



University of
Lethbridge

NEWS RELEASE

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Art history and museum studies professor Dr. Devon Smither earns 2023 Excellence in Teaching Award

Known for being a risk-taker in the classroom, Dr. Devon Smither encourages her students to do the same. It has garnered her a reputation as an innovative and empowering educator as well as the University of Lethbridge's 2023 Excellence in Teaching Award.

Smither is deeply committed to developing her teaching craft and creating learning environments that spark curiosity and enable critical confidence in her students, making her a leading figure on best practices in teaching at ULethbridge and beyond. Smither will be presented with the Excellence in Teaching Award at Spring 2023 Convocation Ceremony III, Friday, June 2, 2023, at 9:30 a.m. in the 1st Choice Savings Centre for Sport and Wellness.



Dr. Devon Smither

Associate dean and an associate professor of art history and museum studies in the Faculty of Fine Arts, Smither has made a point of developing her craft of teaching, integrating diverse and critical perspectives in her courses and encouraging students to grow and excel in their studies.

Completing her undergraduate degree at the University of Alberta, Smither pursued her passion for art history during her master's work at the University of British Columbia and while earning her doctorate at the University of Toronto.

At the heart of her teaching philosophy is a deep-seated desire to make complex curriculum material accessible, interesting and relevant to students' everyday lives and

future professional practices. With a drive to create innovative and engaging content in her courses, she strives to empower students with the tools they need to find success.

A nationally significant voice on best practices in teaching, Smither and a group of art historians created Open Art Histories (OAH) in 2019, a platform to support teaching excellence in the arts in Canada. Smither co-wrote the first Open Education Resource (OER) on Canadian and Indigenous art, *CanadARThistories: Reimagining the Canadian Art Survey*, broadening the history of art in Canada in relation to emerging conversations on decolonization, equity and inclusion and internationalization.

Always open to new concepts, Smither consistently seeks new ways to better her pedagogy. This past year, she implemented contract grading in her courses. A labour-based practice grounded in social justice, it emphasises a compassionate approach to equitable and fair grading and assesses students purely on the work they put into the class. Evaluations on the quality of assignments are separated from the calculation of the course grade, allowing students to be creative, try new concepts, make mistakes and learn from the process, rather than worry about grades in relation to the quality of their work. Smither has seen real success with this model, prompting many students to feel less anxiety in their studies and inspiring them to focus on learning in the classroom.

Smither works to provide opportunities for students to extend their learning outside of the classroom and develop relationships within their communities and beyond. Her mentorship and engagement with students are directly related to her passion for understanding art history and museum studies through a contemporary lens, one that is focused on the social, cultural and political impacts of art and curatorial practices.

To view online: <https://www.ulethbridge.ca/unews/article/art-history-and-museum-studies-professor-dr-devon-smither-earns-2023-excellence-teaching>

-- 30 --

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Our University's Blackfoot name is Iniskim, meaning Sacred Buffalo Stone. The University is located in traditional Blackfoot Confederacy territory. We honour the Blackfoot people and their traditional ways of knowing in caring for this land, as well as all Indigenous Peoples who have helped shape and continue to strengthen our University community.