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.”

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...
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).

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).

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