

May 26-27, 2021

ITEM 194-1003-R0521

**Request for Authorization to Confer the Title of Professor Emeritus on Debra Magpie Earling,
University of Montana – Missoula**

THAT

Upon the occasion of the retirement of Debra Magpie Earling from the faculty of the University of Montana, the faculty wishes to express its appreciation for her 29 years of service to the University and the State of Montana by recommending that the rank of Professor Emeritus be conferred upon her by the Board of Regents of the Montana University System.

EXPLANATION

Professor Earling earned her MFA in Creative Writing at Cornell University in 1992 and joined the English Department at the University of Montana the same year. Over the years she rose in rank to Professor. She served as Director of Creative Writing in 2017-19. When she retires this spring, in May 2021, she will have given twenty-nine years of service to the University.

Professor Earling has been an inspiring teacher in the Creative Writing program. She has primarily taught workshops in fiction, for both undergraduate and graduate students, and supervised thesis work by graduate students in the MFA program. But she has also taught “special topics” courses for creative writers, including courses on humor and on noir, and her CRWR 495 Storytelling has long been a legendary course on campus, a course taken by students in many different programs. In the first part of this course Professor Earling provides students with extensive background in storytelling traditions, in particular Native traditions, and at the end of the course students have to stand up in front of the entire class (at times fifty people or more) and tell a story based on their own experience. This is a course that will be greatly missed at the University after Professor Earling’s retirement.

Professor Earling’s *Perma Red*, published in 2002 by BlueHen/Penguin, is one of the great novels about Montana in our time. Widely read and taught, translated into both French and Portuguese, it will be reprinted by Milkweed Press later this year. Professor Earling’s *The Lost Journals of Sacajewea*, a work of fragmented prose set beside photographs collected by Peter Koch, was produced as both an art exhibit (shown around the world between 2010 and 2019) and an art book (published in 2009). It is an extraordinary work that has been largely unavailable owing to its cost. But Professor Earling is working on a revised version of the original text that will be published as a novel by Milkweed Press in 2022. She has published stories in various collections over the years and given talks and readings at local, national, and international events. In 2015 she received the prestigious Montana Governor’s Artist Award.

Over the years, further, Professor Earling has been an engaged member of the department and the university. Every year, for twenty-nine years, she has participated on the Creative Writing admissions committee and recruited graduate students to our program. She has served on numerous other department committees. She has helped to bring many visiting writers and editors to campus. She served as Director of Creative Writing, overseeing the whole creative writing program, in the two-year period 2017-19. These were crisis years at the university, and Professor Earling worked hard to hold together the MFA program, a program of national distinction.

The English Department is very happy to nominate Professor Debra Earling for emeritus status.

ATTACHMENTS

No Attachments