

## **2018 CAG Award For Excellence In Teaching Geography**

Alana Boland is an environmental geographer and Associate Professor in the Department of Geography & Planning at the University of Toronto, St George. She has been teaching in the department since 2001 and has experience in teaching both large and small undergraduate courses (25 to over 200 students) from the second through the fourth year as well as graduate courses.

Among her notable achievements, Alana is the recipient of a Faculty of Arts & Science Outstanding Achievement Award for Teaching (2007), given in recognition of teaching excellence in undergraduate education with a focus on classroom instruction and course design and/or curriculum development. In 2011, she received the University of Toronto's Accessibility Award for Faculty (2011), given to faculty members who have contributed to enhancing educational opportunities for students with disabilities.

Alana recently completed a five-year term as the department's Associate Chair, Undergraduate and was responsible for running our large (over 1200 specialists, majors and minors) undergraduate program. She is much in demand at UofT for her ideas about how to improve teaching. She has been a member of the Faculty of Arts & Science Committee on Teaching & Learning, a member of the A&S Classroom Space Committee, the department's Teaching Committee, and the Pedagogy Committee at the Asian Institute. In 2017, Alana was appointed Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning, Faculty of Arts & Science, in recognition of her outstanding commitment to teaching excellence and curriculum development and a strong track record in developing and moving innovations forward.

Over her career, Alana has taken on some of the toughest courses in our department, including a required course in statistics, a required course for environmental geographers and many human geographers, and the required course for PhD students. In the course evaluations, students regularly comment on the organization and structure of Alana's courses, noting the impact these had on their learning. This includes the relevancy of the readings and their thoughtful curation, her ability to ensure rich and intellectually stimulating discussions, and her inclusion of and acknowledgement of a variety of perspectives. Students frequently note that Alana's scaffolded assignments are rigorous and are structured to enhance their learning and enable key skill development (including critical analysis, writing, and how to ask questions). She is incredibly dedicated to advancing her students' learning: her assignment design, the training of her TAs, the resources she develops for her students, and her overall approach to teaching make this evident as does the feedback from her students. The students who provided solicited letters in support of this nomination were unanimous in their praise and applauded Alana as an instructor who is both respectful and caring of her students.

Alana has brought numerous innovations to the Geography program that have improved teaching quality and strengthened support for students. These range from simple administrative improvements to the creation of new courses and student support services both inside and outside the classroom. An example of a small but very effective administrative improvement was her decision as Associate Chair to meet with all new sessional instructors (about 15 graduate and non-graduate student instructors each year) to review their syllabi and go over the department and Faculty of Arts & Science expectations for course delivery. A second innovation was her idea of creating a Math Help Centre for undergraduate geography students. This centre offers instruction in basic math that is so necessary for many of our physical geography and some human geography courses. This type of instruction, tailored to geography course needs, is not available elsewhere at the university.

Two further innovations have produced new courses. As an instructor, Alana was the first faculty member in the department to receive funding for an international course module (ICM) from the Faculty

of Arts & Science. She led the way with her ICM in China. In her role as Associate Chair, she proposed and received funding and approval from the Faculty for an experiential course for students at the senior level. The students are offered placements off campus for a period of two terms and gain valuable working experience while simultaneously developing professional skills in the classroom.

Finally, in her role as Associate Chair, Alana has been successful in acquiring funding for writing support for courses in the department through the Writing Instruction for Teaching Assistants (WIT) program. Although Alana was not the instigator of this innovation, she was the person who scaled it up from a pilot project to a continuing program that has benefited courses offered by close to two-thirds of the faculty in the department.

In sum, Dr. Boland's commitment as a caring and innovative instructor and administrator is exemplary and her teaching record is outstanding. She is clearly deserving of consideration for the Canadian Association of Geographer's Award for Excellence in Teaching Geography.