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Laurier Brantford professor Rebecca Godderis awarded for excellence in teaching

WATERLOO – **Rebecca Godderis**, associate professor at Wilfrid Laurier University's Brantford campus, was awarded the **2015 Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) Award for Teaching Excellence**.

The **Award for Teaching Excellence** recognizes educators who excel at unlocking the potential of Ontario's young people. The award recipient is chosen from among Laurier faculty who have been nominated by Laurier students. Each member school of the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance selects one faculty member from their respective institution to receive the award. Godderis is the seventh Laurier faculty member to be honoured with the award and the second recipient from Laurier's Brantford campus.

"Students had only amazing things to say about Rebecca's ability to create a safe and empowering classroom environment that encourages them to think outside the box," said **Richard Camman**, vice-president: University Affairs, Wilfrid Laurier University Students' Union. "On behalf of the Students' Union and the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, it is my pleasure to recognize Rebecca as Laurier's recipient of this award."

Godderis has been teaching at Laurier Brantford since 2009 and specializes in teaching courses on gender, sexuality and well-being in the Society, Culture and Environment and Health Studies programs.

"I have the privilege of teaching students about topics, like gender, that impact their everyday life. These conversations are important because they are as much about being a citizen as they are about learning new information," said Godderis. "I am asking students to think critically about the ideals they hold and their own personal behaviours in relation to issues like gender norms and experiences of gendered violence. We need to work together to create the right kind of space in the classroom to have those conversations."

Godderis says simple things like knowing the names of her students are crucial to creating safer spaces and fostering dialogues between students, and between the students and herself. Part of creating this safer space also involves discussing concepts like power and privilege. For Godderis, this includes the need to challenge the idea that valid knowledge only comes from professors.

"It's important to me that the students understand I am not the only person in the room with expertise," said Godderis. "Each person who joins the class brings their own knowledge that is grounded in real life experience."

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Godderis hopes that the time spent in the classroom inspires students to carry on conversations about gender and sexuality with others outside of the class, and to make changes in their everyday lives. The final classes of each term are spent reflecting on how students see the world differently based on what they have learned in the course, and what impact this will have on their lives. Godderis also discusses the changes the students would like to see implemented in our society more broadly.

Godderis said she is overwhelmed by the all the congratulatory messages and support that have come her way.

"I feel incredibly honoured to have been recognized by the students in this way and I can't thank them enough for thinking of me," said Godderis. "The willingness of the students to engage with me in the classroom is what makes my job as a professor so fantastic. I also want to thank to my colleagues at Laurier Brantford for the many inspiring conversations that they've shared with me about teaching and learning."

Previous OUSA award winners from Laurier include: Sofy Carayannopoulos, associate professor, School of Business and Economics; Jason Roy, associate professor, Political Science; Mercedes Rowinsky-Geurts, associate professor, Language and Literature; Bruce McKay, associate professor, Psychology; Kris Gerhardt, assistant professor, Leadership and Psychology; and Kerry Lappin-Fortin, former professor, Faculty of Arts.

The **Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance** represents the interests of over 140,000 professional and undergraduate full-time and part-time university students at seven student associations across Ontario. Since 2009, the Partners in Higher Education dinner has brought together an array of partners and stakeholders from Ontario's post-secondary sector to recognize teaching excellence. The OUSA presents its teaching awards annually to professors from each of the member campuses that have taken this role to heart and have been selected by their students as examples of teaching excellence.

The OUSA teaching awards will be presented on Thursday, April 9, 2015 in Toronto.