

UPEI faculty member conferred high honour

by Sarah Murphy

Robert Frost once said, "I talk in order to understand, I teach in order to learn."

Professor of psychology and Dean of Arts, Phillip Smith has been awarded the Outstanding Canadian Professor of the Year award.

The awards is jointly administered by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE) and the Canadian Council for Advancement of Education (CCA), and honours undergraduate faculty for their contributions to the lives and careers of students and service to their institutions and the teaching profession.

Smith was officially appointed as assistant professor of psychology in 1989, earned the university's excellence in teaching award in 1992/93. Before teaching at UPEI, Smith had a clinical practice in Charlottetown.

His curriculum vitae also includes an outstanding array of founding member, chair, treasurer, president and past-president positions, along with research grants projects, and reports.

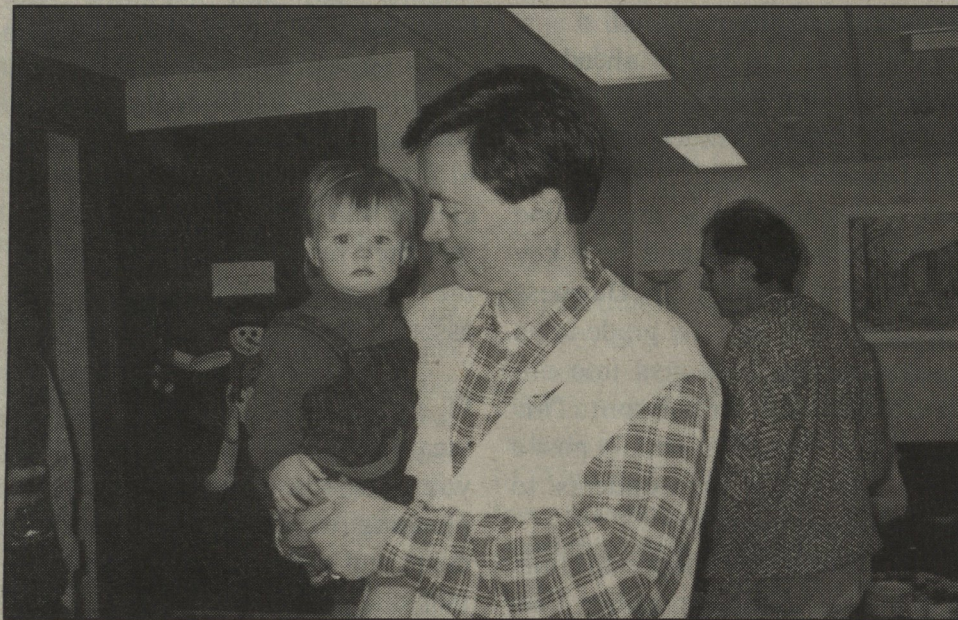
Smith is proud to be the recipient of the award, but is also a little apprehensive.

"It is certainly the most meaningful professor award I can imagine receiving," said Smith. "[But] I am very aware and I don't think that I've ever been more aware since this very nice honour has come about; that there are lots of times when I don't meet the standard of what we should always be trying to be."

Despite his research activity, and his position as Dean of Arts, Smith maintains that teaching remains the most exciting part of his job.

"I do know that what I most

enjoy in my professional life is teaching, that's what's most exciting," he said, adding that all three can be tied together. "It's what gives me the most satisfaction in my professional life and I hope that



Dean Smith, recipient of the Professor of the Year Award

that comes through to students."

Smith has been self-consciously aware of the expectations of students because of the recognition and said jokingly that he was somewhat nervous about next September.

He feels especially privileged to work with first year students, not only because for many his Introduction to Psychology is their first exposure to the subject matter, but also because it is part of the first university experiences. The course, attended by 284 students, was also taken by Smith in 1976/77, then taught by Professor Don Mazer, now a colleague of Smith's.

Students were eager to congratulate their professor, and colleagues were generous in their comments.

J. Paul Boudreau, a colleague in the UPEI psychology department, coordinated Smith's nomination for the 2000 Canadian

Professor of the Year award.

"Phillip Smith believes in connecting with students," Boudreau said. "He's an excellent instructor and an excellent teacher, but he also believes he's working

with heart and minds of people that he can have a direct impact on.

Boudreau asked students for their opinion of Smith as a faculty member.

"One of the common themes from Phillip's students that really struck me was the mention of things like 'He inspired me to think of the many possibilities that were open to me and believe in the possibilities.' Another said, 'He taught me to look at people as having the ability and desire to change and help themselves.'"

Smith's desire to reach out to the community outside the university has resulted in several courses that blend the instruction of psychology with civic responsibility. In his course Human Services: Integrating Theory and Practice, students do volunteer work with community agencies such as a group home, a day care or a more clinical mental health setting.

"Dr. Smith's leadership in the classroom and community alone are commendable and awe-inspiring," said Boudreau.

Smith, who keeps a photographic record of his students, sends end-of-year congratulatory letters to students who have done very well, and organizes feedback teams, advises students to become as actively engaged during their time at UPEI as they can, not only in their study, but also in other activities on campus, either through campus organizations, clubs and societies, athletics, and so on.

Smith not only had advice for students, but also for young professors starting out.

"I think it is important for a professor starting out to feel comfortable that there is a wide range of teaching and learning approaches," he said. "They must adopt the teaching style which feels most comfortable to them.

"Your teaching has to match your own passions, interests and values," Smith said. "It is never bad advice to encourage [professors] to look for opportunities they have to learn with their students. Students do not expect professors to know everything."

Teachers are responsible for developing their student's skills, he added, to encourage them to ask questions, to become critical thinkers, and to address the context of the curriculum.

Smith sees this award not only for himself, but also as an indicator of the quality of teaching at this university.

"I think it is important to recognize that things like this can happen at UPEI, there is a large range of teaching styles here, and UPEI provides an excellent experience."