

Faculty Profile – Kathleen Nichol

Brandon University has been a very fortunate benefactor in Kathleen Nichol's inclination to leave her career path to intuition and chance.

"It's been more about a gut feeling and chance than design about where I'd end up," explained Kathy, an Instructional Associate in the Department of Physics and Astronomy at Brandon University.

Kathy, a Brandon University alumna, graduated in 1973 with a Bachelor of Science, earning a double major in math and physics. By 1978 she had completed a minor in chemistry, and went on to acquire her Bachelor of Education degree in Guidance and Counselling in 1992.

When describing how she came to be an instructor, Kathy explained that "beginning in high school I knew that I could explain things when people needed things explained, so I thought I would teach. But I never at one point said 'I'm going to be...'. I just didn't have a clear idea. I knew what I liked to do, but I didn't know where it would take me. Teaching was always a part of it, but engineering was a thought too."

Kathy joined the faculty at Brandon University in 1978, and has been working to make a difference for herself and her colleagues on campus ever since. When the Mature Student Centre opened in 1980, Kathy became involved in advising, and she joined the Status of Women Review Committee in 1993. By 1996, Kathy was working to implement change, as we started professional development sessions for women, a recommendation put forward by a Status of Women study.

"A lot of women weren't going to promotion and tenure, so we started workshops for women looking for professional development on teaching and research. It started in a very novice way, but it has changed something," said Kathy. "For myself, and on campus too, I'm trying to make it a better place to work."

Kathy's motivation for action came from many avenues, including faculty and new employee orientation. "New people come in, make connections, and then people aren't isolated anymore. I've seen a lot of friendships begin and last. Having something basic such as orientation gave me the idea that I wasn't one woman, isolated. It was an opportunity to make connections and network, which is very useful.

Kathy has turned this motivation into action, being a part of not only the Status of Women committee, but also the newly formed Brandon University Teaching Enhancement Committee (BUTEC). She says her involvement comes from a desire, "to make the University a comfortable but challenging place to work, so people don't feel put down, or isolated. There's such a wealth within the people here, and if they are empowered to do something, that's great."

"With BUTEC specifically, I am involved because I really enjoy teaching, and I believe in good teaching. And I really enjoy learning as well. These workshops and sessions we

put on have provided a great opportunity for everyone to focus on teaching, and to share the vast knowledge here, because I think people can learn a lot from others. Above all is the necessity for respect for every member, because they all bring something to the job. We need to continue building on every individual's strengths."

Kathy's passion for teaching extends far beyond the walls of a Brandon University classroom, as she tutors students in the evening in courses such as math, physics, and chemistry. Why does she do this? For Kathy, it's simple, "Seeing a student's level of knowledge and confidence increase, and seeing people progress and fulfill themselves; are the benefits I get from tutoring."

For Brandon University, the benefit, without a doubt, lies in Kathy's desire to make the campus a better place for all who work here.