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Memorial University professor honoured for teaching excellence

A Memorial University of Newfoundland professor known for her passion for outdoor education and recreation has just received another top award.

Dr. TA Loeffler, who teaches in the School of Human Kinetics and Recreation, has been named a winner of the Association of Atlantic Universities (AAU) regional awards for excellence in teaching and instructional leadership.

She will receive the 2006 AAU Distinguished Teacher Award which recognizes outstanding teaching over a number of years at a formal ceremony next year.

"Receiving recognition for my work is always a big deal," said Dr. Loeffler, who has been teaching at Memorial since 1995. "This award required the co-operation of several nominators and the Instructional Development Office to pull off. That my teaching excellence has been recognized outside of MUN is a tremendous honour. It means I must really be doing something right."

Dr. Loeffler, who received Memorial's own President's Award for Distinguished Teaching in November 2005, was notified of her latest honour on June 28 by Dr. Axel Meisen, president of Memorial and chair of the

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AAU.

One of Memorial's best-known – and prolific – outdoor educators, Dr. Loeffler has taught more than 14 different courses ranging from outdoor education to tourism to women and sport. She was also instrumental in developing the university's Bachelor of Recreation program and has served on countless committees at Memorial.

Over the past 11 years, Dr. Loeffler has become one of the most versatile teachers at the university, encouraging her students to use their creativity to realize their maximum potential.

"As an experiential and outdoor educator, I integrate experiences into every course I teach," she explained. "Given these two identities, experiential learning opportunities are key components of any class I teach. I use a 'living the model' approach whenever possible. I request that students think about how the many things they are learning integrate and interrelate. I assign final projects that require integration of various subject matters."

She also tries to get her students out of the classroom as much as possible. Earlier this month, she took a group rock climbing in Flatrock, on the province's Northeast Avalon.

"Field trips provide opportunities for application of course concepts and for fun, shared experiences that build a sense of community with each course," Dr. Loeffler said.

The association announced last week that two other professors from Atlantic Canada have been highlighted for excellence in teaching. Dr. Erin Steuter, who teaches in the Department of Sociology at Mount Allison University in New Brunswick, and Professor Judith Scrimger, who teaches in the Department of Public Relations at Mount Saint Vincent University in Nova Scotia, will also receive awards next year.

For her part, Dr. Loeffler said being singled out by the association for her teaching is very rewarding.

"Teaching is both a creative and courageous act," she said. "It demands that I reach deep into myself to muster the best possible way to convey information, inspire learning, and meet the students where they are. My career at Memorial has allowed me to build on my passions in all aspects of my work including teaching, research and service."

Dr. Loeffler said her time at Memorial has also allowed her to challenge herself personally. Last summer, she climbed North America's highest mountain, a feat accomplished by only a select few climbers in the world. She reached Mount McKinley in Alaska's Denali National Park and Preserve – which is 20,320 feet above sea level – on June 26, 2005. She plans to conquer Europe's highest peak this summer.

"I will be attempting to climb Mount Elbrus in late August. It is located in southern Russia. I will be attempting Aconcagua in December. I'll spend both Christmas and New Year's on the mountain. Aconcagua is the highest peak in South America and the Western Hemisphere and will be my third of the world's seven highest summits. I'm currently fundraising for a climb of Mount Everest in March or May of 2007."

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