

A Tribute to John

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John Esling is retiring from a most distinguished career this year and I am honoured to have been asked to participate in this tribute. I have had the privilege of being one of John's graduate students at the University of Victoria. Over 18 years ago, I arrived in Canada wanting to work on language assessment. John warmly welcomed me to the department, spoke enthusiastically about his ongoing research, in 'phonetics', and was excited that the department now had a Persian speaker who could contribute to the Phonetic Data Base he was developing at the time. But you didn't have to study phonetics to do research with John. He was very supportive of students with diverse interests and kindly did everything possible to facilitate their progress. In fact, John started putting my doctoral research in motion right away by purposefully introducing me to people on campus. Only five weeks into my first semester at UVic, I found myself at a meeting with the dean of the Faculty of Graduate Studies and the directors of the English Language Center exploring ways to assess the English language proficiency of foreign graduate students. And when, after that meeting, I rushed to his office overwhelmed and worried that things were happening too fast too soon, he reacted with calm and good humour, assuring me that I was the right person for the job and that my work on that project could even potentially lead to a thesis. It did!

As a supervisor, John never turned me away when I sought his help, yet he coached with a style which rarely included giving straight answers. He had this amazing ability to keep you engaged in long discussions and raise new questions about issues you had not considered before. John helped me get through graduate school and write a thesis by providing critical counsel and 'asking' questions, not answering them. His particular manner of mentoring taught me to pay attention to details at a level I had never yet experienced. He remains to this date a model for the ways I direct my graduate students, and for that I am most grateful.

There is so much more I could say about John. He is brilliant, with an exceptional sense of humour; he is an excellent professor and a fine gentleman.

Congratulations, John, it has always been a pleasure to work with you!