

CAG Award for Excellence in Teaching Geography

Dr Ian O'Connell

Ian is an Assistant Teaching Professor in the Department of Geography who is responsible for teaching a suite of courses in Geographical Information Systems (GIS), Statistical Methods, Cartography, and first year Geography. He also coordinates the Geomatics program within the department, and is heavily involved in curriculum development. In the past 5 years, he has taught 28 courses, 1,984 students, and received average student evaluations of 4.74/5.

Dr. O'Connell began teaching full-time in the Department of Geography after completing his PhD studies here at UVic. He quickly established himself as a truly effective and outstanding teacher, but this thoroughly deserved reputation came as no real surprise. While working as a teaching assistant during his graduate studies, Ian's passion for teaching and his innate ability to communicate effectively were apparent to students and colleagues alike.

In fact, on several occasions, Ian won top departmental accolades for his exceptional ability as a TA.

Ian's role in teaching involves course development, lecturing, developing and supervising labs, and offering one-on-one consultation during office hours. On course evaluations, students rated the quality of his teaching performance as extremely high, yielding many scores above 95 percent. Even in a typically unpopular course like Statistics, which many students truly dread taking, Ian has earned amazing scores up to 98 percent! These scores place him consistently at the top of the teaching hierarchy in UVic's Geography Department.

But teaching excellence goes beyond the raw statistics of course surveys. There's also the art of teaching—the ability of the instructor to connect directly with students and give meaning to their educational experience. Ian's past and current Geography students write in resoundingly positive terms that Ian has contributed in many ways to improve their educational experience and also to shape their broader lives. Through his sense of humour, his willingness to work tirelessly and individually with students, for his ability to inspire them by pointing out intrinsic abilities, or through timely advice about how best to pursue a career beyond university—and in many other ways—Ian has touched the lives of his students. He treats them with the utmost respect. And the respect is reciprocal.

Added to the enthusiastic endorsement of students is official recognition in the form of awards from UVic's Faculty of Social Sciences – Excellence in Teaching Award, and from the Western Division of the CAG – The J. Alistair McVey Award for Teaching Excellence.

In sum, Ian's outstanding teaching abilities, and his humanity as a teacher, are qualities greatly admired by his colleagues, and profoundly beneficial to his students.

