

Award for Excellence in Teaching Geography Brent Hall

Dr. Brent Hall is a Professor of Planning and Geography and Associate Dean, Computing Faculty of Environmental Studies, University of Waterloo. Waterloo, Ontario Canada.

Dr. Brent Hall has rightfully earned the respect of his students and colleagues as an academic, an educator and a mentor. Below is a compilation of heartfelt thanks from current and former students to his commitment, care and difference made in our university education.

Brent's dedication to his students is tireless, unwavering and repeatedly going beyond expectations. For a full professor with many administrative tasks Brent is never too busy to meet with his students. His office door is open from 8am until 6pm five days a week. During weekends and evenings, students can expect to receive near instantaneous responses to emails sent at ungodly hours demonstrating that Brent is truly never 'off the job'.

Brent treats his responsibility not merely as a professor or supervisor, but as a mentor. Brent takes great personal interest in his students in terms of their studies, their interests, and their career path. This interest, which often continues well after graduation, is in developing students to their full potential. For example, in his work in developing countries, where he brings many of his graduate students, he is very conscious that his students are not just experiencing the development and implementation of GIS facilities, but also appreciating conditions in a world very different from their own. Another example is helping many students prepare for job interviews as well as provide them guidance and advice about their futures in the work place and/or academia.

Brent's approach to teaching differs from the common student experience, challenging the common precepts and techniques of many educators known to students at the University of Waterloo. For example, never has a teacher truly taught how to ask the right question before teaching how to answer it - an entire side of the equation that is so often forgotten. Nor has a teacher so fully inspired a team atmosphere, and sense of equality among student and professor. The openness of his classes led not only to a deeper level of learning because students unafraid to ask the next question, are also led to the development of a network of trusted people.

To be an effective educator, one needs to not only present material to students in the classroom, successful teachers instill a sense of motivation and empowerment to push the limits of their study to challenge tasks previously thought as inconceivable. Brent has the ability to do those latter components well and more importantly maintain and expand students' respect for him both professionally and personally. Those challenges enabled his students to work hard to generate assignments, reports, and presentations in a professional manner.

Finally, Dr. Brent Hall is a warm hearted and nice person. He spends time nurturing students with different challenges. One student retells his story. "As a Chinese and non-English native speaker, writing in a professional way is a big obstacle to overcome. When Brent realized this, he helped me with grammatical corrections for assignments in his class and for my master thesis, although he was not even a committee member".

In Chinese, 'teaching' has two characters, 'shi' and 'fan'. Each of them has its own meaning: 'shi' means to teach students knowledge and techniques in a professional area; and 'fan' means to show students a good example of being a great person. Brent demonstrates these qualities, the perfect model of an educator.

We are overjoyed at Brent's success in this award and honoured to share the difference that Brent has made in our learning, personal growth, and values instilled.