as to what critical thinking really is and how it might be developed). We want to find the right balance between challenging and nurturing them. We want our students to experiment and to take risks, though many of them have already ventured resources they do not have to attend university, and are understandably cautious.

In these discussions, in other words, we recognize that idealism (though not fashionable) is alive in the professoriate, at least as represented by the university award winners gathered at the Teaching Retreat. We are idealists in that we are committed to two ideas: first, that teaching and learning are central to a university's mission, and second, that there is an unnecessary gap between what teaching and learning might be and what they more commonly are. Such idealism is not news to the presidents who attend the annual dinner of the AAU at which regional award winners are honoured, for they hear addresses every year from these individuals. Idealism is also evident in the annual teaching showcase sponsored by AAU. The Teaching Retreat offers another opportunity for us to confess our passion, affirm our commitment, mentor one another, and resolve to continue “being the change we wish to see” in our institutions and in our profession. For this opportunity, we are all most grateful.

A Note on the Process:

This year's retreat used writing to identify and focus the discussions; much of the writing is anonymous and thus individual opinions are not identified. The use of the first-person plural pronoun does not imply unanimity, though the writing and discussion revealed considerable consensus on concerns, though not necessarily on ways and means to address those concerns.

In keeping with the prevalent theme of mentoring, the new co-facilitator was ably supported and mentored by Roger Moore, who has set an exemplary standard not only in promoting but in reporting the discussion, and who has earned our respect and appreciation.

*Susan Drain, Co-facilitator
Mount Saint Vincent University*

2005 RETREAT PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Peter Williams, Physics, Acadia University
Dr. Harvey Johnstone, Business,
Cape Breton University
Dr. Stephen Coughlan, Law,
Dalhousie University
Prof. Kjellrun Hestekin, Music, Memorial
University of Newfoundland
Dr. Nancy F. Vogan, Music,
Mount Allison University
Dr. Charles Edmunds, Mathematics,
Mount Saint Vincent University
Dr. Barbara Gill, Education,
University of New Brunswick
Dr. Allan Reid, Language and Culture Studies,
University of New Brunswick
Prof. Kevin Sibley, Engineering,
Nova Scotia Agricultural College
Dr. Ann Braithwaite, Women's Studies,
University of Prince Edward Island
Dr. Angie Thompson, Human Kinetics,
St. Francis Xavier University
Dr. Adam Sarty, Astronomy and Physics,
Saint Mary's University
Dr. Ian Fraser, Psychology,
St. Thomas University

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In Their Own Words

We are delighted to introduce a new regular column in PAIDEIA: personal interviews with Mount Allison's award-winning teachers. To kick off this feature, we hear from Dr. David Fleming (Physics) and Dr. Helen Pridmore (Music) two recent recipients of the Paul Paré Excellence Award.

The Paul Paré Excellence Awards recognize a combination of excellence in teaching, research and creative activity, performance, and scholarship.

David and Helen received the Paré Award at May Convocation (2005). Here they answer questions about their love of teaching, their goals for student learning, and how they combine and balance their teaching, research and creative activity.

David Fleming

David is a Mount Allison alumnus who has returned as a Canada Research Chair in Medical Physics.

What do you want students to take away from your classes?

I would like students to take away a wide-ranging appreciation for physics, from its first principles right through to its applications. Physics is very relevant – both in everyday life and to other fields of science. The underlying connections have always been there, but the importance of physics is perhaps more obvious now, and will only continue to grow in future years.

If you want to understand the fundamentals of microscopy, sound perception, medical imaging, or radiation therapy, it's essential to consider the physics and to feel at ease with approaching a subject from that perspective. It is this ability

and frame of mind that I hope students can take away.

Do you have a philosophy of teaching?

My main philosophy of teaching is to keep the student in mind. This is not as obvious or easy as it sounds. To me, it means carefully considering not only the present background knowledge of the class or group, but also the distinct capabilities and interests of individuals. The first challenge lies in communicating at the appropriate level in order to maximize learning. To use a physics analogy, this is like searching for the “resonance” condition.

The other important component for me is to try to engage the individual student and encourage him or her to take an active role in learning, to go that extra distance and broaden understanding.

How do you balance and/or combine your teaching and research?

There have been some good opportunities for integrating my teaching and research, especially with a third year course I've been teaching the last three years, Medical Physics. Topic coverage includes areas such as photon interactions with matter, radiation dosimetry, and radiation detection, all of which are directly related to my research. So we have had the chance to use research equipment as part of the class, and I can make reference to ongoing work in the field during class discussions.

This works in the other direction as well. For those students who are already doing research in my lab, the course can help place their work in the larger picture. Summer and thesis work is, of course, a great way to combine teaching and research, and the availability of these options for undergraduates is one of the special things about Mount Allison.

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Helen Pridmore

Professor, performer, and musical director for the Opera Workshop, Helen also helped found the “Ear and Now” festival of new music.

What do you want students to take away from your classes?

Independence of thought; a thirst for more knowledge, more understanding; an appreciation of a wide spectrum of ideas, even if they aren't exactly to the student's taste or full understanding—just so they know it's out there, to be considered!

How do you balance and/or combine your teaching and research and creative activity?

