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Awards for Excellence in Teaching

2015

**Presentations to the
Atlantic University Presidents**

**by the recipients of the
2015 Association of Atlantic Universities**

Distinguished Teaching Award

**Dr. Emin Civi
Department of Marketing
University of New Brunswick, Saint John**

**Dr. Gordon MacDonald
Department of Mathematics and Statistics
University of Prince Edward Island**

Educational Leadership Award

**Dr. Dale Roach
Department of Engineering
University of New Brunswick, Saint John**

The Importance of Good Teaching

by

Dr. Emin Civi

Department of Marketing

University of New Brunswick, Saint John

I am honored and deeply grateful to receive the AAU Distinguished Teaching Award. I would be lying if I didn't say it feels more than a little humbling. Had someone told me when I started my teaching career that I would be standing here today, I would've thought they were joking with me. There are so many great teachers. It is truly an honor to be counted among them.

I'm quite comfortable in the classroom now, but I remember being distinctly nervous when I started at University of New Brunswick (UNB). I was beginning a new chapter of my career in a new country. Those first students were patient with me. They reminded me that teaching and learning go hand in hand. While you teach, you learn, while they learn, they also teach.

From those early days to now, my approach to teaching has become deeply informed by my discipline—marketing. I've learned that by adopting three of marketing's core principles, I can better engage my students. I practice the process of knowing my audience, identifying or creating activities that engage them, and gauging the success of my learning activities. This constitutes the scaffolding I build every day, one from which I hope their creative potentials grow.

Within this framework, I need to get to know my students as much as possible so that I can create a personalized and motivating learning environment. I need to know about their backgrounds and interests so I create and tailor activities that engage them. I need to know their learning preferences,

fears, and expectations of me and the class. It helps me create rapport, build trust, and provide a safe learning environment. All of these are vital to my success as a teacher and their success as learners.

In addition to a safe learning environment, teaching and learning depend on creating alignment with your students, their expectations, your own personality and skills, and the subject you want them to learn. Each class of students is different. I need to respond to "who they are" and "where they are" in ways that are engaging, and in ways that help them meet our learning goals. Like my students, I've found that my own "time on task" has taught me that this kind of flexibility is an essential skill because it helps me adapt to my students and to changing business conditions. Although it's risky when I step out of my own comfort zone to try new things, the empathy it engenders helps me be more sensitive to potential problems. For example, making arrangements to take the entire retailing class to the local mall, carry out an assignment and present their results in the busy food court with several onlookers was challenging for them and for me, but it inspires students to exceed their personal learning expectations. Taking those chances would not be possible without a university, administrators and colleagues who build a safe environment so that we all can take these risks.

Students who are learning to take chances need to know what new and diverse perspectives might look like. Therefore, I try to emulate the types of thinking they need

to employ while solving marketing problems. I ask them questions like “Has globalization gone too far?” or “Is advertising harmful to society?” to create debates and discussions. I use daily business news from the media, “Contemporary Cases” such as “Why did Target have to leave Canada?” and industry guest speakers to bring the real world into the classroom. I take them on field trips to reinforce classroom learning. I have students act as consultants with real companies. In a few cases this led them to be hired by these companies. And of course, I encourage them to participate in case competitions, coaching them so that they will succeed as one group of students did when they made the national finals.

But without feedback, strategies can seem useful, but come up wanting. That’s why I seek student feedback so that I can determine what works, what doesn’t, and what needs to change. Some feedback happens when I detect problems in student behavior and their learning. Through casual conversations, I seek insight and understanding. But I also formally ask for feedback mid-semester. I want to know the three things that students like the most and the three things they like the least about the course or me. One important lesson that came out of student feedback was learning that when I speak quickly, they were having a hard time to understand me due to my accent. I worked hard to learn how to speak more slowly. However, I still have an accent.

While my students teach me, mentors guide me. I am very lucky to have several outstanding mentors in my life. Dr. Tamer Cavusgil from Georgia State University always encouraged me to seek repeated feedback from students concerning my effectiveness and from very early on I did. I

learned that seeking help or criticism from students and colleagues is invaluable. He inspired me with his work ethic, personality, and his willingness to offer genuine and wise advice. Dr. Ted Needham of UNB Fredericton became my mentor when he helped me to prepare my application for this award. Although I had never met him before the process started, he worked harder than I could have ever expected. He sent countless emails and selflessly spent many hours reviewing my application. He not only impressed me with his work ethic, he is an amazing example of a thoughtful, generous and caring colleague and teacher.

