



## A PHILOSOPHY OF GIVING

### SCHOLARSHIP HONOURS REMARKABLE PROFESSOR



Left to right: Carly Scramstad, Dylan Procter, Aaron Russin, Neil Shah, Nick Tanchuk and Brian Keenan.

**While most university students and new alumni are focused on tuition or student loans, five recent University of Winnipeg philosophy grads are shelling out to support other students — a tribute to an inspiring professor.**

Earlier this year, the group established the Dr. Brian M. Keenan Fund at The Winnipeg Foundation to generate an annual prize for philosophy students. "I have a sense that I'm a better person for having been in Dr. Keenan's class," says Nick Tanchuk, who is just beginning a teaching career at an inner-city elementary school. "I think both the material he taught, and his approach to teaching that material, helped me to clarify what I do in the world. When you experience the difference that sort of educational life can have, you feel a sense that it would be good to see it carry on."

The idea of starting a scholarship had been in the back of Neil Shah's mind for a few years.

"I thought that later in life, much later in life, when I had the opportunity and the money, I would honour my favourite time in my academic life and the person that made the biggest difference in that period of my life," says Shah, who is continuing his studies at Concordia University.

But, when Dr. Brian Keenan retired in 2009, after 37 years of teaching at the University of Winnipeg, Shah fast-tracked those plans — with the help of Tanchuk, Carly Scramstad (who is now in her second year of medical school), Dylan Procter (who is currently applying for grad school) and Aaron Russin (who is continuing studies at University of Winnipeg while working).

The five philosophy majors kept in touch after graduation, meeting regularly to continue the conversations that began in the classroom. When they heard their favourite professor was retiring, they were determined to honour his work and continue his legacy through a scholarship for philosophy students.

Dr. Keenan says he was surprised and pleased by the group's decision. His former students add he was characteristically humble when they told him of the plans.

"Despite being one of the most hilarious stand-up comics you'll ever see, he's actually a startlingly modest man," says Russin.

Putting inspiration into action, the group began researching options for managing donations and prize money. They were already aware of The Winnipeg Foundation: Scramstad has a family member with a fund and

Tanchuk was familiar with the organization through his work at a neighbourhood-based charity. In the Foundation, they found a partner that meets their administrative needs and lends credibility with donors.

"I was really impressed with the stability, the accessibility and the flexibility [of the Foundation] in managing a unique prize," adds Tanchuk. "We're not the prototypical philanthropists. It was really nice that there were workable timelines to grow the fund."

"Considering our age, The Winnipeg Foundation didn't seem intimidating and took us seriously," adds Shah.

The group has been busy fundraising and is encouraged by the support already garnered from Dr. Keenan's former students and colleagues.

The prize, which is national, has also received a lot of interest from

students in its first year; from Prince Edward Island to Victoria, BC, 41 have applied. The winner will receive \$1,250 and have his or her paper published on the group's website.

Until the endowment can generate enough money for the prize, the five founders will contribute it themselves.

"It's a lot of money, but ultimately it's something that matters to us," says Procter. "Philosophers can be accused of talking a lot and doing very little, and I think that all of us thought it was important enough to make the contribution."

The financial and volunteer commitments have been substantial, but all five see the fund not only as a tribute to an influential professor, but an extension of the discipline they share.

"It's been thoroughly enjoyable working as a group on the problems we've encountered, the discussions

that we've been able to have about certain issues," says Scramstad of the process of creating the prize. "It's been super engaging and I think we've come to figure things out because of the method we learned in our philosophy classes with Keenan."

Tanchuk explains that the prize is built on one of the key concepts discussed in Dr. Keenan's classes.

"It comes from a fundamentalist belief that good ideas can make a great difference in the world," he says. "If you can tighten the belt a little bit and support good ideas, you can be a part of that difference. It's an investment in human potential."

**For more information on establishing a Scholarship Fund, visit [www.wpgfdn.org](http://www.wpgfdn.org) and select "Donor and Gift Services."**