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Jennifer Rothchild, associate professor of sociology and anthropology, receives the University of Minnesota, Morris Alumni Association Teaching Award

Summary: Rothchild was honored for local service in a global context.

(April 28, 2011)-Jennifer Rothchild, associate professor of sociology and anthropology, received the 2011 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.

Rothchild was selected for being “an extraordinary teacher whose rigor, dedication, and passionate commitment to her field has transformed the lives of students and colleagues on this campus.” As stated by Cheryl Contant, vice chancellor for academic affairs and dean, “Jennifer Rothchild is an outstanding teacher, mentor, and adviser who brings the classroom to life with her own personal engagement in issues from local to global. Her curious mind and her high demands of students bring out the best in them and in her. With this award, she joins an outstanding group of committed and talented faculty who care deeply about their role in helping students learn and stay engaged in learning throughout their lives.”

“Incredibly honored” to be a recipient of this award, Rothchild says she is “humbled to be selected among a group of such exemplary teachers at UMM” and thanks her family for encouraging great respect for education, particularly the power and value of teaching. “This started with my grandparents who grew up urban and poor in New York City, and rural and poor in southeastern Minnesota,” she recalls. “My grandparents had to sacrifice their own learning for work, but they made sure their children all received as much education as possible. As a result, my mother taught children with disabilities for 20 years, and I count several teachers on both sides of my family from the university ranks to the primary school level. Each one of them has been a major influence on my love and respect for teaching.”

Nominators commended Rothchild as someone for whom “research, teaching, and service are deeply intertwined,” citing her “groundbreaking research on girls’ schooling in Nepal [that] is rooted in her sociological interest in gender and education” and detailed in her book, *Gender Trouble Makers: Education and Empowerment in Nepal*. She has refined these interests as discipline coordinator of Gender, Women, and Sexuality Studies (GWSS) and shares them in her course offerings, which include *Sociology of the Environment and Social Development*, *Sociology of Childhoods*, *Sociology of Gender and Sexuality*, *Sociology of Deviance*, and *Introduction to Women’s Studies*. Women’s Studies/GWSS major Brittany Kill ’08, now serving as a Morris admissions counselor, conveys Rothchild’s enduring legacy of validating “all of the inequalities and injustices I observed and faced while growing up, knowing the whole time that they were wrong and unfair but never having someone to name them. Jennifer has instilled a passion in me not just for lifelong learning but one that will have me constantly working to break down the social constructions that hinder our world.”

Rothchild’s educational philosophy clears a path for her to “enjoy teaching sociology because it can fundamentally alter the way you perceive the world. C. Wright Mills developed a concept called the ‘sociological imagination’,” she

clarifies, “which isn’t a thing so much as it is a habit of mind, a determination to see the world from multiple perspectives all at once. As a student practices her or his ‘sociological imagination,’ she or he learns not only to think critically about social behavior but also acquires an important capacity for empathy and taking action for social change. In this way, the ‘sociological imagination’ becomes an important tool for seeing the structures that influence our behavior as well as a challenge to imagine solutions for solving the world’s most difficult problems.”

Colleagues have been affected by this philosophy as well. Jennifer Deane, associate professor of history, states “Without realizing it, she has taught me about the sociological imagination, about the complexities of gender as a social process, and introduced me to new ways of thinking about institutions from a sociological point of view.”

Known for involving undergraduates in research, Rothchild is a strong advocate of service learning and the circumstances it presents for going beyond abstractions and into the “real world” to illustrate sociological concepts, terms, and theories, often resulting in permanent curricular innovations. Incorporating service learning into several of her courses, Rothchild trains students to conduct community-based action research projects of their own design. Ian Jentz '08, now teaching social studies at Pueblo Pintado Community School in New Mexico, writes of his experience “Her courses fully align the socially relevant content that is contained within them with service learning opportunities, which promotes the enduring understanding that sociology is inextricably linked to social change within the community.”

Rothchild has served the campus community as a committed adviser and mentor throughout the years, including current membership on the Assessment of Student Learning Committee, the Violence Prevention Program Committee, and Queer Issues Committee. As a supporter of professional development activities, she is a Faculty Center Mentorship Program mentor, a Service Learning Fellowship mentor, and a Multicultural Education, Diversity and Equity Study Circle member. Her generosity of time, talent, and experience stems from the conviction, she says, that she “cannot imagine a more wonderful place to grow as a teacher than the University of Minnesota, Morris. The administration respects and supports classroom performance. Every day my colleagues provide me with ideas and vision. Our students inspire me with their talent, curiosity, and civic-mindedness. A better world depends on students like those we have at UMM.”

Rothchild earned a bachelor of arts in zoology from Miami University of Ohio, a master of science in sociology from Georgia State University, and a doctorate in sociology from American University. In addition to her book, she has also authored several chapters in the Handbook on Service Learning in Women's Studies, Interdisciplinary Studies, and the Disciplines.

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