

Award for Excellence in Teaching Geography

Dr Lorne Bennett

Dr. Bennett has been an Assistant Professor at the University of Guelph since 1989. However, Guelph had been a familiar place for Lorne long before he began his teaching career. Lorne completed his BA and MSc. at Guelph before heading to Ottawa to complete his Ph.D. in Geology in 1989. In the time that Dr. Bennett has been teaching at Guelph, he has successfully instructed hundreds of students and has enriched the quality of education in the department. His teaching complement includes introductory courses in physical and environmental geography; second year courses in statistics, geomorphology, air photo interpretation and climatology; senior courses in recreational behaviour and environmental systems analysis; and a graduate course on biotic processes.

For Dr. Bennett, teaching is not merely about filling students' minds with geographical facts and figures; it is about providing students with the knowledge base and skill set that will make them life-long learners. Lorne accomplishes this by engaging his students, regardless of the class size, into active participation in lectures and laboratory sessions. By transforming his students into active learners, he facilitates greater comprehension of difficult course material, and instils confidence in his students. This is particularly noticeable in his large introductory courses in which the majority of his pupils are not geography majors, and thus, are often unfamiliar with many of the concepts that he introduces. Through his patience, keen understanding of geographic phenomena, and wonderful sense of humour, Lorne provides a comfortable and secure environment in which students can stretch their skills to the limit.

Lorne's excellence in teaching is demonstrated by comments from students who often say that: "Dr. Bennett is one of the best professors I have ever had" and that "he has an outstanding ability to teach!" On a course evaluation form, one student remarked that: "it is obvious that Dr. Bennett is teaching to help students and make them excited about particular topics." His high approval ratings are also reflected in his course evaluations. On the Department's 5.0 point scale for "Overall Effectiveness as a Teacher", Lorne consistently achieves scores of 4.5 or greater. This is a considerable achievement considering the range of courses he instructs.

Dr. Bennett's teaching contributions have not been confined to the University of Guelph. From 1992-1997, Lorne served as a lecturer in Geology at Wilfred Laurier University, and was instrumental in the development of a distance education course in Geology. More recently, Dr. Bennett has devoted much of his spare time to the Native University Program as an instructor at the Six Nations Polytechnic. His teaching evaluations from this program have been impressive, with many students commenting on his ability to adapt his teaching style to the specific needs of his students.

Throughout his teaching career, Dr. Bennett has been actively involved in the research activities of students as an advisor, committee member, and external examiner. His dedication to research has also been recognized through the numerous conference presentations, reports, and publications that he has produced. In addition to his research on geomorphological processes and dynamics on the Niagara Escarpment, Lorne has devoted a lot of time to developing new courses for the department of Geography as the Coordinator of Distance Education courses.

Many students have also had the pleasure of working with Lorne outside of the classroom in the Geography Society, our undergraduate student club. Dr. Bennett's endless support of slide shows, career fairs, hikes, and open houses have helped make the club a success and introduced Geography to the broader University community. Through his passion for teaching and learning as a life-long process, Lorne Bennett has touched the lives of many students and faculty in the field of Geography and beyond. He is a most deserving candidate for this award.