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Jennifer Deane Receives All-University Horace T. Morse Award

Summary: Jennifer Kolpacoff Deane is a 2013 recipient of the Horace T. Morse—University of Minnesota Alumni Association Award for Outstanding Contributions to Undergraduate Education.

(April 22, 2013)-Jennifer Kolpacoff Deane, associate professor of history, is a 2013 recipient of the all-University Horace T. Morse—University of Minnesota Alumni Association Award for Outstanding Contributions to Undergraduate Education. The award honors faculty who excel in teaching, research, creative activities, advising, academic program development, and educational leadership. Deane is the fortieth Morris faculty member to receive the award.

According to Deane, “history is not an entity whose content is to be mastered rather, it is a process that is fluid and always changing.” She notes in her teaching statement that her aim is not “necessarily to train medieval historians, but rather to draw upon the rich content of medieval and early modern European history to sharpen students’ critical thinking, verbal communication, and writing skills.” To do so, Deane empowers students to understand what historians do, how they do it, and why it matters.

“Deane has engaged her students in the world view and characters of the Middle Ages through creative opportunities for students to role play and imagine,” says Bart Finzel, vice chancellor for academic affairs and dean. “Students come away from the experience having learned and wanting to learn even more: the hallmark of a gifted instructor.”

Finzel refers to a defining characteristic of Deane’s methodologies—namely, her use of interactive lessons in the classroom. The goal of these experiences is to immerse students in “a world view from a different time and place,” which enables them to understand the complexity of historical arguments. In classes like *The Galileo Trial*, an honors course that Deane teaches with previous Morse-recipient Jim Togeas, professor of chemistry, students engage in carefully constructed role-playing activities that refine and test their understanding of historical arguments and perspectives.

According to Deane, “the pedagogy is both exciting and challenging.” She adds that “it demands careful supervision and oversight, and at the same time, a certain willingness to let go of immediate control in the classroom.” And while these interactive classroom experiences require extensive effort and organization on her part, Deane believes her students make the work gratifying. She admits to having taken pedagogical risks since coming to Morris in 2005, recognizing that “the students were engaged enough to run with it.” In her mind, receiving this award validates her bold choices.

As a Horace T. Morse Award recipient, Deane will be named to the Academy of Distinguished Teachers. Academy members provide important leadership to the University community as mentors, advisers, and spokespersons for the University’s teaching mission. Deane received the 2012 University of Minnesota, Morris Alumni Association Teaching Award and was named a 2013 UMM Founders Scholar.

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