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Bradley Deane receives Morris Alumni Association Teaching Award

Summary: Bradley Deane believes that there is no single piece of advice he can offer his students that will serve them all, but he admits that he finds his own advice about teaching from one of the Victorian writers he studies. According to John Henry Newman, he says, the job of a teacher in the liberal arts is to cultivate “habits of mind that last a lifetime.”

(April 20, 2009)-Bradley Deane believes that there is no single piece of advice he can offer his students that will serve them all, but he admits that he finds his own advice about teaching from one of the Victorian writers he studies. According to John Henry Newman, he says, the job of a teacher in the liberal arts is to cultivate “habits of mind that last a lifetime.”

Deane, an assistant professor of English at the University of Minnesota, Morris, is this year’s recipient of the University of Minnesota, Morris Alumni Association Teaching Award.

Thanks to the generosity of the UMM Alumni Association, the Morris campus annually recognizes its outstanding professors through this award, created by the alumni in 1994. This honor was bestowed for the first time in the spring of 1997 to honor individual University of Minnesota, Morris faculty members for their outstanding contributions to undergraduate education.

“It means a lot to be recognized among so many great colleagues and friends who are equally deserving,” said Deane. “I am pleased it happened here I’ve always wanted to receive this award,” he added with a smile.

“Brad is acknowledged by students and colleagues as a dynamic, innovative, challenging and effective teacher,” said Cheryl Contant, Morris vice chancellor for academic affairs and dean. “In the nomination statement for this award, Brad was described as a ‘great example and leader’ and a teacher who engages, challenges and pushes his students. The campus community congratulates Professor Deane on his remarkable teaching, advising and mentoring of our students.”

Although modest regarding the reasons that he in particular was selected, Deane said that perhaps his work in and outside of the classroom played into the decision. In his first year at Morris, he researched and founded the Morris chapter of Sigma Tau Delta, an International English Honor Society. In his third year, he became involved in the Honors program and now serves as the program’s director.

More significantly, students who take Deane’s courses in British Literature, Critical Approaches to Literature and others over the years reap the benefits of his support and encouragement.

“I encourage students to get out of the habit of regarding classic literature on such a high pedestal, as if it descended from the heavens instead of having emerged from the great social and cultural debates of the days in which it was written,” he said. “Students are already shrewd critics of the movies and TV shows with which they’re familiar, and they can bring the same critical intelligence to bear on a great novel, play or poem.”

Outside of the classroom, Deane relishes a good debate on these topics and others as the opportunity to speak with students “less formally, get[ting] them to talk more in a [non-lecture style] discussion. Some interaction outside of the classroom is important because students think it’s important. Community doesn’t stop at the edge of the classroom.”

Like other faculty at Morris, Deane serves as an adviser to students and often mentors those who are not his direct advisees or even English majors.

“Morris students are very sincere, earnest, engaged and active in their own learning,” said Deane. “At a previous job, I encountered students who were very successful and goal-oriented, driven, but were concentrating primarily on ‘what does it take to get an A.’ Morris students are engaged by ideas.”

Its students and the campus culture of shared governance are at the core of why Deane chose to come to the Morris campus in 2002. He recalled that a student was part of the committee that decided who to hire for his position that teachers at Morris are “first class” and dedicated to students here.

“I’d measure our English faculty against any in the state,” said Deane with pride. “We have so many dedicated teachers who at the same time are undertaking groundbreaking research in their field. Morris has a culture that’s dedicated to teaching and preparing students for the world and for specific jobs. Students leave Morris knowing how to think critically and generate their own ideas.”

Those students who leave Morris—the alumni—still keep in touch with Deane. He had dinner during the recent Jazz Fest with the student who was on the search committee that hired him and keeps connected to former students through Facebook.

“It’s fantastic to see how well they’re doing,” he said. “It’s what you’d expect from our students—they’re working not just for the money some are working for nonprofits.”

Deane holds doctorate and master’s degrees in English from Northwestern University and received his bachelor’s degree in English, With Great Distinction and Highest Honors, from the University of Michigan. He has served on a number of campus committees and written on a variety of topics, including his most recent work in progress, “The Monkey in the House: Commodities and the Subversive Fetish in Late Victorian Imperial Romance.” He is a member of the Modern Language Association, Sigma Tau Delta and the North American Victorian Studies Association.

Deane lives in Morris with wife Jennifer, an assistant professor of history at Morris, and children Tess, 4, and Lucy, 7. He will be honored during the annual campus Recognition Dinner on April 30 and will give the keynote address, “Morris Saves The World,” during the annual Student Honors and Awards Ceremony on Friday, May 15.

Through personal and academic discovery, the University of Minnesota, Morris provides opportunities for students to grow intellectually, engage in community, experience environmental stewardship and celebrate diversity. A renewable and sustainable educational experience, Morris prepares graduates for careers, for advanced degrees, for lifelong learning, for work world flexibility in the future, and for global citizenship. Learn more about Morris at morris.umn.edu or call 888-866-3382.