



ASSOCIATION OF ATLANTIC UNIVERSITIES
ASSOCIATION DES UNIVERSITÉS DE L'ATLANTIQUE

Award for Excellence in Teaching
2015
Distinguished Teaching Award

Dr. Gordon MacDonald

Dr. Gordon MacDonald has taught in the Department of Mathematics and Statistics at the University of Prince Edward Island since 1992. His nomination letter says, “Dr. MacDonald is that rare teacher of difficult, demanding subjects who is not only respected but *beloved* by his students.” Such an accolade is neither given lightly nor earned easily. Gordon has consistently dedicated himself to reaching out – both to his own students and to the community, through his involvement in such activities as high-school math competitions and Math Camps.

Gordon’s aim throughout his career has been, as he himself says, not just to teach mathematics but to “teach *how to think mathematically*.” That he succeeds in doing so is borne out by such student comments as “[he] understands that we’re not all Mathematics majors, so he tries to apply the Math to our lives and makes it enjoyable.” Gordon also believes strongly that mathematics should comprise “a community of learners”; he works to explode the stereotype of the mathematician as a solitary scholar by involving students in the subject in a variety of ways. For example, as faculty liaison for the Math and Stats Student Society, he helped organize a ‘meet and greet’ for new and returning math students and developed mathematics-based bingo cards for use during the event. He is also highly involved in all aspects of Science Atlantic’s annual Math, Stats, and Computer Science conference. With his coaching and support, a team of UPEI math students attend and give talks, and participate in competitions.

Gordon is also recognized by his colleagues as an exemplar of the highest standards in teaching. One colleague pointed out that “he’s spent a lot of time thinking about the topic from the student’s point of view, and he seems to have gained new insight into his teaching as a result.” In fact, one of the keys to Gordon’s success is this very student-centred approach to teaching the subject. Many instructors have profound knowledge of their subjects; far fewer can ensure that that knowledge is effectively transferred to the student. Gordon is one teacher who does so.

“He is simply an awesome person and professor,” says one student, and Gordon’s achievements bear out that praise. In his enthusiasm for his subject and his students, his constant attempts to improve his pedagogical techniques, his community outreach, and his innovative approach to his subject, Dr. Gordon MacDonald exemplifies the qualities of a recipient of the Association of Atlantic Universities’ Distinguished Teaching Award.