

Award for Excellence in the Teaching of Geography Dr Kathi Wilson



Since joining the University of Toronto Mississauga in 2003, Professor Kathi Wilson has proven to be an inspirational and devoted geography teacher. She is extraordinary in her commitment to pedagogy, to students and to the life of the department and university as well as exemplary in her desire to connect with the broader community.

Kathi specializes in both graduate and undergraduate teaching. She taught half of our full-year foundation course, *Where on Earth* (GGR117), for six years. Kathi decided to start teaching the course using universal instructional design principles (UID). UID borrows from the Universal Design principles in architecture and design, which seeks to ensure barrier-free access to buildings for people with (dis)abilities. UID represents an approach to teaching predicated on creating learning environments that are inclusive of all students with diverse needs (e.g., learning styles, language, sexuality, ethnicity, (dis)abilities). It is completely in character for Kathi to embrace this philosophy given her compassion for students and commitment to education. Under her leadership, GGR117 has grown in popularity, increasing from 140 in 2003 to over 340 students in 2010/2011. Her ability to teach the course (which incorporates various forms of media and creative assignments) to so many students at such a successful level (achieving extremely high evaluation marks) is remarkable.

Kathi's excellence in teaching undergraduates is not limited to first year courses. She has also taught GGR277 (*Social Research Methods*), GGR353 (*Geography of Health and Health Care*) and GG313 (*Sex and the City*). Kathi played a key role in the Geography Department's curriculum initiative that was built around the notion of outcome-based learning. She took the lead in revising the BA curriculum to include the formal adoption of an Honours Thesis course (GGR417) for all of our specialists (BA, BSc), which she designed and taught for two years.

Kathi's record as a graduate teacher is no less impressive. Kathi teaches a service course for the graduate Geography Department, i.e., JPG1111 *Research Methods in Geography and Planning*, one of the most demanding and yet rewarding courses in our department. As a further commitment to the graduate teaching and the community, Kathi implemented a service-learning component into a graduate course on *Healthy Cities* for the School of Public Policy and Governance. Service learning incorporates community service with class-based learning to enhance the learning experience, build strong connections with community partners and strengthen communities. Kathi recruited 8 community partners who identified 14 research projects for the students to complete in lieu of a final paper. The projects the students completed not only provided them with important insight into local-level governance issues but also assisted the community partners in policy and program development.

Kathi also played an active and leadership role in UTM's Teaching Learning Community (TLC). This group of faculty meets regularly to discuss teaching issues and Kathi helped devise recommendations and structure debate so that everyone gets more out of these exchanges of teaching information and advice. Another area in which she excels is the introduction of new initiatives and technology to enhance the

learning experience for our first-year students. She received funding from the Provost's Courseware Development Fund (University of Toronto) to support the development of online self-assessment technology aimed at improving self-efficacy and course performance. Furthermore, she received funding from the Office of the Dean, University of Toronto Mississauga to implement an undergraduate writing initiative in GGR117.

In addition to all this, Kathi served on the UTM Undergraduate Advisory Committee for the past three years. She also volunteers to be part of UTM's Headstart (first year summer preparation) program. Kathi's commitment to education extends beyond the classroom. As an example, she assisted a student group interested in forming a debate club at UTM. She helped the students understand the rules of order and helped to run their first attempt at a formal debate. She also participated in efforts to improve pedagogy through presenting information about teaching in GGR117 at Teaching and Learning conferences and the University of Toronto's Technology in Teaching Fair. Finally, Kathi has given guest lectures in local high schools about geography and the relevance of the discipline to current debates and concerns.

Most recently, Kathi became Chair of the Department of Geography at the University of Toronto Mississauga in 2010. She is teaching two courses this year despite the onerous administrative duties that accompany the position.

Finally, Professor Kathi Wilson is truly a fun and supportive colleague. She also, obviously, exemplifies excellence in the teaching of Geography.