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Two McMaster professors receive Canada’s highest teaching award

McMaster’s Nick Bontis and Carolyn Eyles earned Canada’s most prestigious award for university teaching, the 3M National Teaching Fellowships.

The quality of teaching at McMaster has once again received national recognition.

Two McMaster professors, Nick Bontis and Carolyn Eyles, have been recognized with the 3M National Teaching Fellowships for bringing inspirational learning to their students and for their willingness to take risks.

“I depend greatly on my students,” Eyles says. “I listen to them and incorporate their ideas into my teaching. I also get a huge amount of encouragement from McMaster to go try it. It’s easy to take risks when you have the support of your university.”

Bontis says creating a high-energy, interactive learning environment engages students.

“Technology, especially computer simulation, takes lessons beyond theory and creates a totally different learning experience,” says Bontis. “Staying on the cutting edge—whether it’s about the latest goings-on in the business world or new software that companies are using—ensures that I give students the skills and the knowledge they need to hit their career path running.”

Eyles attributes her passion for teaching to her students and to her willingness to take risks.

“A few of the items from the period 1933 to 1945, including thousands of letters, which are now part of the McMaster Resistance Collection. The Resistance Collection covers the period between 1933 and 1945, when millions of people were interned and died in Nazi concentration camps throughout Europe. Nearly 2,000 letters or from or to prisoners in Dachau, Buchenwald and Auschwitz, as well as in Gestapo prisons and POW camps, comprise much of the material. There is also a diary of the Nazi evacuation from Ravensbrück (the women’s concentration camp), and even a hand-fabricated recipe book, which prisoners exchanged to pass the time.

McMaster’s planetarium has returned to orbit, re-opening with a redesigned space and breathtaking space shows to enhance the night-sky experience. It’s come a long way since the days of projecting the night sky onto a war-surplus parachute, as it did in the early 1950s. Located in the basement of the Burke Science Building, the William J. McCallion Planetarium now digitally projects a representation of the night sky onto its domed ceiling. The planetarium’s purpose is to explain star systems and planetary activity to students in Physics & Astronomy, but it is also a popular attraction for the public, riveted by the mystery and awe of the universe. With only 35 seats, two evenings of shows held each month quickly sell out.

The new software not only allows audiences glimpses of basic sky features such as stars, planets and constellations, it can show the night sky as it looked in the past or will look in the future, from both Earth and other planets. It can simulate the movement of celestial bodies in real-time and explore features such as meteor showers or objects in the so-called ‘Hubble Deep Field’, which were beyond the capacity of previous planetarium projectors.

For show information and schedules, go to www.physics.mcmaster.ca/planetarium or e-mail planetarium@physics.mcmaster.ca.

A new approach to peace at McMaster

Groups at the University recently sat down to work out a unique approach to inspire a respectful community on campus.

The McMaster Peace Initiative was developed in the context of events surrounding Israeli Apartheid Week in 2008. A number of organizations signed onto the initiative, committing to create an environment of mutual understanding and to promote peaceful co-existence. President Peter George, McMaster Muslims for Peace and Justice, the Jewish Students Association, the Muslim Student Association, Israel on Campus and the Jewish Faculty Association all signed the document.

The groups went even further in their undertaking, agreeing that if any hate or intimidation occurs, hatred is promoted, or physical acts that endanger the safety of others occur on campus, or if property is damaged, then a response would be issued to condemn the act.

Conference targets Aboriginal health

McMaster’s Indigenous Studies Program and the Aboriginal Students Health Sciences Office held their annual Aboriginal Health Conference in February. The event drew international and national stakeholders working on Aboriginal health disparities, research, policy, and practice.

They came together to consider ways traditional Indigenous approaches to health and Western bio-medicine can complement each other. The leaders spent the day networking with this 100 McMaster undergraduate, graduate and medical students, and traditional practitioners, sharing experiences, exposing students to future career paths and mentorship. The event provided a venue for traditional healers and Aboriginal leaders to discuss future links and initiatives between their two communities; share best practices in Aboriginal health research, create a forum for students to participate in future dialogue and make recommendations for the next year’s event.

Participants included Dr. Malcolm King of the Institute of Aboriginal Peoples’ Health, traditional knowledge holders from the U.S. and Canada, Dr. Marcia Anderson of the Indigenous Physicians Association of Canada and Paulette Tremblay of the National Aboriginal Health Organization.

Pan Am bid gets city and University go-ahead

The City of Hamilton has voted to participate in the Ontario bid for the 2015 Pan Am Games, approving a plan to build a new stadium and velodrome. In March, McMaster’s Board of Governors also approved the University’s participation in the bid, which could include a new 50-metre pool on campus.