Jill Atkinson is the 2016 recipient of the Chancellor A. Charles Baillie Teaching Award for her work in redesigning “Principles of Psychology” (Psychology 100), in a blended learning format.

Course redesign a winner

Friday May 13, 2016
By Andrew Carroll, Gazette Editor
Photo by University Communications

Jill Atkinson (Psychology) knows that she is joining some very select company.

Dr. Atkinson is the 2016 recipient of the Chancellor A. Charles Baillie Teaching Award, which recognizes undergraduate, graduate or professional teaching that has had an outstanding influence on the quality of student learning at Queen’s University.

She is being recognized for her redesign and teaching of the large introductory psychology course “Principles of Psychology” (Psychology 100), in a blended learning format that includes small interactive group sessions, called active learning labs. Professor Wendy Craig, Head of the Department of Psychology and Dr. Atkinson’s nominator, says the new model “has had an exceptional effect on the quality of student learning at Queen’s University.”

“The redesign of the first-year psychology course to focus on active learning broke new ground in the Faculty of Arts and Science,” says Jill Scott, Vice-Provost (Teaching and Learning). “What impresses me is the rigour with which Dr. Atkinson has evaluated the impact of the changes on student learning, setting a high standard for evidence-based practices in teaching and learning.”

Dr. Atkinson says the award is an honour and counts some of the award’s previous winners as mentors. She is also proud to be recognized amongst the many amazing teachers that Queen’s offers.

“I know many of the past winners and have learned important lessons about teaching from several of them. To be included in this group is truly an honour,” she says. “I also know a
number of other colleagues who reflect on their teaching practice, systematically make changes and evaluate these changes in an effort to improve their students’ learning. I therefore appreciate the difficult decision the committee must face each year when faced with so many deserving nominees.”

With the redesign, all of the approximately 1,800 students who take the course participate in a small interactive learning lab every week as well as a lecture. The new model also resulted in the design and launch of “Applied Research in Higher Education” (PSYC 400). This senior undergraduate course combines a research seminar with practical training in teaching realized via the facilitation of the learning labs. Through this students gain experience in the principles of course design, including the identification of learning outcomes, high quality teaching practices and outcome assessment.

While Dr. Atkinson recognized that the redesign project would be difficult and lengthy, she also knew that it would be worth the effort. Early on she turned to fellow psychology faculty member Ingrid Johnsrude to share her vision as well as the work.

“Relentlessly scientific and willing to work at all hours, she made the years we invested in this project rewarding,” Dr. Atkinson says. “It was truly a team effort and I could not have done it without her. Overall, it has been a wonderful opportunity, investigating and applying effective pedagogical techniques while helping to train the next generation of teachers.” Dr. Craig calls Dr. Atkinson a “pioneer in course redesign and evaluation at Queen’s” for this work. “The efforts of Dr. Atkinson are a model for the Faculty of Arts and Science and the university for improving the quality of student learning,” Dr. Craig wrote in her nomination. “The results of her work have set a precedent for not only how to improve the quality and method of our teaching but to also include an evaluation framework that ensures we as a university are having the positive outcomes of teaching.”

Following the redesign, the Faculty of Arts and Science is now using the blended learning course developed by Dr. Atkinson as a model for 11 other large introductory-level courses with a combined enrolment of approximately 8,000 students.

*The Chancellor A. Charles Baillie Teaching Award is presented annually at Fall Convocation. It is awarded annually for activities that lead to improved learning, including curriculum development, educational leadership, design and delivery of out-of-classroom educational experiences, or classroom teaching and supervision. All full-time and part-time faculty members are eligible for this award. You can read more about the Baillie Teaching Award and its eligibility requirements here.*

**Chancellor A. Charles Baillie Teaching Award recipients:**
2016 Jill Atkinson, Department of Psychology
2015 James Fraser, Physics, Physics Engineering and Astronomy
2014 Stephen Lougheed, Biology
2013 Anne Godlewska, Geography
2012 Lindsay Davidson, Surgery
2011 Brian Frank, Electrical and Computer Engineering
2010 Mark Weisberg, Law
2009 Richard Ascough, Theology/Religious Studies
2008 Bill Newstead, Chemistry
2007 Ron Easteal, Anatomy and Cell Biology
2006 John Smol, Biology
2005 Maggie Berg, English
2004 Morris Orzech, Mathematics and Statistics