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[Gercken Receives All-University Horace T. Morse Award](#)

The award honors faculty who excel in teaching, research, creative activities, advising, academic program development, and educational leadership.

MORRIS, Minnesota (April 20, 2017)—Associate Professor of English and American Indian Studies Becca Gercken is a recipient of the [Horace T. Morse - University of Minnesota Alumni Association Award for Outstanding Contributions to Undergraduate Education](#) (Horace T. Morse Award). The award honors faculty who excel in teaching, research, creative activities, advising, academic program development, and educational leadership.

Nominators write that Gercken “focuses on possibility, on opening multiple perspectives, on finding ways to show what literature and critical thinking and writing have to offer and teaching students to believe they can accomplish what they want to accomplish.” In this way, she hopes to help all students to succeed.

“There’s a tendency to either focus on the best students or the most problematic students, and then you lose people in between,” she says. “I work to try to have as many people engaging as possible in class, and one of the ways you can help students grow is to find ways to reinforce that level of engagement and to help them feel like their experience is just as valid as anybody else’s.”

One of Gercken’s particular strengths as a teacher and mentor is her ability to encourage traditionally underrepresented college students and faculty members to participate in the academy by “using the parameters of the systems in which they operate.” She aims to do so in a culturally centered way.

“We don’t want anyone to feel like it’s an either-or: that they can either be a traditional person or a person in academia. What academia needs is more traditional people being themselves.”

Gercken is more than a respectful and respected classroom teacher, adviser, and advocate; as a founding faculty member of Morris’s American Indian studies major, she also is an influential contributor to program development on campus. To Gercken, the creation of this major simply made sense, given the contexts in which the campus was established and now operates.

“To have this many Native students on our campus and not have a course of study that reflects where they come from and how they understand the world would have been problematic,” says Gercken. “It’s important for our students, their parents, and their grandparents to know this is a school that takes Native cultures seriously and is willing to present Native historical viewpoints.”

“Through her teaching, scholarship, service, and leadership, Becca Gercken has helped us understand more fully our history and our shared humanity,” says Bart Finzel, vice chancellor for academic affairs and dean. “Her system-wide recognition is richly deserved.”

Gercken is the forty-fourth Morris faculty member to receive the Horace T. Morse Award (the campus has the highest percentage of Morse Award-winning faculty members within the University system). As a Morse award winner, she will be named a member of the Academy of Distinguished Teachers, which provides leadership to the University community as mentors, advisers, and spokespersons for the University’s teaching mission. To learn more, visit scholarswalk.umn.edu.

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