

SFU Press Releases Collection

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Workshop elevates post-secondary teaching

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Cheryl Amundsen hopes that Simon Fraser University's expansion of a workshop she founded at Montreal's McGill University will inspire more professors to rethink how they teach. Ten years ago, the SFU education professor abandoned the traditional approach to showing professors and post-secondary lecturers how to teach. Amundsen, who has 20 years experience studying instructional development and the use of learning technologies, says conventional teaching workshops have not benefited student learning much. "They only demonstrate a blanket set of teaching strategies to promote generic learning," explains Amundsen. "Contrary to what many people believe, academics are not usually trained teachers or instinctively good ones." While teaching at McGill, Amundsen developed a workshop that helps higher educators design or redesign their courses. Participants learn teaching strategies that draw on their passion for their discipline and their understanding of how knowledge correlates within it. "A central construct of this workshop is the notion that students learn better if instructors let the learning they want their students to do drive their choice of teaching methods," says Amundsen. Since its creation in cooperation with other professors, Rethinking Teaching: A Course Design Workshop for Professors has attracted 300 participants at McGill. Amundsen, in partnership with McGill University, will hold her workshop for a second consecutive year at SFU, this spring (April 19 to 23).

Glyn William-Jones, a newly appointed assistant professor in earth sciences at SFU, will use the workshop to get feedback on a fall introductory geo-hazards course he has designed. "These workshops," says Williams-Jones, "give us the tools to communicate better with our peers and the public. What good is cutting edge research if it never gets out of the lab."