

Award for Excellence in Teaching Geography

Dr. Norman R. Catto

I have worked closely with Norm Catto since he first came to Memorial University in 1989. We have team taught courses, we have taught the same courses in the same term, we have taught the same courses in different terms, and we both have taught courses that are pre-requisite to each other's senior courses. I know his dedication to teaching and his tremendous energy for undergraduate students and their education. I have also used some of Norm's graduate students as Teaching Assistants in a second year course; I know, from them, of his great generosity of time and expertise in their graduate experiences at MUN.



Norm Catto teaches courses at every level in Memorial's Geography curriculum. His energies abound in front of the large first year sections as well as in the third year field course and the fourth year geomorphology or natural hazards courses. Students flock to his courses; undergraduates, in particular, are amazed by the breadth and depth of his knowledge, his fairness and enthusiasm. His graduate students applaud his care and concern for their specific needs, be it an "older" student with parental responsibilities, a foreign student with minimum English proficiency or a student in the Environmental Science programme who lacks a strong geography background.

Norm is one of our "front line" professors. He regularly teaches our first year course, Geography 1050 and is the reason why many of our students are Geography majors. Inspired and innovative teaching in the first year courses is crucial to our maintaining healthy numbers in the department. Norm has also singularly organized four regional courses for distance offering. Enrolment numbers have always been near capacity. The production crew at the Distance Education television unit were in awe of Norm's ability to explain complex matters in a way they could grasp.

About five years ago, Norm, a retired Junior High School teacher, the Associate Dean of Education and I founded the Newfoundland Branch of the Canadian Council on Geographic Education (CCGE). Norm readily took lead in the group trying to fill in some of the many gaps in geographic education with students, teachers and the general public. He taught a graduate course for social studies teachers through the Faculty of Education. For the last ten years he has offered mini courses to students from the Peel district in Ontario and also to junior high students in the Eastern School district in Newfoundland.

Two years ago, our department was approached by representatives of the Department of Education, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to help organize a national conference for high school students. The Interchange on Canadian Studies, 2007 had Norm Catto as a keynote speaker on Climate Change; he leads discussion groups after his talk. Norm leads three major field trips for the students and teachers and the whole conference was met with great enthusiasm. He sits on advisory panels on the geography curriculum for the province where his opinions are highly valued.

Norm has provided many "in-services" for junior and high school teachers in the general Avalon area to help with professional development and new methods in geographic education. Norm has also taken the lead to help with the organization and input of resource materials (eg. slides of landforms, different locations) for use by Newfoundland teachers on the NLTA's Virtual Teaching Centre.

I often exaggerate that I rarely have breakfast without listening to some interview with Norm on CBC radio. He seems to be the Geography professor most often consulted for information about issues such as beaches and golf courses in Windmill Bight, global warming and adaptation of coastal areas, and avalanches. He has given over 80 such interviews in a five year period. He has offered courses in landform study to the Innu Nation in Labrador, is President of FLOW (a local environmental group) and the author of many educational tour guidebooks of the province. He has recently given public lectures at the Rooms, our provincial museum and the Johnson GEOCENTRE. Norm connects well with the public and continues to teach far outside the walls of Memorial University.