

# Profile: Researcher Extraordinaire: Catherine Fichten

by BETTY SUNERTON

Well over 100 publications in scholarly journals and books in the last 16 years - and a commendation by the American Psychological Association for being in the top two per cent of prolific researchers and scholars.

Over 100 presentations at scholarly and professional conferences - including invited keynote addresses.

Hundreds of thousands of dollars in research grants including seven from FCAR (Fonds pour la Formation de Chercheurs et l'Aide à la Recherche); three from SSHRC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council); four from CQRS (Conseil Québécois de la Recherche Sociale); one from NHRDP (National Health Research and Development Program); one from OLT (Office of Learning Technologies).

A string of prestigious appointments including appointments to the Advisory Committees of FCAR and SSHRC, to their Research Grants Juries, and as an External Expert to these bodies and to FRSQ (Fonds de la Recherche en Santé du Québec); to the editorial boards of three scholarly journals, and as a guest reviewer for 16 others; and as external examiner for six universities.

An invited visiting professorship in the Psychology Department of Keio University in Tokyo last summer.

Prix de l'ARC pour Contributions au Développement de Carrières Scientifiques. (Jointly awarded by ARC, Facultés des Sciences et de l'Éducation de l'Université de Montréal, and CEQ for extraordinary contribution to the scientific

careers of students and young researchers.

A legion of appreciative students - whose ranks include Steven Pinker of MIT, author of *How the Mind Works* and the *Language Instinct*. (He credited the Dawson Psychology Department - and Catherine Fichten in particular - with kindling his interest in psychological research.)

Awards from AHEAD (Association on Higher Education and Disability) for guides written for disabled students and their professors.

These are some of the highlights of the unbelievably productive and varied research career of one Catherine Fichten of the Dawson Psychology Department.

One major area of her research - and possibly the one of most interest to Dawson faculty - deals with the social integration of people with physical and sensory impairments; she is internationally recognized as *the* expert on students with disabilities.

Catherine and her team have been studying the invisible barriers to full social integration of disabled people, barriers that remain despite vastly increased physical access to most aspects of community life. These hidden obstacles are attitudes, values, beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and actions. Able-bodied individuals are often uncomfortable with those who

have disabilities, and negative attitudes have denied disabled people full access to the social and economic life of the community.

Catherine and her co-researchers have carried out a series of over ten studies in this area since 1982. The objective of the studies has been to investigate the nature of attitudes and of cognitive and emotional factors which facilitate or hamper interaction between people with and without disabilities. An additional goal has been to design and evaluate interventions to eliminate social barriers to integration. For the most part, studies have focused on interaction between college students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers and professors, although they have also explored such topics as job interview strategies for disabled people and the effectiveness of large scale advertising campaigns. They have assessed the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of both able-bodied and disabled people in numerous contexts. They have also evaluated a variety of techniques designed to change attitudes and eliminate interaction problems and discrimination.

Catherine has made major theoretical and methodological contributions to social-cognitive theory and research. As well, she and her co-researchers have disseminated a great deal of information of practical, applied significance. The findings have

been published in scholarly journals and books and have been presented at numerous conferences. They have also prepared non-technical reports of findings for lay persons, have given talks to concerned community groups, and have compiled and distributed two award-winning guides designed to help students with disabilities and their professors to relate better to each other.

Another major area of Catherine's research activity concerns a topic of increasing interest to the greying Dawson faculty: insomnia and aging. Catherine and her team's data in this area make it clear that the complaint of insomnia has to be distinguished from the phenomenon of sleep disruption. For example, they have identified a significant group of older individuals who manifest fairly severe sleep disorders but experience minimal or no associated distress. In fact, they conclude that

there are at least three separable aspects of insomnia: difficulty sleeping, daytime sequelae, and distress about the problem. They are currently developing a cognitive model of insomnia and examining the therapeutic implications of the different predictors found for each of the three facets of insomnia.

