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## Students Find Research Project Rewarding

*Summary: Two students participate in Michael Lackey's <em>Truthful Fictions</em> research project.*

(November 14, 2013)-Adrienne Haataja '13 Cokato, and Kelsey Butler '14, Bowlus, aided in the research project *Truthful Fictions: A Conversation with American Biographical Novelists*. The project was created by Michael Lackey, associate professor of English, and concentrates on the biographical novel.

The forthcoming book, which will be released in February 2014, includes interviews with 16 biographical novelists. The authors address topics such as creative freedom, writing already established characters, and sensualizing history. Lackey wanted students to aid in his research because the project was very time consuming.

“Since the material I am working with is extremely complicated, I needed students who are exceptionally smart and well read, which is why I chose Kelsey and Adrienne,” he says.

The students' roles included transcribing Lackey's interviews. They were also invited to attend an [Institute for Advanced Study \(IAS\) Thursdays: Women in Religious Texts and Contexts session](#) on the Twin Cities campus. During the forum, Lackey moderated a conversation with the novelists Anita Diamant, Sherry Jones, and Rebecca Kanner on the topics of fiction, religious texts, and the biographical novel. After the forum, the students had the chance to have dinner with the writers.

“The entire experience felt like a reward for all the hard work put into the project,” says Butler. “It pushed the inquisitive side of me.”

“There is a tendency to deify authors and make them into these characters,” says Haataja. “Realizing that these people are people, and the reality of what goes into a book, was a learning experience for me.”

Haataja goes on to note that “one of the big things about Morris is undergraduate research, and [she] wanted to be a part of that.” She is not alone, as 56 percent of Morris students participate in research over the course of their undergraduate careers. Regardless of the subject, opportunities like those Butler and Haataja have had are not uncommon.

Lackey was assisted by another student researcher, Rachel Balzar '14, North Branch, on his recent book, [The Haverford Discussions](#), which was released in October. This activity was sponsored, in part, by a 2012 Summer Stipend from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

*Truthful Fictions* is supported by generous funding from the University of Minnesota's Imagine Fund Awards and University of Minnesota, Morris's Faculty Research Enhancement Fund.

Pictured above: Student researchers Adrienne Haataja '13 (left) and Kelsey Butler '14 (far right) with novelists Anita Diamant, Sherry Jones, and Rebecca Kanner.

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