Chapter 11
3M Fellows Making a Mark in Canadian Higher Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 3M National Teaching Fellowship program has a rich history in Canada as the premier teaching award, coveted by university professors and post-secondary institutions alike. This program was developed in 1985 through a unique partnership with the Society for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education (STLHE) and 3M Canada. It has evolved into one of the most successful public/private partnerships in Canada. While the Fellowship Program has expanded and strengthened over the years, the original vision of celebrating teaching excellence and leadership in teaching continues to distinguish it from other national award programs. Each year, 10 new individuals are chosen to join the Fellowship through the submission of a detailed nomination package, which in turn is adjudicated by a rigorous selection process. Unlike the UK National Teaching Fellowship Scheme, the European Award for Teaching Excellence, or the Australian Awards for University Teaching that offer significant monetary benefits, the 3M Fellows are not awarded money. In addition,

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while self-nomination is not encouraged, increasingly institutions nominate their recent award winners, especially when they have been recognized for teaching internally and by regional and provincial bodies. So, why do the 3M Fellowships receive nominations year after year and why are they perceived to be more prestigious than ever before? This case study reveals why by highlighting the history of this award, the selection process, and the multiplier effect of the community of 3M Fellows. Further, the authors distinguish the salient aspects of the 3M Fellowship Program from other award schemes in higher education.

HISTORY OF THE ORIGINS OF THE 3M NATIONAL TEACHING FELLOWSHIP

Most national teaching award programs tend to be initiated by the government or a disciplinary society. Right from its inception, this award had different origins. The company 3M Canada approached STLHE in 1985 with the object of creating an award that would recognize exceptional teachers who have made a difference in the lives of their colleagues and their students. This award was to aspire to become the "Stanley Cup[1] of University Teaching." This particular vision has been attributed to John Myser, President at the time for 3M Canada when he asked a number of the guests at the Canadian Embassy in Washington, DC to whom they attributed their success. The responses surprised him, for in most cases, references were made to university professors who had made a profound impact on their lives. This resonated deeply with John Myser's own experience.

In 1985, STLHE was in its embryonic stages of connecting with interested teachers in Ontario in order to form a new teaching society. Christopher Knapper, the inaugural President of the new Society, took this opportunity to ask his colleagues to generate proposals to present to 3M Canada. Their initial proposal included the idea of bringing together outstanding teachers at a facilitated retreat. It also included another radical concept at the time—the equal recognition for teaching excellence and for leadership in teaching. When several 3M representatives showed up in suits at the 5th annual STLHE Conference in Ottawa, they saw faculty in shorts and t-shirts, gathered informally, playing games and encouraging active learning with utter joy and abandon. Christopher Knapper recalls: "my heart sank…. I thought this was definitely the end of our proposal." John Myser, however, saw a progressive group of teachers brushing cobwebs from the Ivory Tower and replacing them with new and innovative teaching ideas.

The 3M National Teaching Fellowship was different because it not only recognized dedicated and gifted teachers but also those who demonstrated leadership qualities that had an impact on their colleagues and student learning beyond their discipline,