

such. The first year we only had one level – the equivalent of what was to become Psych 260, a sort of practical orientation to the topic – and we knew right away that it would work. The format I started with is the one we still use today, that of bringing in a prominent expert to do the keynote address, and bringing in other Canadian and American experts in the field during the course of the three weeks.

In the first year we were lucky enough to have Janet Lerner, the “Grande Dame of Learning Disabilities” from Northwestern University in Chicago, as our keynote. She is sought the world over to give lectures. I simply called her up, explained our plans, and asked her if she would consider coming to St. Jerome’s. To my great surprise, she said “yes” without hesitation! She now comes annually for Psych 160 and 360, and it was her affirmation of the programme that inspired and encouraged me to invite other prominent people in the field to come here to lecture in the Institute.

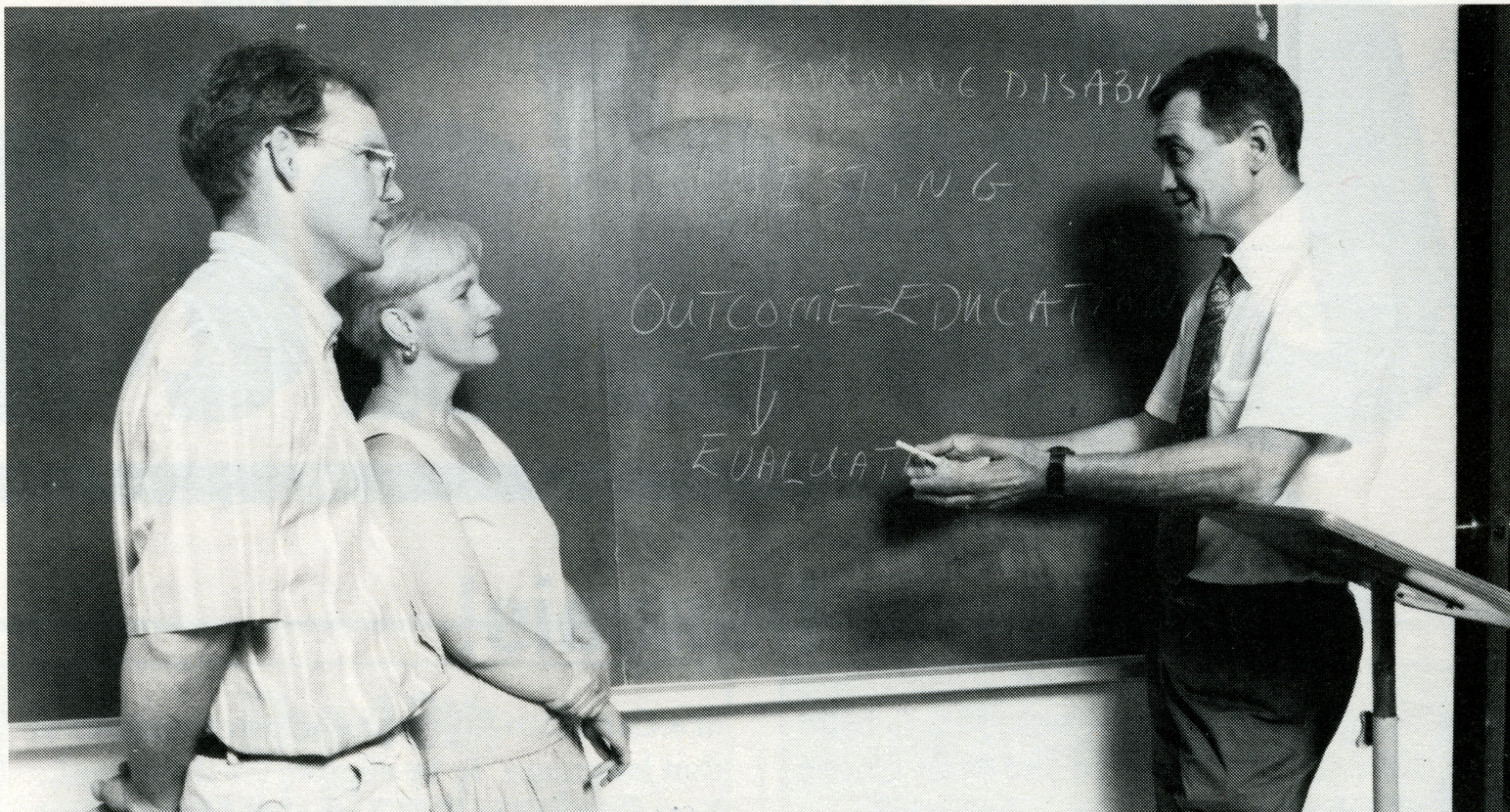
By the end of that summer, it became clear to me that there was a need for a course that helped people prepare for the Institute. That first year, we turned away a lot of people who weren’t adequately prepared for the course, but who desperately wanted to take it. It was then that we decided to offer an introductory level for those people to help them get started. However, at the same time at the other end of the spectrum, we had the people who had just finished 260 saying, ‘where do we go from here?’. They were looking for a practical orientation for what they had just learned, so we devised a daily workshop format of theory and practical application for them. Anyway, by 1980 – the following summer – we found ourselves with the Institute as we know it today, Psych 160, 260, and 360. As the Director, I invited Judy Van Evra to be the

