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Schrunk Ericksen receives Teaching Award

Summary: Thanks to the generosity of the UMM Alumni Association, the Morris campus recognizes its outstanding professors through the UMM Alumni Association Teaching Award, created by the alumni in 1994. Janet Schrunk Ericksen is this year's recipient.

(March 29, 2006)-"Excellent teaching is one of the many qualities that distinguish the University of Minnesota, Morris. Our faculty has several instructors with years of experience, innovative classroom exercises, and strong dedication to students...Although it is a shame that only one can be recognized by the Alumni Teaching Award committee, when there are so many good teachers, we have nominated Janet Ericksen because we feel she has especially unique and valued qualifications."

Thus began the nomination statement for Janet Schrunk Ericksen who is the 2006 UMM Alumni Association Teaching Award recipient.

Thanks to the generosity of the UMM Alumni Association, the Morris campus recognizes its outstanding professors through the UMM Alumni Association Teaching Award, an annual award created by the alumni in 1994. The purpose of the award is to honor individual UMM faculty members for their outstanding contributions to undergraduate education.

A member of the UMM English faculty since 1998, Schrunk Ericksen has accepted a variety of leadership positions. She is serving as discipline coordinator for English for her third year, and also has been the assistant chair of the Humanities Division for the 2005-2006 academic year. She has served as a mentor to tenure-track faculty in the division, and has guided, along with Tom Turner, UMM Spanish faculty, the Faculty Seminar series on tenure tracking, giving advice and insight to faculty regarding ways to integrate teaching and research.

Among Schrunk Ericksen's many accolades are those from current and former students, which reflect her dedication and her innovative teaching style. "Janet cares about her students as scholars and as people," continued the nomination statement. Comments from her students reinforce the fact that Schrunk Ericksen's teaching is outstanding. One student commented, "I was drawn not only to her passion for knowledge, but for her passion for sharing that knowledge and excitement with the students she taught." Another shared, "I have witnessed [Schrunk Ericksen] press her students not to settle, but to strive, academically, toward their full potential." Former student,

Margaret Uttke '04, provided the nominating committee with a six-page letter of recommendation, which included documentation of Schrunk Ericksen's teaching skills that Uttke now appreciates as a graduate student at Notre Dame, placed into a teaching role herself for the first time.

"Janet Ericksen has always stood in my mind as a paragon of someone who cares deeply for student learning and who leaves a profound mark upon the lives of her students," said Uttke.

"In an 8 a.m. class [comprised of students with a variety of majors] and just a few English majors, discussion of setting in an 800-year-old Icelandic story of an arrogant farmer who makes a stupid oath might be expected to be less than exciting," said Schrunk Ericksen. "Yet all the students enrolled are there (the course is even overenrolled because I let in a few extras), none is asleep or even looking particularly glazed and by the end of the class all but a few have contributed to the discussion.

"I am repeatedly pleased and encouraged that I can make my students realize that how English has changed in the last thousand years is fascinating or that the literature produced by English speakers so long ago can still speak powerfully, and can tell us about ourselves as well as our cultural ancestry," Schrunk Ericksen continued.

Schrunk Ericksen holds a bachelor's degree in art history and English, magna cum laude, from the University of Hull, Northumberland, United Kingdom, and the University of Kansas and master's and doctoral degrees in English from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She also completed a summer course in Icelandic at the University of Iceland, Reykjavik.

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