

Award for Excellence in the Teaching of Geography

Dr Bill Gough

Bill Gough is an Associate Professor in the Department of Physical and Environmental Sciences at the University of Toronto at Scarborough and a member of graduate faculty in the tri-campus Department of Geography. At the undergraduate level, he has taught courses on climatology, the Great Lakes, marine systems, climate change impact assessment, and wind. At the graduate level, his courses have included physical oceanography, atmosphere-ocean modeling, boundary layer climates and climate change impact assessment. He has supervised 20 Master's and nine Doctoral students.



Bill is widely acknowledged at UTSC and downtown as an exceptional teacher and mentor. He was the recipient of UTSC's Faculty Teaching Award in 1998 and has often been invited to sit on teaching award and teaching enhancement committees at the university.

Over the last nine years, Bill's undergraduate course evaluations have been outstanding. His average score on the question asking about the overall effectiveness of the instructor is 6.3/7, well above our departmental average of 5.8 last year. One comment from his course evaluations last winter is typical of the praise expressed by his undergraduate students:

"He is an AWESOME PROFESSOR. He explains all the hard concepts thoroughly and spends time on difficult concepts. He loves what he is teaching because you can see it the way he speaks. He uses video clips that keep us focused and not lagging. He gives out participation marks which helps boost out our final marks and all his lectures are recorded on audio, which is very convenient for the students to refer back to. He is fair in his assignments, but the course is a lot of calculations and reading!"

Many of Bill's former students highlight the extraordinarily caring nature that he shows in his teaching, supervising and mentoring. An example of this thoughtfulness comes from a graduate student who writes how Professor Gough was willing to spend extra time with her to help her improve her English outside of regular course work. He gave her weekly literature review assignments over the summer, which he then edited and added to with suggestions for improvement. One student quotes Bill as saying "If someone is a student of mine, I see this as my lifetime responsibility".

Students note how Bill, despite the fact that he seems to have one of the busiest schedules on campus, is always available for his students. This year, for example, not only is he supervising eight graduate students, but he is also Vice Dean, Graduate Education and Program Development at UTSC and a member of the Executive Committee of the University of Toronto's Governing Council.

Bill is an innovator as a teacher both in the classroom and in curriculum development. For example, as a way of getting to know his students better, his 'meet the prof' assignment offers his students a 1% bonus mark if they meet with him for 10 minutes to discuss their backgrounds and interests in the course. Bill has also contributed to curriculum development in Physical Geography. Our department has been without a core course in Physical Geography for more than a decade because faculty felt that their students already had too much coursework. Bill persuaded his colleagues that the benefits of a core course would be substantial and volunteered to design and teach the course. The response from the graduate students who took the course was overwhelmingly positive. One student commented that it was "an excellent effort at building community and showcasing how all flavours of geography fit together... a really tough task. Dr. Gough is a true geographer's geographer! Therefore a great introduction to grad geography for anyone who was new". To help the graduate students gain a better understanding of academic life outside the classroom, he encouraged all 18 students in the course to submit abstracts to the CAGONT annual meeting last year and helped many of them with their travel expenses out of his own research funds. Seeing the enthusiastic response to the course among physical geography students, faculty members have agreed to make it a permanent part of the curriculum.

Bill's commitment to teaching extends to the broader community in Toronto. In the last eight years, he has given 18 public lectures on climate change and other physical geography topics to primary and high school students, various associations and community groups.

Bill's devotion to his students and to teaching is admirable and his teaching record is outstanding. He is clearly deserving of the Canadian Association of Geographer's Award for Excellence in Teaching Geography.