



3 M TEACHING AWARDS

## Top of their class

This year's national teaching fellows, all innovative and dedicated professors, are Canada's best

ASOOTHING GUITAR ballad is piped through the sound system, muffling the chatter of a few dozen second-year kinesiology students; they're waiting for anatomy class to begin at an auditorium at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ont. A slide show reviewing the body parts studied in previous classes plays on a loop: the medial pterygoid, trunks of brachial plexus, the maxillary artery, and so on. Two minutes later, the lights dim;

a clip from *Grey's Anatomy* appears, depicting a blood-gushing patient being treated by a frazzled young medical resident struggling to contain the bleeding. The students go silent. It's time for Marjorie Johnson to start her lecture on the intricate anatomy of the human neck. Not before she pulls up a photo of Steve Nash, the Phoenix Suns superstar, his neck's veins, muscles and nerves bulging beneath his skin as he protects the ball from

**The extra mile:** Johnson uses props and basketball images to keep students tuned in

an opponent at a basketball game. "He's one of my heroes," Johnson later confesses, "so they see Steve Nash a lot."

Sports images, preferably from basketball, her favourite sport, or clips from popular TV shows are just some of the tools the anatomy professor uses to keep students tuned in. She'll frequently hand over her laser pointer during lectures, encouraging students to identify, for example, the hypoglossal nerve. "That's just to break it up a bit, so they can refocus," she says. "Otherwise it gets pretty boring."

For her collaborative spirit and passion for the subject she teaches, Johnson was one of 10 professors named a 3M National Teaching fellow this year, an honour established in 1986 by the Society for Teaching

and Learning in Higher Education and 3M Canada to recognize the importance of university teaching.

In order to make anatomy more than a memory game, Johnson has used all kinds of analogies and props. Once, for Halloween, she dressed as a mammary gland—that's a breast to you. For a class on pelvic organs, she put a bedsheet over her head to represent the broad ligament, a muscle that drapes over the uterus, while holding two footballs repre-

senting the ovaries. To envision the inside of a female pelvis, a couple of students volunteered to act as props: one representing the bladder, the other the rectum. Did they mind? "They get a kick out of it too," she says.

For someone capable of those sorts of tricks and stunts, you'd think she has never hesitated in front of a crowd, but Johnson says she's actually a shy person. "Was I nervous the very first lecture I taught? I still get nervous," she says. "But it's a good nervous energy."

## 3M Teaching Fellows 2012

Every year, 10 Canadian professors are recognized for their exceptional contributions to teaching by the 3M National Teaching Fellowship, created by the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education and 3M Canada. To read longer profiles of the winners, visit [macleans.ca/oncampus](http://macleans.ca/oncampus).



### Marshall Beier

Department of Political Science,  
McMaster University

Beier, in addition to research, teaching and mentoring students, creates courses like *Weapons and War in the Digital Age*, connecting research to the real world.



### Charles Lucy

Department of Chemistry,  
University of Alberta

Lucy says he's on a quest to find the essence of teaching. Considering his students routinely collect awards and jobs, he may already have found it.



### Adrian Chan

Department of Systems  
and Computer Engineering,  
Carleton University

Chan, more than just a teacher, shares anecdotes and family stories, captivating students both in and out of the classroom, building a "learning community."



### Toni Samek

School of Library and Information  
Studies, University of Alberta

Samek calls herself an activist teacher. Her research into global citizenship animates classes like *Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility*.



### A.R. "Elango" Elangovan

Gustavson School of Business,  
University of Victoria

Elangovan teaches organizational behaviour, knowledge management, trust and leadership. It is no accident he's known for spotting student talent.



### Susan Vajoczki

School of Geography and Earth  
Sciences, McMaster University

Vajoczki's relentless pursuit of improved teaching and learning methods has made her a prolific scholar and speaker on new teaching practices.



### Sarah Forgie

Department of Pediatrics,  
University of Alberta

Bringing a jazz band into the classroom is just one of many creative risks Forgie takes to make medicine fun—to the delight of her students.



### Connie Varnhagen

Department of Psychology,  
University of Alberta

Varnhagen uses evidence-based teaching to tap into student potential, doing whatever it takes to help students learn—even if it means treating statistics more like philosophy.



### Marjorie Johnson

Department of Anatomy  
and Cell Biology,  
University of Western Ontario

Johnson uses everything from human props to photos of basketball star Steve Nash to keep her anatomy students keyed in.



### Fiona Walton

Faculty of Education,  
University of Prince Edward Island

Walton, who specializes in Aboriginal education, helped establish the first master of education program in Iqaluit, run by UPEI.



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That's because Johnson takes her role as an instructor way beyond relaying information to students. She believes teachers have the privilege of working with young people to help broaden their horizons and influence their career decisions. In fact, much of Johnson's prestige with students comes from the relationship she develops with them outside the classroom, whether it's at her office doling out advice or the countless hours she spends with them in the anatomy department's cadaver lab.

"I remember myself, a terrified second-year student entering the cadaver lab," says Michael Berger, a former kinesiology student of Johnson's who is in his sixth year of a seven-year program that combines an M.D. and a Ph.D. at Western's medical school. "She was

such a calming influence, her elbows deep inside a cadaver, so happy to be surrounded by students trying to find this nerve or dissect through that artery." Berger says he plans to teach after watching Johnson teach the same course for more than a decade: "If I come out half as positive and enthusiastic and as much of an influence on students as she is, then I'll be quite happy."

Five years ago, Louis Kour was one of Johnson's undergraduate students, but his dream was to attend medical school. He's currently in his final term of a master of science in clinical anatomy, under the supervision of Johnson, who is also the program director. Kour says after spending time with Johnson—first as a student, then volunteering in her lab and working as her teaching assistant—he decided

he wanted to teach as well. Her passion and her concern for students inspired him to switch gears. "She's come in on weekends, snow days, all because of the students. Things like that made me realize there's more to the world than just medicine," he says.

Johnson, who's been teaching at Western since 1994, says her graduate studies at the University of British Columbia, working under the supervision of "some great mentors," inspired her to devote her career to the teaching side of academia, more than research.

Back in the classroom, pointing to the photo of the Canadian basketball star's neck, she asks her students, "What is that?" One student mumbles: "It's the jugular vein." After a few wrong answers, someone gets it: the omohyoid muscle. Naturally. **GUSTAVO VIEIRA**

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