



ASSOCIATION OF ATLANTIC UNIVERSITIES  
ASSOCIATION DES UNIVERSITÉS DE L'ATLANTIQUE

*Award For Excellence in Teaching*  
*2011*  
*Distinguished Teaching Award*

**DR. MAUREEN VOLK**

Maureen Volk began her teaching career in the School of Music at Memorial University in 1979. She admits that, at that time, she considered teaching a small price to pay for doing what she loved—playing the piano. Thirty years later, however, her teaching philosophy attributes music as the vehicle that led her to “an obsession with the equally fascinating world of teaching and learning”, a world that has enriched her professional life in a way she never imagined possible.

Maureen describes her approach to teaching as a combination of humanist and geek. Her belief about students and her relationship with them is humanist: respect, motivation, support, relevance, and fun are themes of her approach. Students especially appreciate her creative methods and her generosity with her time. When students struggle with their learning, Maureen extends lesson times and offers extra tutorials. In one-on-one and small group settings, she experiments with a variety of strategies, sometimes unorthodox or silly, until together they stumble onto approaches that make a difference for them. One student described how Maureen and she danced together to help her grasp a particular piece’s rhythmic complexity. Another student wrote, “I never felt confident or capable of doing aural skills until I took her class.”

Maureen is a geek when it comes to course planning. In course evaluations students frequently comment on her organization and the usefulness of the learning resources she prepares. An early adopter of technology, Maureen uses music processing and editing software to develop listening resources for piano literature and practice exercises for dictation and sight-singing. An Instructional Development Grant in 2007 enabled Maureen to purchase a digital camcorder. She records student lessons and performances and provides the recordings on a flash drive; the students keep a journal of what they see and hear as they watch themselves play. As a result, they become more aware of their movements and of the quality of the sound they produce, and they learn to set their own practice goals.

Maureen has also undertaken important leadership roles. She was director of the School of Music from 1990 to 2000 and president of the Canadian University Music Society from 1997 to 1999. She has mentored new faculty, conducted a national survey on undergraduate music curriculum, led curriculum reviews, developed program planning and student advising guides, and developed a set of student evaluation of teaching forms which was adopted by Memorial’s School of Music and by several other music schools and faculties across the country. She has redesigned the aural skills, piano pedagogy, and studio pedagogy curriculum and developed six new courses.

In 2003, the Faculty Council of the School of Music established an undergraduate student award of excellence in Maureen Volk’s name, and in 2008 Maureen received the Memorial University’s President’s Award for Distinguished Teaching. Now she adds the 2011 AAU Distinguished Teaching Award to her many accolades—and she is indeed a worthy recipient.