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DR. MELISSA RIDLEY ELMES RECEIVES TEAMS TEACHING AWARD FOR EARLY CAREER COLLEGE EDUCATORS

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By Amanda May

Lindenwood faculty member Dr. Melissa Ridley Elmes was recently awarded the The Teaching Association for Medieval Studies's (TEAMS) Teaching Award for Early Career College Educators. Dr. Elmes has been teaching at Lindenwood since 2016.

TEAMS holds an annual competition that judges unpublished lesson plans that pertain to medieval studies. Dr. Elmes said she was encouraged to submit to the competition by a senior colleague who is also in medieval studies.

"I knew about the teaching prize but hadn't considered entering it until a more senior colleague of mine in medieval studies used one of my assignments last year, loved it, and urged me to write it up and send it in," said Dr. Elmes. Her submission is titled *The Chaucerian Miscellany: A Practical, Hands-On Approach to Teaching Medieval Literature and Book*. She originally designed the activity for her upper-level undergraduate course on Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, but has gone on to incorporate adapted versions of it in some of the other courses she teaches.

"The assignment calls on students to develop a commonplace book over the course of the term that is comprised of several shorter assignments spread across five categories: required components--which include preparation activities for class discussion, weekly responses, a track-a-word activity designed to promote linguistic attention to the readings, a close reading exercise, and a summative reflection of the overall assignment--and elective components, focused on four further areas of concentration: literary study/analysis, research, creative writing, and artistic endeavors/manuscript culture. At the end of the term, my students have compiled their own 'medieval miscellany,' providing me with a high-impact assessment tool and my students with a personalized and meaningful artifact of their experiences reading and responding to the *Canterbury Tales* (or other course texts, as adapted.).... It is the kind of whole-person developmental work--connecting the dots of intellectual, emotional, psychological, and critical attachment to learning for its own, intrinsic value, the development of a lifelong learner *ethos*--that only a Humanities assignment like this one can offer students," said Dr. Elmes.

Dr. Elmes, as a winner, will receive a cash prize of \$250 and be published in the fall edition of *The Once and Future Classroom*. She will also be invited to present her paper in a TEAMS-sponsored session at the 2021 International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

“The real reward is knowing that my assignment will be published and available to other professors and their students,” Dr. Elmes said. “Every student, at some point in their career, should get that ‘*THIS is what I went to college for!*’ moment, and if this assignment offers that moment to even one student beyond Lindenwood, it can be counted among my most important contributions as a professor and of service to the profession.”

In regards to those interested in reading work from the medieval period, Dr. Elmes has many suggestions. “If you want to debunk what is believed about women in the Middle Ages as being subservient and uneducated damsels in distress, then read *Silence*, the tale of a transgender knight, or Christine de Pisan’s *City of Ladies*. If you want to read about fantastic travels, then John Mandeville (fiction) or Ibn Battuta and Marco Polo, are great options. If you want to read lyric poetry, I can’t recommend enough the women poets of the Japanese Heian period, so lovely and subtle, and the French troubadours and Trobairitz, so over-the-top by comparison. If you want dragons, then *Saga of the Volsungs* and *Beowulf* are great options. If you are interested in war and epics, check out *Song of Roland*. If you are interested in Robin Hood, then the *Geste* is the best place to start, it includes all of the scenes you see in the movies, like the feast and the archery contest. If you want the sweeping medieval romance with knights and ladies and tournaments and marvelous events, King Arthus stuff, then *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the *lais* of Marie de France, or Malory’s *Morte Darthur* are good bets. If you want to read a cross-section of medieval English society and worldviews, Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* is famous for a reason.... If you are a Tolkien fan, read *Beowulf*, *Kalevala*, and the Anglo-Saxon riddles, and then go back in and re-read *The Hobbit*. If you are a George R.R. Martin fan, read the historical account of the Black Dinner of 1440, and the 1157 Feast at Roskilde, and then re-read the Red Dinner scene.”

Earlier this year, Dr. Elmes also had her first poetry book, *Arthurian Things: A Collection of Poems*, published by Dark Myth Publications. The book is available for purchase on [Amazon](#) or [Barnesandnoble.com](#).

A huge congratulations to Dr. Elmes on her award, and on publishing her first poetry collection!