Like any profession, teaching is a learned skill – but for a precious few, it’s supported by natural talent.

Growing up in Regina, Saskatchewan, Dr. Scott North gravitated towards teaching at a young age. As a teen learning the piano and organ, he was compelled to share what he’d learned with two cousins whose parents couldn’t afford lessons.

For months, his cousins came for weekly visits and North would show them how to play and read music, passing along his lesson books as he completed them with his own teacher. While his first pupils didn’t pursue music, the experience helped North discover a talent for teaching.

“I think I’m a better medical educator than music teacher, because my cousins don’t play now,” he laughs.

Many years later, North has been recognized as one of Canada’s finest teachers. This spring, the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry professor earned a 3M National Teaching Fellowship, the only national award for teaching in Canada. To date, the University of Alberta has produced more 3M award winners than any other Canadian university.

North has been teaching at the University of Alberta since 2000, after completing a master’s degree in medical education.

“One of the things I really enjoyed about being involved in the academic environment as a trainee, was the opportunity to mentor people junior to me and be involved in teaching,” he says.

His 3M fellowship was specifically given in recognition of a four-week introductory oncology course North teaches every spring to second-year medical students. It’s the last course of their second year and is often seen by students as “the hurdle that must be overcome,” he says.

In addition to end-of-semester fatigue, North must rally students to engage in material that’s academically and emotionally challenging. Typically, about half of his students have been touched by cancer in some way and since the course delves into cancer’s psycho-social elements, as well as purely medical concepts, many students must face their own fears and memories.

To put them at ease, North addresses their apprehensions at the very start, stressing that the class is meant as an introduction to the field. “It’s not my intent that they walk away from the course as a cancer specialist. All I want them to do is get comfortable with oncology.”

“arange of experts to speak to different perspectives on cancer, including patients and alternative-medicine practitioners. Actors are brought in to enact different cancer scenarios and students are given the opportunity to practice delivering bad news.

Since students have different learning styles, North tries to present the material in many different ways to achieve “a-ha moments” in the classroom. But all of his strategies are geared at teaching concepts, not just facts. The point is to teach students how to think.

“What you have to teach students is that it’s okay not to know everything. It’s not a memorization game,” he says. When it comes to cancer, knowledge changes rapidly, so students need to understand principles and know how to seek out up-to-date factual information when they need to.

This can be nerve-wracking for many students, but each and every one gains confidence after “a gentle push,” says North. “It’s like the mother bird pushing them out of the nest and letting them know how this is going to be.” After all, medicine is about solving problems, and not regurgitating information.

North loves “knowledge transfer” and mentorship, but he’s quick to point out that as a teacher, he’s always learning, too. By finding creative, non-medical analogies to explain concepts to students, Dr. North improves his ability to communicate with patients, too.

“I definitely think my interest in education helps me in the clinic.”
UPCOMING DEADLINES FOR ACADEMIC AWARDS

3M NATIONAL TEACHING FELLOWSHIP
The 3M National Teaching Fellowship is a national teaching award that recognizes teaching excellence as well as educational leadership. University of Alberta faculty members have won 34 3M Teaching Fellowships, the highest number in Canada, making our university the national 3M leader. The 3M Teaching Fellowship is open to all individuals currently teaching at a Canadian university, regardless of discipline or level of appointment. Up to ten Fellowships are awarded each year. The deadline to submit a 3M nomination package to the Academic Awards and Ceremonies Office is noon on August 26, 2011.

Our office will be hosting a 3M workshop and consultations in mid-July with 3M specialist, Carole. E. Dence, who has worked with recent University of Alberta recipients and compiled winning nomination packages for faculty members at Carleton University. The workshop will provide valuable insights and strategies on construction of a successful nomination package for this prestigious award. The individual consultations are for candidates and their nominator(s) who are planning to submit a nomination package this year and provides an opportunity for an in-depth review of their nomination package. An electronic notice regarding these events will be sent to Faculties and departments in June, for more information please contact us.

Copies of previous successful 3M nomination packages are available for review in the Academic Awards and Ceremonies Office, please contact us to make arrangements to view them.

TRADITIONAL FULBRIGHT SCHOLAR AWARDS
The Canada-U.S. Fulbright Program offers a unique opportunity to explore important contemporary issues relevant to Canada and the United States and the relationship between the two countries. Traditional Fulbright Scholar Awards are intended for candidates who wish to conduct research, to teach or to undertake a combination of both activities at an academic institution of their choice in the host country.

Post-doctoral researchers, emerging and established faculty members, as well as experienced professionals are eligible to apply for a Fulbright award. Candidates must have obtained a Ph.D. or equivalent professional/terminal degree by December 31, 2011 or have equivalent professional experience. As well candidates must be a Canadian citizen at the time of application. The deadline to apply for the Traditional Fulbright Scholar Awards is November 15, 2011 (for awards tenable in September 2012 or January 2013).

FOR MORE INFORMATION
For more information, visit our website, www.ualberta.ca/academicawards, use the search tool or navigate to the award you are interested in.
For discipline specific awards, select the appropriate field of study and determine which award(s) are applicable to you.

ACADEMIC AWARDS AND CEREMONIES OFFICE
With the support of the campus community, we have added numerous new awards that University of Alberta faculty members have received to our website, www.ualberta.ca/academicawards. If you have received an award and your accomplishment is not celebrated on our website, please contact us so that we may recognize your achievement.

NEED HELP WITH A TEACHING AWARD NOMINATION?
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.

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