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Jennifer Deane awarded 2012 Alumni Association Teaching Award

Summary: This award honors individual University of Minnesota, Morris faculty members for outstanding contributions to undergraduate education.

(May 2, 2012)-Jennifer Kolpacoff Deane, associate professor of history, received the 2012 University of Minnesota, Morris Alumni Association Teaching Award. This award honors individual University of Minnesota, Morris faculty members for outstanding contributions to undergraduate education by calling attention to educational philosophies, objectives, and methods.

“Surprised and deeply honored” to receive this award, Deane says, “There are so many talented teachers on this campus that I feel quite humbled to have been chosen as this year’s recipient. Teaching UMM students is a tremendous privilege, so it’s icing on the cake to be recognized in this way.”

Deane was nominated for this award because she is “an exemplary teacher, advisor, scholar, and community citizen.” The nominating committee continues, “Professor Deane takes her teaching very seriously, imaginatively constructing and revising her courses, and she is very good at it—not only in courses aimed at history majors or in her own research fields, but in introductory general education classes as well. Her enthusiasm is infectious, as is her commitment to the objectives of a liberal arts education.”

Interim vice chancellor for academic affairs and dean, Bart Finzel says, “In her work in history and in the honors program, Jennifer 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. Students come away from the experience having learned and wanting to learn even more: the hallmark of a gifted instructor.”

Students agree. Alumnus Eagan Heath '08, Madison, Wisconsin, says, “(Deane) is a born teacher who cares deeply about her students’ education and works tirelessly to push them to be better thinkers, writers, readers, and historians.”

Deane’s goal in the classroom is not necessarily to train medieval historians. Instead, she trains students to understand what historians do, how they do it, and why it matters. She draws upon the content of medieval and early modern European history to sharpen students’ critical thinking, verbal communication, and writing skills. “I want my students to step outside of their own perspective, and try regarding the world through some else’s eyes and assumptions. That’s when horizons really start expanding.” says Deane.

Deane is always looking for new and creative ways to reach her students. She describes herself as a “perfectionist – like many faculty” and says, “No matter how well a class goes, I always have the feeling that it could have been just a little bit better if only...and that’s where both the fun and pressure come in.” She finds teaching inspiration not only by recalling her own experiences as an undergraduate, but also in colleagues’ innovative practices, and from her own ongoing research and reading. For example, in her Early Modern Europe course, students participate in salons modeled on 17th and 18th century French intellectual gatherings and in her World History course, students become travelers on

the Silk Road through central Asia. While interacting with their fellow travelers (classmates) based on medieval primary source documents, the students are monitored by border guards (teaching assistants). Deane enjoys using role-plays in her teaching, “Whatever type of activity we’re doing, my favorite teaching moments always happen when the students take off in the roles and the debate becomes their own.”

Deane comes from an academic family, and as such says, “Teaching is probably in my DNA.” She says she essentially grew up on the University of Washington campus, with an English professor father and a mother who earned her Ph.D. in psychology while Deane was a child. When she was a teenager, she enjoyed tutoring and teaching in various ways and was drawn to positions in which she could encourage other peoples’ abilities. Teachers have had an enormous influence in her life, and now she tries to emulate them in her own career. She says, “The very best aspect of working with students, whether in teaching, advising, or simply informal contact, is watching them develop confidence and direction over the course of the years at UMM. It’s incredibly gratifying to see another person crystallize their own talents and passions, and to play any kind of role in encouraging them along the way.”

Even coming from an academic background, Deane still had to overcome a large obstacle to be an effective teacher: shyness. As she says, “It was awfully hard at first to get up in front of people and learn to teach in graduate school. I was so painfully shy when I was younger that I could hardly speak up in class. It’s one of the reasons I try to encourage all of my students to practice speaking in front of others.”

Her students get encouragement in all aspects of their lives. As an advisor, students are often waiting outside her office to speak with her about course related or advising related topics. As Stephen Harper ’13, Hastings, says, “Jennifer encourages students to excel in every aspect of her class whether it be further refining their writing style or to help them gain a deeper understanding of their subject matter: she is a tremendous asset. She takes pride in developing students to their fullest potential.”

As a denizen of the campus community, Deane has served on the Scholastic Committee, the National Scholarships Executive Committee, the Undergraduate Research Symposium Committee, and the all-University Katherine E. Sullivan Scholarship Committee. She has also presented at the History Club movie and Disco Series and judged Meiningens actors, the Fashion Trashion show, and the E-Quality Diva Drag Show.

Additionally, in 2010, Deane took up the job of coordinating the history discipline. She oversaw a revamping of the major that included adding History 2001, The Study of History, as a requirement, moving the World History course from two temporal-based offerings to a single, topically-focused introduction, and replaced the one-on-one tutorials with a theme-based research seminar, History 4501.

Deane earned her B.A. in European History from the University of Washington, Seattle and her MA and Ph.D. in Medieval and Early Modern European History from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. She is a member of the Medieval Academy of America, the American Historical Association, the Society for Medieval Imperial History, the Arbeitsgruppe Geistlichen Frauen im Europaischen Mittelalter and Phi Beta Kappa. She has written many peer reviewed articles, given many presentations, and recently published the monograph, *A History of Medieval Heresy and Inquisition*.

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