

Media Release

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Faculty Awards for Excellence in Teaching and Research to Honour Professors Sara MacDonald and Julia Torrie at Spring Convocation

Faculty members from Great Books and History will be honoured for their excellence in teaching and research at St. Thomas University's Spring Convocation on May 12. Professor Sara MacDonald will receive the John McKendy Memorial Teaching Award and Professor Julia Torrie will receive the University Scholarship Award.

"Our professors are being recognized for their high standard of accomplishment in teaching and research. Their success underlines the quality of education that our students receive and also highlights the positive impact that our faculty have on the province—from teaching young people to world-class scholarship," said Dawn Russell, St. Thomas University President and Vice-Chancellor.

"To honour these professors at Convocation when 400 of our students will graduate is a timely reminder of the transformative role that a university can play for individuals and society."

MacDonald, an alumna of St. Thomas University, is a professor in Great Books who also teaches in the first-year interdisciplinary Aquinas Program. She teaches texts of cultural significance that can be intimidating, especially for first-year students. According to her students and colleagues, MacDonald puts her students at ease and provides them with the confidence to read, debate and think about these texts in a meaningful way.

In the classroom, she has an energetic and engaging teaching style and has high expectations, pushing students to reach their potential. One of her student nominators believes that her "ability to captivate a student's understanding of great texts is not only a rarity but a critical aspect for any professor in pursuit of excellence." MacDonald has been an invited lecturer in Canada, the United States, India and China.

"As someone who has taught at St. Thomas for many years, I know that there are many excellent teachers here so it's an honour to have been recognized," said MacDonald. "I have the opportunity to share the ideas of some of the world's most influential authors with others. I work to open these books up to students, and show them these texts are interesting and important."

MacDonald also takes learning outside the classroom. Last year, she took a Great Books class to Boston to visit art museums, attend a production of *Romeo and Juliet* and visit the public library, all in order to explore the degree to which art can serve as a vehicle for truth. On their course evaluations, students described this trip as "life changing."

An Important Scholar of Modern European History

Torrie, a professor in the Department of History, has established a reputation as an important scholar in modern European history. Her research focuses on the transnational social and cultural history of Germany and France during World War II, particularly as it relates to war and occupation. Her study *"For Their Own Good": Civilian Evacuations in Germany and France, 1939-1945* is the first comparative study of civilian evacuations in the two countries during World War II and demonstrates the complexities of an assumed all-powerful Nazi state by showing that citizen objections to evacuations forced changes in policy. The book was recently re-issued in paperback and a French-language adaptation of key parts of the book will be published soon.

Torrie has delivered many conference presentations and invited talks in Canada, the United States and Europe, and currently has book chapters that explore German documentary photography and protest in Hitler's national community accepted for publication. She is working on a research project that uses diaries, letters and photographs alongside official sources to explore German occupiers' experiences in France.

"It's an honour to be chosen for this award, particularly with so many strong researchers at St. Thomas. I see the award as encouragement to keep moving ahead in my research and writing," said Torrie.

"Research is like a puzzle and there are always new questions to ask and new things to discover. It's thrilling to find the missing link, the piece of evidence that completes a connection, confirms a hypothesis, or points my work in a different direction. Learning more about the past is a way to better understand the present—it helps us think about what motivates people, how they behave in different situations and why."

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