My teaching feeds directly into my creative activity, and vice-versa. I am a singer and so are my students -- I learn from what I teach them and it helps me grow as a creative artist myself.

What do you enjoy most about teaching?

I love seeing people put the pieces together. Perhaps we are working on a French song from the 19th century, for example. When the student realizes that the harmonic language in the song is a perfect example of the work he or she is doing in Theory Class; when he or she realizes that the style of the composer relates well to what is being discussed in Music History; when he or she really reads the poem and understands how melody and harmony work together to express the text—then a light bulb goes on, and it all comes together, and the student really understands what music is. Actually performing the music makes all the theory and history come alive.

What's one of the best or most rewarding teaching experiences you've had?

One of my first teaching assignments, at another university where I had my first full-time job, was to teach Music Appreciation. A chemistry major in the class was fascinated by a piece I

had them listen to: Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring". He graduated and went off to grad school in Scotland, and later e-mailed me to tell me that he bought the CD of this work, and listened to it while working in the lab. He found the music inspiring. For me this was a success story; I had drawn a student from another discipline into my world. Very rewarding!

Do you have any advice for students contemplating the professoriate as a career?

Know how much focus and energy you will need to be a good teacher. You can't just coast on the same old, same old every year—not even every week. Every day, every student is different, and you have to figure out what each individual needs. That takes a lot of work!

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Bestowing a teaching award is an evaluative process . . .

When we think of teaching awards, we do not automatically think of the evaluation of teaching. Yet that is what we do when we bestow teaching awards; we use a set of criteria to judge who we believe are exemplary teachers.

Ellen Carusetta (UNB) in Knapper, C. (2001)
Fresh Approaches to the Evaluation of Teaching.

Do you have an outstanding colleague in the Faculty of Arts? See the Call for Nominations for the J.E.A. Crake Teaching Award, page 8.



Conference Announcement & Call for Presentations

WOMEN ON THE ATLANTIC ACADEMIC TUNDRA: THRIVING AND SURVIVING

Mount Allison University
March 3rd and 4th, 2006



Our conference will explore the personal experiences, challenges, victories and disappointments of academic women.

We invite participation and presentations from everyone—men and women:

- Students Faculty & Instructors Administrators Counsellors

**PROPOSALS ARE INVITED FOR ALL SESSION FORMATS:
INTERACTIVE WORKSHOPS
DISCUSSIONS, ROUNDTABLES, AND PANELS
POSTERS
E-MAIL YOUR PROPOSALS TO PCTC@MTA.CA (CALL 364-2652 OR 364-2613)**

There is no charge for this conference; however, registration is required.

E-Mail pctc@mta.ca



Keynote presenter, Dr. Cecilia Moloney, Friday March 3rd at 7pm in Avard Dixon
Dr. Moloney, NSERC/Petro-Canada Chair for Women in Science and Engineering, Memorial University (Newfoundland) will speak on *Finding Her Voice in the Academic Tundra*. Her participation is made possible through the Marjorie Young Bell Visiting Speakers Fund.

This conference is a collaboration of
The Purdy Crawford Teaching Centre & The Office of the Sexual Harassment Advisor

For complete information, visit www.mta.ca/pctc

The organizers wish to acknowledge the support received from Leadership Mount Allison.



THE J.E.A. CRAKE TEACHING AWARD (ARTS) CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The J.E.A. Crake Teaching Award, established by the J.E.A. Crake Foundation, is intended to encourage and recognize good teaching within the Faculty of Arts at Mount Allison University. The award is made annually to a full-time faculty member at Mount Allison judged to demonstrate outstanding teaching.

CRITERIA

The criteria which will be considered include

- evidence of excellent teaching, and
- the quality of contributions to the Scholarship of Teaching §

NOMINATION

Nominations, including self-nominations, are invited from any member of the university community, including students. There is no limit to the number of times an individual may be nominated.

To nominate a faculty member, you should do the following:

1. check with your nominee to ensure that she or he accepts your nomination and is willing to take part in assembling the supporting dossier
2. write a letter, addressed to the Dean of Arts, Dr. Carrie MacMillan, Centennial Hall, in which you provide the reasons why the nominee merits this award

The recipient will receive an award in the amount of \$2,000.00, half of which is to be used on a teaching project of the award holder's design. The teaching project should be undertaken in the year following the presentation of the award.

Nominations should be submitted by Monday, February 20 to:

**J.E.A. Crake Teaching Award Nomination
Ms. Debbie Estabrooks, Office of the Dean of Arts
Centennial Hall, Mount Allison University
65 York Street, Sackville, N.B. E4L 1E4**

For more information, please e-mail: destabrooks@mta.ca

The J.E.A. Crake Teaching Award is the only teaching award exclusively for the Faculty of Arts, comprising the following departments and programmes at Mount Allison University: Canadian Studies, Classics, Drama, English, Fine Arts, History, Modern Languages and Literatures, Music, Philosophy, Religious Studies, and Women's Studies.

§ The Scholarship of Teaching can encompass many, diverse activities: from presenting at educational conferences (e.g., STLHE, the AAU Teaching Showcase) to mentoring a colleague in your own department; from participating in or presenting at Teaching Centre events to contributing to the pedagogical literature, in your discipline or in general.

