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Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations
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2019-2020 OCUFA Teaching and Academic Librarianship Awards

Citation for Dr. Joel Faflak



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Inspiring lifelong learning is a common goal among educators; to motivate others to pursue a career in education for the love of learning. It takes a dedicated educator to have the positive, inspiring influence on others that Dr. Joel Faflak has.

Dr. Joel Faflak has not only inspired students with his teaching techniques and experiential learning, but also through his ability to personally connect with students and prepare them for life-long learning, both at the graduate and undergraduate levels. Students form unique connections with Dr. Faflak through his holistic perspectives on learning. As one student said, “Joel Faflak is the person who taught me that teaching is a process that involves the whole self, and which is facilitated only by radical openness and willingness to change.”

Dr. Faflak sees the profound value in education and expresses education as, “the rare opportunity and profoundly human function of learning for learning’s sake, but within a broader social, political, or economic environment that values and requires thoughtful reflection to ensure its more than functional survival.” His teaching philosophy is reflected in his work on course development and his dedication to students.

In his curriculum development, Joel centres self-discovery and experiential education, the latter considered highly unusual in the arts and humanities field. Through the School for Advanced Studies in the Arts and Humanities (SASAH) at Western University, where Dr. Faflak played a role as the founding director, he has designed a four-year program where the teaching concept of experiential learning is deeply embedded to expand lessons from the classroom into the field. Students have noted Dr. Faflak’s encouragement of them to shape and feel responsible for their education journey. The program is interdisciplinary in nature, including internships, opportunities for studying abroad, and community engagement. Part of Dr. Faflak’s role at SASAH included developing opportunities for students to experiment with different teaching approaches and curriculum, while also recognizing areas of improvement and further innovation.

Dr. Faflak’s dedication to undergraduate course development has had an influence at other institutions across the province. The course *The Culture of Leadership I and II*, is a study of leaders and moral dilemmas as well as the students’ own leadership style. The curriculum involves community engagement through its connection to the London Art Gallery; where a goal is “to expand awareness of the role of art on the Western campus and build student attendance to the Gallery itself.” The course *Madness and Creativity* echoes his own scholarship but taught in a way that focuses on the individual students’ self-discovery. During the final project, students are placed in groups but receive no other guidelines to incite a learning experience that highlights themes of the course. According to Faflak, “The point is to ask them to throw themselves entirely into the madness of creative process to see where it leads them.” The priority in his course development places

students in the forefront of their learning process to develop a culture of lifelong learning and a sense of ownership for their education.

Faflak's work around material development also reflects his teaching philosophy and instruction methods. His *Manual for Fieldwork in Community Engaged Learning* is a guide for students to use for independent work and aids in the expansion of their work on experiential learning, and community engagement.

Testimonials from Faflak's colleagues speak to his work incorporating interdisciplinary studies into curriculum, as well as his dedication to the community and engagement. A colleague expressed Faflak's availability to help students as a unique ability to create "an intimate experience from a big university." Faflak finds ways to mentor students in both the classroom context and through professional opportunities post-graduation.

The most notable indicator of Dr. Faflak's teaching excellence are the flood of student testimonials expressing their admiration and respect. It is difficult to ignore the praises of students stating "how important it is to feed your soul with what it is you love" or noting the flexibility given to "allow us to experiment with our education." A number of students shared their feelings through their time as Faflak's students as an awakening, suggesting he "made me realize my passion for writing and politics, and it forced me to voice my opinions and grapple with difficult topics." It takes a strong instructor to evoke these passions for education and it is clear that they do not go unrecognized.

Lifelong learning is something that is experienced and through the right facilitators can become a shared passion between instructors and students. Levi C. R. Hord shared their experience with Dr. Faflak, stating that "Joel thinks intensely about what he presents to his students. He is capable of turning a lecture into a sublime experience by speaking from a place of deeply rooted feeling." Levi's letter is one of many that conveys Dr. Faflak's passion for education as a journey of self-discovery but also demonstrates the profound impact he has had on his students.

The OCUFA Teaching and Academic Librarianship Awards Committee concurs and is pleased to present a 2019-2020 Teaching Award to Professor Joel Faflak.

Congratulations!