Associate Director and to handle 160, which she graciously agreed to do.

Since then, we’ve been following pretty much the same basic format. The speakers have changed over the years, of course, as the need for different topics and areas of expertise has changed. There has also been some evolution in the requirements for the courses. My role has always been a supervisory and organizational one, but even that has become easier with the years.

**Update!:** To what do you attribute the great success of the Institute?

**J.O.:** I’d have to say that the people who have been involved over the years and the



John Orlando chats with Psych 260 summer session students.

Photo by C. Hughes

programme’s uniqueness have contributed in great measure to its success. We have been very fortunate since the beginning to have top names in learning disabilities gathered in one place, teaching all the most current information. Experts in the field from the States and Canada have said time and again that the programme St. Jerome’s offers is unique in North America. We have even had people with Masters degrees in learning disabilities taking the courses!

The staff involved in the programme have also contributed to its success. For example, the teaching assistants work ongoing every day with the students in the classroom. For about the last ten years now we’ve had the help of Linda Bateman from the Waterloo public school board; and Len Modderman and David Naismith, who are a Behavioural Consultant and a Special Education Consultant, respectively, with the Waterloo separate board. In the earlier years

we also had people such as Mary MacNeil, Wayne Townsend, and Marta Hoyles. As well, it takes a lot of preparation and organization to run the Institute – remember that all three courses run concurrently for three intense weeks in July – and I’ve been fortunate to have the help of Marie Malloy in the early years, and Stephanie Van Evra in the

more recent years. Of course, the College’s faculty secretary, Alice Tapper, who makes all the arrangements for speakers, as well as types and organizes the materials, has been an invaluable member of the team. I would be remiss if I did not strongly acknowledge the dedication of these people to the Institute. Each and every one of them has

gone well beyond what could be expected.

**Update!:** If the Institute is so successful, why is it being phased out?

**J.O.:** Well, the Institute is yet another casualty of the current economic times. There has been a slight decline in enrolment due to the teachers’ pay freeze, but other than that the Institute is healthy with respect to the number of students requesting the courses. Unfortunately, the programmes simply cost too much to run. St. Jerome’s has always subsidized the Institute as part of its contribution to educational systems and to teachers, but because of cutbacks, the financial burden has become too much for the College to bear. The announcement of the phase-out last summer caused an uproar amongst the students, though. I had a number of them offer to do fund-raising to keep the Institute alive. I must admit that I was deeply touched by the support and encouragement they expressed.

**Update!:** What has motivated you all these years as the Institute’s Director?

**J.O.:** I think one of the aspects that has continued to motivate me over the years has been the students. I could see not only the extent to which they appreciated the opportunity to learn, but also how eager they were to learn more and to want more in the field, and the amount of energy they were prepared to expend for it. The workload in each of the courses is extremely heavy. For three intense weeks the students are under a lot of pressure – each course is worth one full credit, so there are mid-terms, finals, quizzes, daily summaries, projects, and case studies to be completed in a minimum amount of time. When I look at the amount of work they do in those three weeks, I don’t think I’d want to trade places with them! But

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