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Laurier professor awarded prestigious 3M National Teaching Fellowship

WATERLOO – Carol B. Duncan, associate professor and chair of Wilfrid Laurier University's Department of Religion and Culture, is the recipient of a prestigious 2014 3M National Teaching Fellowship.

"I am delighted to congratulate Carol on her success," said Max Blouw, Laurier's president and vice-chancellor. "At Laurier we put a strong emphasis on the student experience and Carol exemplifies our commitment to create an outstanding learning environment that engages students in their studies."

The award, widely regarded as the top teaching honour in Canada, recognizes excellence in the classroom and educational leadership.

"I am thrilled that Carol has been invited to join the 3M Teaching Fellowship," said Pat Rogers, associate vice-president: teaching and learning. "Carol is a supreme example of the professor who challenges and supports her students to achieve their best, and through her extraordinary powers of leadership and her gentle approach she transforms the lives of students and colleagues alike."

Duncan started in Laurier's Department of Religion and Culture 17 years ago, and since that time has developed 25 courses for the classroom, including "Religion and Culture of the African Diaspora" and "Religion and Social Change." She is internationally recognized for her research in Caribbean religions and migration in transnational contexts, in addition to her work on the African diaspora. Duncan has won a host of teaching awards and fellowships. At Laurier, Duncan won the Faculty of Arts Teaching Scholar Award in 2004, the university-wide Award for Teaching Excellence in 2004, and the Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations' teaching award in 2006. Duncan was invited to serve as a research fellow in the Women's Studies in Religion Program, as well as a visiting associate professor, at Harvard Divinity School in 2006-2007.

"I feel honoured and privileged to have such significant recognition," said Duncan. "I see it as a formal 'thank you' and an invitation to join in conversation about teaching and learning with colleagues from across the country. It also highlights the importance of teaching at Laurier. One doesn't teach in a vacuum: you are part of a community of educators. Laurier has been a good place to be a teacher as well as a scholar."

Duncan focuses on a storytelling methodology for designing and teaching courses, which involves including multiple voices and perspectives. A strong supporter of the arts, Duncan is interested in incorporating oral history, literary narratives and performing arts, including dance and music, in her courses. "Getting students attuned to multiple voices on a particular theme or topic builds a multi-layered story for the course," said Duncan. "This clarifies central themes for students, and brings arts and culture into the classroom – hopefully demystifying related works for students."

This is the fourth time that a Laurier professor has been awarded a 3M Fellowship. Michael Moore from the Department of English and Film Studies, now retired, was honoured in 1993; Michel Desjardins from the Department of Religion and Culture in 2001; and Mercedes Rowinsky-Geurts from the Department of Languages and Literatures in 2008.

The 3M National Teaching Fellowship is sponsored by 3M Canada and the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE). The award includes a lifetime membership in STLHE, a citation, and an invitation to participate in a teaching and learning retreat with the other fellows. This year's 10 fellows will be recognized at STLHE's annual conference, which will be hosted by Queen's University in June.