

# Spotlight

academic awards triannual

ISSUE 9, OCTOBER 2009

A decade ago, during a sabbatical, a light went on above Dr Glen Loppnow's head.

His revelation didn't have anything to do with his research in the field of understanding and measuring damage in DNA and RNA, its implications for the molecular origin of life, and its consequences for modern diseases. It was a deep realization about his role as a teacher and more specifically, as Professor of Chemistry for the Department of Chemistry at the University of Alberta, where he'd been teaching since 1993.

"I realized that I was spending all this time in front of the class teaching concepts that had a reputation for being theoretical and totally irrelevant to anything in the real world, and it wasn't having any impact on students, because it was dry and boring. By thinking about the things that would engage them more, it changed the way I taught that course," says Dr Loppnow, who is one of two U of A professors selected for a 3M National Teaching Fellowship in 2009. The 3M award, the sole national award of its kind in Canada, recognizes excellence and leadership in undergraduate teaching.

"We teach much more than we should. I don't think we allow students time to learn as much as we need to," says Dr Loppnow. "It's about bringing the world they know and have constructed in their mind into contact with the world that you, the teacher are constructing for them, and allowing students to make the connections on their terms rather than your terms."

**Teach Less. Learn More.**

The results were impressive. In one of his classes on thermodynamics, Dr Loppnow asked the students to write down key issues they were concerned about in the world. Climate change was high on the list. The topic was perfect for thermodynamics. He put his students into groups and had them brainstorm on various problems and solutions involving climate change and then present their best solution. They would be graded not only on

*continued overleaf...*

## Dr. Glen Loppnow

Professor in the Department of Chemistry  
2009 3M National Teaching Fellow

building a **community** | building a **reputation**



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...“Loppnow” continued

how well they had integrated the content of the course but also on the creativity of their presentation.

“That really engaged the students,”

Dr Loppnow recalls. “I had students doing rap songs about entropy in the universe, a very difficult concept in thermodynamics. I had students who did music videos about climate change. I had students who did movies and had gone out and made up flyers and distributed them to classmates. When you engage the heart as well as the mind, boy, it’s just transformative what happens.”

What Dr Loppnow believes is that teaching reaches far past its contents. “Trying to make students citizens: that’s the heart of education,” he says. “You engage students in things they care about and then they use the content they’re learning in their courses to actually change something. That’s one of the things I see in the classroom now. We’re changing students from being passive absorbers of knowledge in large lecture theatres to being active doers using their scientific knowledge to change how the world works, and hopefully for the better.

It develops their attitudes about the fact that they are part of a global society and not just in it for themselves.”

What is the greatest thing Dr Loppnow has learned as a teacher? “That our students are amazing people,” he says.

“You can set high expectations for them. As long as you work hard to engage them and guide them along the process, they can meet those high expectations and a lot of times exceed them. I’ve been blown away by what students will do if you just ask them to.” ■

## Upcoming Deadlines for Academic Awards

### McCalla Professorship

McCalla Professors are those who value excellence in teaching, acknowledge the importance of students, conduct themselves in an ethical manner, are collaborative, open to change, take pride in history and traditions and are committed to integrating their research and teaching.

*Large Faculties* determine individual submission deadlines; therefore, please check Faculty websites for more information. Submissions from *small Faculties* (i.e., Augustana, Extension, Graduate Studies and Research, Law, Native Studies, Nursing, Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, Physical Education and Recreation, Rehabilitation Medicine, Campus Saint-Jean, and School of Public Health) should be sent each year to the Office of the Provost and Vice-President (Academic) on the first working day of December (i.e., **December 1, 2009**).

### Alan Blizzard Award

The Alan Blizzard Award was developed by the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) to encourage, identify, and publicly recognize collaboration in university teaching which makes a demonstrated difference in student learning.

The Alan Blizzard award is given to collaborative projects that increase the effectiveness of student learning. The first award was given in 2000; teams from the University of Alberta received the award in 2000 and 2003. The deadline to submit applications to STLHE for the Alan Blizzard Award is **January 15, 2010**.

The application form is available at [www.stlhe.ca/en/awards/alan\\_blizzard/index.php](http://www.stlhe.ca/en/awards/alan_blizzard/index.php).

### Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund (TLEF)

The Teaching and Learning Enhancement Fund (TLEF) has been created to improve teaching and learning effectiveness.

Applications are invited from all University of Alberta instructors who seek innovative ways of integrating teaching and research.

It is anticipated that this fund will support a diverse range of initiatives specifically focused on creating exceptional and life changing university experiences for students.

There are two levels of funding for the TLEF: professional development in the area of teaching and learning and projects or research. Applications for funding for professional development are accepted on a continual basis. The deadline for funding for projects or research is **February 1, 2010**.

### Rutherford Award

The Rutherford Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching is designed to recognize teaching excellence by full-time continuing academic staff at the University of Alberta.

Any individual who has completed a minimum of five years of teaching at the University of Alberta as a full-time continuing member of the academic teaching staff is eligible to be nominated for the Rutherford Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. The deadline to submit nominations is the last Friday of February (i.e., **February 26, 2010**).

### Provost’s Award for Early Achievement

The Provost’s Award for Early Achievement of Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching is designed to recognize teaching excellence by full-time continuing academic staff within five years of their first university appointment.

Any individual who has completed no more than five years of University teaching as a full-time continuing member of the academic teaching staff is eligible to be nominated for the Provost’s Award for Early Achievement of Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. The deadline to submit nominations is the last Friday of February (i.e., **February 26, 2010**).

### Teaching Unit Award

Excellence in teaching and learning may occur at the group or individual level. The intent of the Teaching Unit Award is to celebrate teaching excellence that occurs as a result of the collaboration of instructors.

The teaching unit may work at the graduate or undergraduate level and may include some or all members of a faculty, school, department or division. The deadline to submit nominations is the last Friday of February (i.e., **February 26, 2010**).

### William Hardy Alexander Award

The William Hardy Alexander Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching was created to recognize teaching excellence by academic staff.

Temporary academic as well as continuing academic staff (Administrative Professional Officers, Faculty Service Officers, Librarians, part-time continuing academic staff and Trust staff) with at least three years teaching experience (and who have taught at least 18 credits) at the University of Alberta are eligible to be nominated for the William Hardy Alexander Award for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching. The deadline to submit nominations is the last Friday of February (i.e., **February 26, 2010**).

### For more information...

Visit our website, [www.ualberta.ca/academicawards](http://www.ualberta.ca/academicawards), use the search tool or navigate to the award you are interested in.

For **discipline specific awards**, please visit **our website**, select the appropriate field of study and determine which award(s) are applicable to you.

For more information or assistance with an academic award nomination, please contact Bobbi Schiestel, Faculty Awards Facilitator, at 780.492.2644 or via email at [bobbi.schiestel@ualberta.ca](mailto:bobbi.schiestel@ualberta.ca). ■



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