“Teaching is not a solo act,” declares David Barnet, Professor in the Department of Drama. “Every single aspect of it is part of interlocking communities. The class becomes a community. The teacher becomes part of that community. There is also the entire community of teachers who have taught or are teaching those students whose energies you harness in your class. Finally, there is the teaching community of which we are part.”

Barnet is one of two U of A professors selected for a 3M National Teaching Fellowship in 2009. The 3M Fellowship recognizes excellence in undergraduate teaching and is the sole national award of its kind in Canada.

For decades, Barnet has focused on his passion to “make theatre available to a whole variety of people, far beyond the usual setting of the theatre,” he says. Drawing upon his research of Popular Theatre in India, Bangladesh, West Africa and the Philippines, Barnet has brought original theatre works to such atypical venues as alcohol and drug rehabilitation centres, prisons and seniors’ lodges.

As the founding director of The GeriActors and Friends, a community-based senior’s theatre company, Barnet has been responsible for creating theatre based directly upon the issues, aspirations, and reminiscences of seniors. “We develop that theatre by improvising, by talking, and by play-acting... because we all love to play-act, don’t we?” says Barnet.

Within the construct of the GeriActors and Friends, men and women have learned to tap both their vast reservoir of personal experience and something they’d often previously only daydreamed of: the desire to act. Barnet’s eyes light up when he speaks of a man in his...
seventies who plays a 16 year-old gas jockey pouring gas into a woman’s car while flirting with the woman’s daughter. “He stands at the back of the car singing, ‘I’m in the mood for love.’” Barnet laughs, the scene still so obviously alive in his mind. “He is so happy doing it! And we are so happy watching it!”

The daughter in the scene is played by a woman in her late 20s. For the past three years, the GeriActors and Friends has been an intergenerational theatre company whereby groups of students and the seniors work together. In the Department of Drama’s Fall Term, there is a graduate and undergraduate course Barnet teaches called Intergenerational Theatre, which often sees up to ten students of age 22 on average acting with seniors ranging from their late sixties to early eighties.

Befitting its roots in popular theatre that speaks of and to the marginalized in a voice that is pure and grounded in reality, the works of the GeriActors and Friends are, in some cases, tricky. “We’re writing a scene about Alzheimer’s at the moment,” says Barnet, imparting that the goal is to craft a scene that may allow for a cathartic laugh. “We believe very much in humor and in music but also in seriousness,” he notes. “You have to be careful not to re-traumatize people, not to bring more pain. In theatre, your job is to bring light, not pain.”

As for his job as a teacher, Barnet is quick to dispel the myth that he is, well, one of the “cool” ones. “Teaching is not cool. Coolness has become mainstream and teaching is not mainstream. Teaching is at the margins. Teaching is destabilizing. It is the critique of the mainstream. Teaching is our responsibility and learning is their responsibility.”

That said, Barnet says there isn’t a day that goes by that he doesn’t learn something. “Teaching is reciprocal,” he says. “Unless you receive as you give, then there is no dynamic process.”

Dr Glen Loppnow
Dr Glen Loppnow, Professor in the Department of Chemistry, is also the recipient of a 3M National Teaching Fellowship. Loppnow is known for his research in measuring damage in DNA and RNA in order to achieve a greater understanding of the molecular origin of life and modern disease. The 3M Fellowship shines a light on Loppnow’s student-focused teaching style. There is a common link between his research and his teaching. In his words: “I want to do something that helps people.” Loppnow will be featured in the next issue of Spotlight.

Upcoming Deadlines for Academic Awards

Festival of Teaching
The Festival of Teaching is an important element in the overarching Teaching and Learning Initiative. One of the goals of this Initiative is to position the University of Alberta as an institution where teaching excellence is a celebrated expectation, integrating the story of teaching and learning at the University of Alberta into the University culture in such a way that it becomes universally acknowledged as a core value, key expectation and valued part of the University of Alberta experience for all stakeholders.

Share your innovative approaches to engaging students in the classroom; discuss ways that you support students to learn and to discover their own capabilities and passions; let others know about your experiences in helping students to learn and to discover their own capabilities and passions; let others know about your experiences in helping students to learn and to discover their own capabilities and passions. More information will be available soon at www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/Provost/festival.cfm.

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 30 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 17, 2009. (Note deadline change.)

Our office will be hosting a 3M workshop and consultations in mid-July with 3M specialist, Carole E Dence, who has 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. 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 PhD by December 31, 2007 or have equivalent professional experience. As well candidates must be a Canadian or American citizen at the time of application. The deadline to apply for the Traditional Fulbright Scholar Awards is November 15, 2009 (for awards tenable in September 2010 or January 2011).

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.