PODCASTS, PUPPETS & THE ART OF TEACHING

3M winner’s podcasts for UAlberta students go viral

Four thousand miles away from the University of Alberta campus there was a man who taught high school biology. The place was Belfast, Ireland and the man was Mr. McNally. He taught with the approach that every student is a person to be individually recognized and noticed. While Mr. McNally may not have known it then, the Irish biology teacher was inspiring one young student to become increasingly interested in science and the art of teaching.

That young student now goes by Dr. Jonathan White and he is one of this year’s 3M National Teaching Fellows, U of A’s 2014 sole recipient and the first surgeon to ever receive the teaching honour. “I used to be someone who knew nothing about surgery, but thirty years later I’m considered an expert, which means that there was something that happened with education that changed me. And that is why I will be interested in education until the day I die; I want to understand what happened in the process that got me to where I am today,” says White.

With fascination in medicine, education and technology, it seemed fitting for White to begin creating podcasts as a free online resource for students. Originally, White’s goal was to create a series called Surgery 101 with 10 podcasts on surgical topics for UAlberta students. It was not long after the initial podcasts were made available on iTunes before White was receiving requests from medical students from around the world to release more episodes. In an effort to keep up with the global demand he was receiving for his innovative teaching tool, White transitioned to feature students presenting on topics that they were interested in. “I’m very open to the fact that students have to teach me something when I’m trying to teach them something,” says White.

Since its inception in 2008, Surgery 101 now has 155 episodes, 1.2 million downloads from 170 countries, and the recent creation of a mobile app. Not only has White made his teaching tool accessible, but he has also made it relatable, creating Muppet Surgery episodes and using Lego to explain complex topics in unintimidating ways.

White uses the success of Surgery 101 to remain focused on his students at the University of Alberta, practicing teaching tactics that prepare medical students for careers on hospital frontlines. The day before class lectures, White introduces students to fictional patients and symptoms, accompanied with links to Surgery 101 that will help solve the case study. White states, “Instead of expecting students to just sit there and be passive receivers, I’m willing to say ‘Okay, show me what you’ve got. Bring it to the table.’”

White encourages other teachers to pursue the ideas that sit neglected on the edges of cluttered desks. Rather than ignoring an idea that is yet to be explored, White says, “Go for it, even if it’s not perfect. Listen to what your students need and let them show you the way. If you’re waiting for the right conditions for your idea, it will never happen.”

Dr. Jonathan White, 3M National Teaching Fellow
3M National Teaching Fellowship

The 3M National Teaching Fellowship is a national teaching award that recognizes teaching excellence as well as educational leadership. To date, University of Alberta faculty members have won 41 3M National Teaching Fellowships — the highest number in Canada — making our university the national 3M leader!

The 3M National 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 internal deadline to submit a 3M nomination package is noon on Monday, August 25, 2014.

The Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) will be hosting a 3M workshop and consultations in mid-July with 3M specialist, Carole E. Dence, who has worked with several recent University of Alberta 3M Fellows to compile their winning nomination packages. The workshop will provide valuable insights and strategies on assembling 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 provide an opportunity for an in-depth review of their award submission. Further details will be sent to Faculties and departments as soon as they are finalized.

Copies of successful 3M nomination packages are available for review in the Centre for Teaching and Learning. Please contact CTL to make arrangements to view them.

Other Upcoming Deadlines

The following workshops may be useful when preparing your next academic award nomination package:

- **Teaching Philosophy**
  - June 9, 2014 — 10 am to 11:30 am

- **Preparing a Teaching Dossier**
  - May 29, 2014 — 10 am to 11:30 am
  - June 16, 2014 from 10 am - 11:30 am

Everyone is welcome. Cost is free. For further details and to register, visit ctl.ualberta.ca/events.

Changes in Academic Awards Administration

Administrative oversight of the nomination process for teaching awards was transferred from the Office of the Registrar to the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) in April 2014 along with the databank of successful teaching award nomination packages that were held in the Awards Facilitation Office. A special “thank you” to staff in the Office of the Registrar (Academic Awards & Ceremonies Office). Their passion for the advancement, recognition and celebration of learning has resulted in many successful teaching awards for members of campus.

Welcome to Curtis Champagne, CTL’s new Strategic Initiatives Manager, who will help academics in their pursuit of teaching awards by identifying award opportunities and offering tips on developing a strong nomination package. Curtis may be reached at curtisc@ualberta.ca or 780.492.9302.

For more information...

The Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) rewards teaching excellence, scholarship and innovation by administering awards and funding. Visit ctl.ualberta.ca/awards-funding for details.

The Office of the Registrar manages the database of academic awards located at ualberta.ca/academicawards. Contact Laura Connell at laura.connell@ualberta.ca or 780.492.2644 to add an award that is not reported in the database.

Need help with an academic award nomination?

For assistance with developing a nomination package contact Curtis Champagne, Strategic Initiatives Manager, Centre for Teaching and Learning at curtisc@ualberta.ca or 780.492.9302.