Then there is my family. Without my wonderful parents, a post graduate degree would not have been possible. They believed in the value of education—a good education could change their children’s futures. Like many parents, they made sacrifices so that my sister and I could both earn our PhDs. This was not a simple process. In order to appreciate their sacrifice, you need to know that I grew up in a small rural town in western Turkey where high schools were, sadly, of poor quality, especially for someone with post-secondary aspirations. My parents sent me to a good boarding school, ten hours away, on a remote island. As a parent now, you must know how difficult this must have been for them. We could communicate only with letters. My mother wrote to me almost every day to keep me motivated, ending each letter with her two favorite lines: “Education is a golden bracelet. To get it, you’ve to work hard, no matter what happens” and “You should always be considerate, gentle and generous to others.” Maybe because they were such wonderful people, I knew a wonderful woman when I met her. My wife, Mariam, has given me boundless support over the years. She picked up the slack and took care of everything so that I could focus

my attention on my students and their learning. I know I can depend on her. She encourages me to take on initiatives that might help my students' lives in the short and the long term.

Because of my students, my mentors, my family, and my wife I have learned that:

- Teaching is a collaborative process that relies on parents, loved ones, peers and mentors, as well as students to succeed.
- Secondly, effective teachers experiment, evolve and reshape their

teaching in order to help their students transform themselves.

- And thirdly, "Be considerate, gentle and generous to others" is not just a nice way to close a letter. When you create a spark, stand back, and watch what will happen.

You do me a very great honor today. You inspire me. Thank you!

The Importance of Good Teaching

by

Dr. Gordon MacDonald

Department of Mathematics and Statistics
University of Prince Edward Island

Thank you to the AAU for honouring me with the Distinguished Teaching Award.

I was curious, so I went to the AAU website, and discovered that I am only the second mathematics professor to receive this award, and the first was over 20 years ago (Georg Gunther from Corner Brook). I don't want to read too much into this, but it is difficult distinguish yourself as a professor of mathematics. There are issues in mathematics that don't occur in other disciplines, like: the presumed knowledge of 12 years of pre-university prerequisite material, and the negative attitudes towards mathematics (or even mathematics anxiety) of many students.

When was the last time you mentioned that you were a professor of *whatever* and the response was: "I hated *whatever* in High School" or "I was never good at *whatever*". In mathematics we hear that all the time.

There is obviously a problem with the teaching (and learning) of mathematics.

Growing up, I wasn't planning to be a mathematics professor. My mother and grandmother had been secondary school teachers. In fact my grandmother was the first female High School principal in New Brunswick, so I guess I have some familial aptitude for education. But I wanted to be an astronaut.

What I really wanted to do was make a difference. I didn't just want a job or career. I wanted to leave my mark and do

something that was a real benefit for humanity.

I have published around 40 research papers in mathematics, but, if I am honest with myself, none of them are real difference-makers (maybe someday).

I am writing a Calculus book, which I think may revolutionize how the subject is taught, but it is still in progress.

I have even written a political science paper on a new way for society to govern itself, but that hasn't taken off.

But, every time I step into the classroom, I feel like I am making a difference. I am giving the next generation some useful skills and knowledge and ways of thinking that will help them to leave their mark... that is the power of teaching.

I've had to work at my craft to become a GOOD teacher. When I was a graduate student, there was no training in "how to teach mathematics". One December day my Ph.D. supervisor at U. of T. said, "You are getting close to finishing your Ph.D., you should teach a course. I'll arrange it." One month later I was teaching Linear Algebra to over 200 Engineers.

Luckily, I have had many mentors and role models over the years. My Math teachers at Dalhousie University where I completed my undergraduate degree: Keith Johnston, Pat Stewart, Ken Dunn, Peter Fillmore, Heydar Radjavi, CC Sastri, to name a few.

While I was at Graduate school, my Ph.D. supervisor Peter Rosenthal, had a large influence on my teaching style, and I had a few opportunities to talk mathematics teaching with Paul Halmos, who was the supervisor of my supervisor, and a famous mathematician known for his mathematics exposition.

