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Baily Shumaker Receives Prestigious Richard S. and Nelle Dabney Merit Award

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Lindenwood University student Bailey Shumaker received the prestigious Richard S. and Nelle Dabney Merit Award for Missouri, which recognizes those working in special education.

“Growing up, I was always drawn to helping others, whether it was in class asking questions, showing others how to do a specific drill for the swim team, to babysitting my friend's little sibling who had autism,” Shumaker wrote in her application essay. “These passions and interests helped guide me to a profession that helps others.”

The award was established in 1971 through the efforts of Robert S. Dabney – a past Missouri director of special education – to recognize and encourage those who will shape the future of special education. Richard’s daughter, Nelle Dabney, served as the director of special education in Kansas City. The Missouri Council for Exceptional Children Board of Directors named this award in their honor.

Shumaker becomes the 11th Lindenwood special education student teacher to win the award in the last 26 years. In the last five years, Lindenwood boasts four Richard S. and Nelle Dabney Merit Award winners, which demonstrates Lindenwood’s strong tradition of developing outstanding teachers through innovative learning.

A senior special education major, Shumaker will graduate from Lindenwood next month. She was nominated for the award by Lindenwood English Professor Dr. Katie Bahm, [College of Education and Human Services](#) Senior Professor of Curriculum and Instruction Dr. Rebecca Panagos, and adjunct instructor Carrie Newman.

“Bailey embodies the level of professionalism, passion, and enthusiasm for teaching special education that we hope to all have,” Panagos wrote in her letter of recommendation.

This award is a testament to Shumaker’s commitment to turning her childhood dream into reality and highlights her continuous hard work in special education.

After working as a paraprofessional over the summer, she realized special education was her career pathway to help others. Shumaker has completed

practicums, substitute teaching, elementary and high school internships, and is now a Teacher of Record at Troy Middle School as a Student Services/seventh-grade instructor.

“There are students who are not able to speak up for themselves at home or at school, and I want to be that teacher who is willing to advocate for them,” Shumaker said. “My students are so incredible and just need someone who is willing to take the time for them to thrive. I want to and will continue to be that person from now until the end of my professional career.”