U of L professor Don McIntyre receives inclusive education award

Don McIntyre, this year's recipient of the Inclusive Education Certificate of Recognition at the University of Lethbridge, has always worked to ensure his students have positive learning experiences, and he became even more innovative amid the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The annual award was established by the U of L's Accommodated Learning Centre to acknowledge professors who foster an inclusive learning environment in their classrooms.

"We are delighted to present this certificate on behalf of students, who nominated Don for his inclusive course design and delivery methods," says Dawn Vickers, manager of the U of L's Accommodated Learning Centre. "When students experience a welcoming environment that incorporates universal design, they are more likely to feel belonging, fully engage and experience success."

"I am so pleased to present this student-nominated award to Don and I'm very grateful for his outstanding commitment to making learning opportunities accessible to all students," says Kathleen Massey, U of L associate vice-president (students). "By doing so he is ensuring that all students who want to learn in his courses are able to do so in a fully inclusive manner."

McIntyre, a professor in the Indigenous Governance and Business Management program in the Dhillon School of Business, was nominated by several students who said his use of technology, including speech-to-text software, allowed them to fully participate in the learning experience. He made class recordings available on Moodle so students could revisit them as often as they wanted. Some of his other solutions are not high-tech at all, like wearing a clear plastic mask when teaching so students can lip read. In addition, students appreciated his use of imagery and stories to help convey course materials.

"He also displayed a genuine willingness to listen and learn from his students, especially whenever course material affected his students personally," says one student.

"I was extremely moved by the compassion he showed me at this difficult time and I have highly recommended his classes to other students," says another.

"I was floored when I received the note telling me about the award," says McIntyre. "This is just what I do; I'm not doing it to have someone acknowledge it, but when the acknowledgement comes, it's very nice. I'm honoured and delighted to be given the opportunity to be a teacher. If someone has come here to learn, it's incumbent on all of us to figure out how to make it happen. Students have more than enough roadblocks to being able to have an education. The administration and staff have helped me immensely to provide these supports to students on their journey."

His philosophy is straightforward — if it's good for one student, others will benefit, too. Along with creating an inclusive classroom, McIntyre gives students multiple ways to learn course content, something that grew out of his Anishinaabe upbringing. One way is to use stories that demonstrate concepts.

"For some students, that hits the mark," he says. "Other students want something much more pragmatic like a case study. I incorporate repetition, the use of stories, narrative and illustrations, and group discussions into my classroom."

Through all these ways of sharing class material, McIntyre ensures students' different ways of learning and knowing are ignited.

"Creating a space of safety, where everyone feels included and valued is what makes a learning experience truly transformational," says Martha Mathurin-Moe, the U of L's executive director of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. "Learning about the numerous ways in which Professor McIntyre makes his students feel seen, heard and included should be celebrated. This is one of many things we can all do to create an inclusive campus. I congratulate and thank Professor McIntyre for his compassion and innovation in making our U of L campus an amazing place for our students to live and learn."

The Inclusive Education Award was created to acknowledge professors and instructors who recognize the value of diversity and are responsive, adaptable and collaborative in accommodating learning needs. They demonstrate caring, compassion and empathy by promoting a classroom culture that is welcoming, respectful and inclusive and by adapting their teaching methods and content using universal design principles. Incorporating a universal design for learning framework provides all students, and especially those with disabilities, more opportunity to have a positive and successful post-secondary learning experience.

You can find this news release online at Inclusive Education award.

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