Finally, at UPEI, I have been lucky to work with a Department that is full of good teachers. Dr. Lowell Sweet (retired) was one of the best teachers at UPEI, and we spent lots of time discussing how to teach Calculus.

I've had lots of good mathematics teachers, but GOOD mathematics teaching is hard to define. Mathematics is not memorization and recitation of facts, and it's not just learning and applying a set of algorithms. It is developing a way of thinking, and a basis of technical expertise, that allows you to mathematically analyze and solve problems.

There is endless debate over the teaching of mathematics: rote vs. discovery learning, old math vs. new math, traditional vs. reform calculus, curriculum revisions, standardized testing or no standardized testing. Mathematics is unchanging, but fashions in mathematics teaching change regularly.

In the 1990s, Calculus results were abysmal. Over 50% of 1st year university students across North America were failing Calculus. The NSF (in the US) spent over \$44 million, funding over 350 experiments on methods of improving Calculus outcomes. An interesting dynamic evolved from these experiments. Almost every experiment was a "success", in that there was a statistically significant increase in student outcomes. But when the attempts

were made to implement these experiments on a wider scale, the effect disappeared in most cases.

The key feature that couldn't be replicated – teachers who believed in their subject, their methods and their students. Teachers must be given the freedom to teach according to their strengths.

I think GOOD teaching in mathematics comes down to two key characteristics from which all else follows – Caring and Knowing.

- Caring: caring about your subject, about the craft of teaching, about your students and about their learning.
- Knowing: having mastery not only of the subject you are teaching, but knowing how it fits in the larger body of knowledge, what are the key reasons why it's important to learn the subject.

We all know that in international math testing (like the PISA) students from Atlantic Canada typically test near the bottom in Canada (still respectable internationally), while Quebec, BC and Ontario test near the top. The main difference: the qualifications of teachers of mathematics (especially at the Junior High level). On PEI, a junior high math teacher could have taken only one math course since Grade 11 math. Not only that, many have actively avoided taking a math course since Grade 11, and they are teaching developing mathematics minds. (Until recently, there might have even been some High School teachers like that).

It is hard to judge caring, but it is easier to judge knowing. If there is one thing we could do in Atlantic Canada to improve the teaching of mathematics (and hence student outcomes), it would be to copy

Quebec and require reasonable qualifications for teachers of mathematics starting at junior high (oh, and get computer science in the high school curriculum).

As University Presidents, maybe you could help to make this happen.

Again, thank you to the AAU for honouring me with this award.

Growing Communities and Cultures of Teaching

by

Dr. Dale Roach

Department of Engineering

University of New Brunswick, Saint John

I would like to thank the AAU for inviting me here to speak to you today. It would be a rare occasion indeed for an academic to pass up a captive audience, a podium, and a microphone. I must admit, however, that I have not given a speech since I was in sixth grade and the lack of a Powerpoint slide deck is unsettling for me.

My values and beliefs about teaching can be summarized quite simply: good teaching is important to me, and we should help each other become better teachers. With that in mind, I would like to give you a small taste of the teaching community and culture on UNB Saint John's campus over the next few minutes. I believe that our teaching community and culture is very unique and very special. I believe this comes about not because of an extrasensory ability to hire good teachers and educational leaders but because we grow and foster good teaching practice and community. This is perhaps best demonstrated to those who are not familiar with our campus by the disproportionate representation of my colleagues on the lists of past AAU and STLHE award recipients. To those of us who have chosen to work at UNB Saint John, however, it is exemplified by our commitment to our teaching and to each other.

At this juncture, I would like to relate a bit of my own personal experience; I was a lab geek. I spent five years working towards a PhD in Mechanical Engineering in a lab by myself with a wind tunnel, probes twenty times smaller than a human hair, and Gigabytes of data to pour over and analyze

to death. All of this experience made me a great subject matter expert, a requisite attribute for teaching in higher education, but did not make me a teacher. In fact, if anything, it made it more difficult to relate to my students. So how then can we bridge this gap between successful researcher and successful teacher? I believe that the solution lies in the building of strong communities and cultures of teaching on our campuses and by supporting and engaging new faculty to help them make the transition to the profession of teaching and I stand before you today as a testament to this model. Shortly after being hired on at UNB Saint John, I was invited to join the campus' Excellence in Teaching Committee and, thankfully, I accepted.

