**NU NEWS RELEASE: UNL Department of History wins university-wide teaching award**

March 6, 2017

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*Editor’s note: A video about the UNL Department of History’s accomplishments is available* [*here*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kESFropGdMc&feature=youtu.be)*; members of the media are welcome to use the content.*

University of Nebraska President Hank Bounds announced today that the [Department of History at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln](http://history.unl.edu/) has been selected to receive the University-wide Departmental Teaching Award (UDTA).

The [UDTA](https://nebraska.edu/recognition-and-awards/presidents-faculty-excellence-awards.html?redirect=true), one of a select group of Faculty Excellence Awards given by the president each year, is NU’s most prestigious honor for departmental excellence in teaching. Since 1993, the UDTA has recognized departments or units within the university that have made unique and significant contributions to NU’s teaching efforts and that have demonstrated outstanding commitment to education of students at the undergraduate, graduate or professional levels.

Honored departments, which are selected by a committee of faculty members from across the university, receive $25,000 to be used in a manner the department sees fit, such as for travel to a conference, instructional equipment or improvements to a classroom or student resource.

“The Department of History sets a high standard for excellence in teaching,” Bounds said. “While course content is about the past, when it comes to student learning and engagement, the department’s faculty members are completely focused on the future. Their commitment to innovative teaching strategies and ensuring that students are prepared for success is remarkable. The result is a vibrant, collaborative department whose faculty have built a culture of excellence and where students come first.”

Chaired by James Le Sueur, Ph.D., the Department of History is home to 27 faculty and 14 graduate assistants. The department serves close to 200 undergraduate majors and 60 graduate majors, in addition to the thousands of UNL students from all academic disciplines who take history courses each semester. More than 2,100 students took a history course in fall 2016.

While the department has a long record of teaching excellence, over the past five years its faculty have been especially focused on initiatives to enhance the student experience. Faculty-led efforts are driving innovation in teaching and deepening students’ learning and engagement. For example:

·         The Department of History is among the country’s most innovative in the field of digital humanities. The department played a key role in the development of UNL’s nationally known [Center for Digital Research in the Humanities](http://cdrh.unl.edu/), one of the university’s Programs of Excellence, and it has brought this expertise into the classroom so that students learn firsthand that history is not limited to books or archives. Many history students learn computer programming, web design, database curation and video development. Faculty members’ commitment to integrating technology into their teaching and student-focused research projects is not simply for the sake of introducing new equipment, but to deepen students’ disciplinary thinking and their analytical and interpretive skills.

·         The department’s Harvest History program allows undergraduates to digitally capture artifacts brought in by the public – including letters, photographs and other objects – and then share them on a free web-based archive. The program provides students a unique opportunity to serve and engage with the wider Nebraska community and it has served as a model for other universities looking to develop similar initiatives.

·         In 2009-10, the department re-imagined its undergraduate program with a focus on immersing students in history as a discipline. Faculty wanted to enhance student engagement among majors and minors while also ensuring a rich educational experience for all students taking a history course. This involved shifting emphasis of classes from coverage to an emphasis on disciplinary thinking, involving both critical thinking and writing skills. Faculty examined every aspect of the department’s program, re-evaluating learning objects at each class level to ensure students acquire appropriate skills in a consistent fashion.

·         Recognizing a growing demand among students for online coursework, the Department of History has awarded grants for conversion of courses into online offerings. The department is a university-wide leader in distance education in terms of both quantity – about 500 students annually take history courses online – and quality.

·         The department has successfully cultivated a sense of community among history majors. For example, the popular History Club and the national history honor society Phi Alpha Theta help history come alive for students, and faculty lead a variety of scholarly activities outside the classroom to deepen students’ learning opportunities and engagement. The total number of majors in the department has remained consistent at about 200 over the last decade, thanks in large part to its commitment to outstanding advising and mentorship. Furthermore, the community spirit doesn’t end when students graduate. The History Alumni Advisory Council, created by the department in 2012, is made up of 16 department alumni who help with recruiting and fundraising efforts.

·         The department has re-vamped the experience for first-year students, with a fundamental commitment to providing every student an opportunity to be taught by leading experts in their fields. Faculty also have introduced a wider variety of courses to introduce students to new ways of historical thinking. The department has also actively sought and received grants dedicated to improving undergraduate students’ success. Grant funding has allowed for new peer tutoring opportunities and a departmental workshop focused on increasing student participation and active disciplinary learning. Graduate students also helped develop a universal assessment tool for all introductory U.S. history courses that was featured in *Perspectives*, the publication of the American Historical Association.

·         The department has also enhanced its graduate program with an emphasis on training the next generation of historians. Graduate students are now required to take a course on “The Teaching of History” that equips them to teach future students, and they annually organize a humanities conference that trains them to share and discuss history research on a national stage.

·         The department’s internal peer mentoring program, established in 1997, is an integral part of faculty development. The mentoring program, in which new faculty members are evaluated by tenured faculty, ensures that new colleagues are engaged in the department’s goals and creates a robust pipeline for continued teaching excellence.

The Department of History is being honored today at a luncheon hosted by President Bounds.