Many Dawson students have participated in Catherine's research and have benefited enormously from the painstaking, time-consuming, comprehensive tutoring she has given them. One visually impaired student under her tutelage won the first prize at the Concours d'Excellence de l'Association des Professeurs de Psychologie du Réseau Collégial du Québec and has since gone on to graduate studies. Many of her students come trekking back for help with university projects and theses, and she has been official supervisor for several of these.

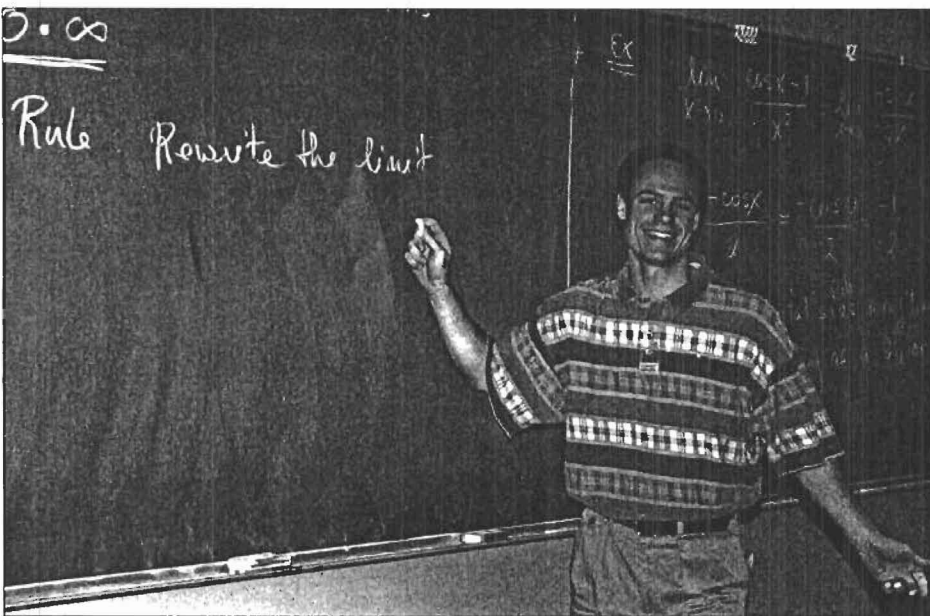
Catherine is also one of the great teachers of regular Dawson courses. She has always been active in the life of the college; for example, she is largely responsible for the Task Force on Services to Physically Disabled Students. And she's a busy and respected clinician (but that's another article).

In her spare time (!), she sails with husband Jake (they have a huge collection of trophies); writes about things nautical (e.g. *We're All in the Same Boat: Nautical Expressions That Have Come Ashore*); fights City Hall and wins (she wanted a park where City Hall wanted a parking lot); provides support and counselling to troubled students, friends, and children of friends; tends a huge indoor garden; and pampers and takes prize-winning photos of her beloved cat. ☺

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Betty Sunerton retired from  
Psychology at Dawson in 1997.

## Profile: Who's New in Math



### Jean François Deslandes

Since the retirement of over 50 of our colleagues last year, a number of new young faces have appeared in the hallways and classrooms at Dawson. Jean François Deslandes is one of that contingent of new troops who have stepped into the vacuum created.

Jean François, at 26 years old, is the youngest member of Dawson's Mathematics department, young enough to be sometimes mistaken for a student. He is one of approximately ten new teachers hired in Mathematics in 1997-98. Although teaching three five-hour mathematics courses this term, he is still considered part-time since one of the courses is in Conted. Jean François taught his first course

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by STEVE MUSZYNSKI

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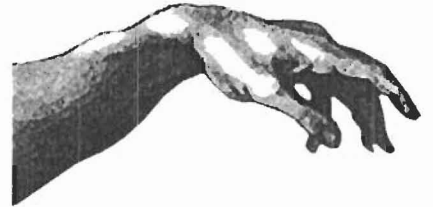
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Front Cover: Joe Lutz and Madeleine Pothier-Picard doing the tango at the Sherbrooke entrance of the College. Photo: Amalia Liogas. Concept: Steve Muszynski Back Cover: Photo: Amalia Liogas