

CAG Award for Excellence in Teaching Geography

Dr Jeff Hopkins

Jeff Hopkins is an Associate Professor in the Department of Geography at Western University. Jeff completed BA and MA degrees in our department and returned as a faculty member in 1993 following completion of his PhD at McGill and a postdoctoral fellowship at McMaster University.

Jeff has taught over 4500 undergraduate students at all levels and is one of our most effective instructors. He has made important contributions to the education of our students through teaching at all levels, including introductory and advanced courses in Human and Cultural Geography, our Geography Field Trip course, as one of our most prolific supervisors of undergraduate theses and as the co-instructor of our mandatory graduate Philosophy of Geography course. He consistently receives excellent course evaluations and has been recognized seven times as a recipient of the Western Teaching Honour Roll by the University Student Council (USC). He was an inaugural winner of the Dean's Award for Excellence in Teaching in the Faculty of Social Science in 2016.

Jeff's success as an instructor relates to at least three important elements. The first concerns his effective course design. Jeff's course syllabi distinguish themselves through their organization and clarity of the objectives and structure of the course; he establishes clear learning outcomes that are achieved in a systematic, rigorous and engaging manner.

The second is through his use of innovative and imaginative teaching methods, along with an infectious passion for the subject matter. In this area, Jeff's teaching philosophy provides insight about his accomplishments in the classroom: "I cannot will anyone to learn: It is a personal choice on their part – the proverbial horse to water- but I can make that watering hole enticing..." One way Jeff entices his students to learn is by making the central ideas in the course 'real' for students. He has done this through a variety of ways for many years – by referring to current events on campus, in London or other parts of the world; by showing films and media bytes; and by incorporating fieldwork as a major part of course assignments.

The third element is Jeff's care for the students. He is an instructor who often goes the extra mile to help them. He works hard for graduating students as a frequent reference for their graduate and employment letters. Student feedback shows that Jeff has inspired many students to see aspects of their everyday life through the lens of cultural geography.

Jeff has also taken on leadership roles associated with teaching. As our Undergraduate Thesis Coordinator, he has: better communicated to undergraduate students the value of undertaking a thesis; supported thesis students by holding periodic group meetings to celebrate successes and discuss generic problems; and initiated a thesis completion event where students provide short presentations of their work to the Department as a means of both celebrating their accomplishment and recruiting new thesis students.

At the graduate level, Jeff brings a wealth of intellectual insights and unwavering support to a graduate thesis advisory committee, whether it is in helping students formulate their thesis problem, being available to help with theoretical and methodological challenges, or participating at the final defense. Students greatly admire his intellect and attention to their needs. Indeed, given his jovial personality and supportive nature, he somehow manages to make students feel completely at ease whilst asking them challenging questions during their oral defense. He truly brings out the best in our graduate students.

Beyond his work in the classroom, Jeff has been an important contributor to Instructional Development. He is a consistent and effective advocate for our Geography programs to maintain a balance in physical, human and technical geographies and that work 'in the field' be a component as many courses as possible. Jeff has mentored junior colleagues on their teaching, providing an important role model for new faculty, both within the department and at the university level. Jeff has long been associated with the Teaching Support Centre at Western and is often recruited to help with their teaching course or to help observe and comment on a faculty member's teaching. He also served the university on the Provost's Advisory Committee on Teaching and Learning.

We are delighted that Jeff Hopkins has been selected as the 2017 recipient of the CAG Award for Excellence in Teaching Geography.