

Decades later, David Bentley looks at it as one of the best decisions he's ever made. As a second-year university student, the Western professor decided to switch the focus of his study – from Physics to English.

"My father, when I told him, after thinking for a long time said, 'That's what it's all about.' And I feel comforted by those words, in that what we study is ultimately what it's all about," said Bentley, who, since 1976, has taught English at Western.

"It's about the human spirit and imagination. It's about the capacity for human empathy. It's about things that are absolutely essential to our humanity, and that's why the arts and humanities strike me as being centrally important," he noted.

Today, Bentley's distinguished career as a researcher in the arts has been recognized with a Killam Prize, presented by the Canadian Council of the Arts. Bentley is among one of five Canadian researchers, who will receive \$100,000 each in recognition of their exceptional career achievements in humanities, engineering, natural sciences, social sciences, health sciences and interdisciplinary studies.

Bentley becomes only the fifth Killam Prize winner at

Western, and the most recent winner since Economics professor John Whalley won in 2012. Other Western winners include Engineering professors Alan Davenport (1993) and Maurice Bergiounou (1999) and Roberts Research Institute founder Henry Barnett (1988).

Other winners include Vijay K. Bhargava, University of British Columbia; Victoria Kaspi, McGill University; Donald Savoie, Université de Moncton; and Lorne Tyrrell, University of Alberta.



Adela Talbot // Western News

English and Writing Studies professor David Bentley is the recipient of the distinguished Killam Prize, presented by the Canadian Council of the Arts, in recognition of his outstanding career achievements.

The Killam Prize presentation ceremony will be held May at Rideau Hall.

“It was so astonishing to me, so wonderful,” Bentley said of learning he had been named a recipient of the prize. “Quite frankly, a month later, I’m still in shock. I’m just deeply honoured by it – it means the world to me.”

Reflecting on a career at Western that has spanned nearly four decades, Bentley praised a supportive environment that allowed him, without reservation or impediment, to pursue his interests and love of teaching.

“At every turn in my career, I’ve had the opportunity to teach and do research,” he said.

“And that balance between teaching and research is critical, a fundamental foundation of the modern university,” continued Bentley, whose main areas of teaching and research include Victorian and Canadian literature. He is best known for his foundational work in Canadian literature and for the Canadian Poetry Project.

“We are researchers who teach. We don’t just teach out of textbooks; we don’t just teach what other people have discovered and other people’s ideas. We teach what we have discovered and we teach our ideas to our own students. This seems to me to be critically important in Canada. Otherwise, we are going to be importing

my mind, the combination of research and teaching the material we uncover is critically important, and it's what Western offered me."

Over the years, Bentley has been on the receiving end of numerous awards for teaching and research, including the 3M National Teaching Fellowship and the Premier's Discovery Award for the Arts & Humanities, of which he is particularly proud.

While Modern poet W. H. Auden is known for asserting, 'poetry makes nothing happen,' Bentley begs to differ. Poetry brings about change and affect, and is just as important in study as anything else.

"In Canada, people may not be aware of it, but it was a stanza of poetry in a Canadian boat song that led to the creation of the *Cape Breton Highlands National Park*. So, poetry makes things happen," he said.

"John McRae's *In Flanders Fields* transformed the poppy, transformed it from being an emblem of sleep to being an emblem of remembrance, and, in a sense, created 'Poppy Day,' Remembrance Day as we now understand it," he added.

"Poetry makes things happen in our daily lives – when

people read a poem, are moved by a poem, they are made
at home, as I felt when I first started reading Canadian
poetry at age 15. And I know from records in the
19th century, that poetry made settlers feel at home in
Canada, people who were terrified by the silence in the
woods were comforted reading a poem.”