Building a community and culture of teaching is no small task. It requires countless hours of dedication and hard work. Perhaps the more difficult ingredient to find, however, is the right combination of people and opportunities. Communities need leaders who are passionate about what they do and believe, but who also follow through with what they have committed to. University administrations need to trust in their educational leaders and provide them with the opportunities and resources they need. This requires a great deal of trust and respect from both sides in order for it to flourish.

On our campus, the Vice-President's Excellence in Teaching Committee and the Teaching and Learning Center serve as the center of all things teaching-related. As the name implies, the committee is overseen by

the campus' Vice-President but is given a high degree of autonomy over its purpose and projects. The VPETC, as it is very affectionately known, is a group of highly-dedicated faculty members from all disciplines on our small campus with additional representation by some staff members as well as teachers from the New Brunswick Community College and the Saint John Regional Hospital; both of which are located very nearby. The Teaching and Learning Center is staffed by a part-time coordinator who serves as our official representative to various committees both within UNB and to the outside world and we have been very fortunate to have very dedicated people take on this role. The sheer volume of work and committee representation that is performed by this group would be, quite simply, too long to list, so I will mention only those activities that relate to our teaching community and culture.

The VPETC and the Teaching and Learning Center are the nexus of the teaching community and culture on our campus. We celebrate anything together: Start of term, end of term, holidays, people receiving awards, or in all honesty, any other reason to have cake and socialize. In addition to our celebrating, we are also a peer support group and act as teaching consultants and friends. It is not uncommon for our bi-weekly meetings to be called to order twenty minutes late because we had to catch up with one another before getting down to business and discussions often last for an hour after business has concluded. In my fifteen years of experience of working at a university, I must say that this is quite unique.

Flagship initiatives such as New Faculty Orientation are designed to engage faculty members in their very first days on campus

and provide them with not only resources, but personal interaction with experienced members of the teaching community as well as key service units of the University. These types of events are instrumental in reaching out to faculty and building a community and culture of teaching and learning. At a recent event, participants were astounded by the number of people who volunteered their time to come and meet them. The VPETC also runs a mentorship program where new faculty are paired with seasoned veterans and leaders in the campus' teaching community to help them through their first semester of teaching. As you might expect, these relationships often last much longer and often result in the new faculty members themselves becoming proponents of our teaching culture. Professional development programs ranging from informal discussion groups to workshops and a Diploma in University Teaching are also provided and are designed to be inclusive of all levels of experience as often those in the mid-career group have complicated needs and issues for which there are few resources available to support them. The committee also publishes "Teaching Matters", a campus teaching newsletter with articles contributed primarily by members of our teaching community.

The Vice President's Excellence in Teaching Committee also administers an awards program that recognizes good teaching over a wide range of levels. The Golden Apple for instance recognizes excellence in teaching on a very small scale and is meant to provide encouragement and recognition to faculty for good teaching. There is no quota for this award and it fills a gap that frequently exists in awards programs where the first, usually departmental awards, often require years of service and places new faculty in direct

competition with career teachers. Other awards have also been created at the Departmental, Faculty, and University levels and, with regards to the latter, awards for both Teaching Excellence and Educational Leadership have been created.

On our campus, the VPETC and the TLC are recognized as a body of experts and are regularly consulted on teaching related matters by our administration. As a whole, the structure we have in place has provided for the development of a fantastic community in which to work where teaching and learning are truly a focus. For example, our Facilities Management group regularly consult with the VPETC with regards to classroom renovations to leverage our knowledge of pedagogical requirements, new teaching methods, as well as our direct experiences of having used the teaching spaces.

In closing, I would like to congratulate this year's other award recipients, Dr. MacDonald and my colleague from UNB Saint John, Dr. Emin Civi, on their achievements and I would like to thank the Association of Atlantic Universities for this great honour. In addition to my wife Stephanie and our two children, I am supported in my career by a number of outstanding colleagues and, often, partners in crime. In particular, I would like to thank Dr. Margaret Anne Smith, Dr. David Creelman, Dr. Lisa Best, Barb Dowding, Judy Buchanan, Mary Astorino, Dr. Jim Christie, Dr. Kate Frego, Dr. Ruth Shaw, and Dr. Robert MacKinnon as well as many others who make up our Vice-President's Excellence in Teaching Committee. In true servant leader form, as Robert Greenleaf described, it is for them that I work so hard to better the teaching community and culture on our campus.