



UNC Greensboro

2016 Excellence in Teaching Award Winner: Gregory Price Grieve, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

In his thirteen years at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Gregory Grieve has made an indelible mark in teaching, research, and service. Professor Grieve is a highly productive and respected researcher, a former Lloyds's International Honors College fellow (2008) and was selected as a Lloyds's International Honors College Chancellor's fellow (2015).

Religion is a challenging subject to teach. Discussions and discourse of religion are usually avoided in polite company, and yet, religion remains a topic of utmost importance in modern society. It is a topic that both binds and divides people; it is the source of conflict, yet it is a reason for peace. Grieve's goal is to bring a student to a level of understanding from Ricoeur's first naïveté, 'the practice of one's religion' to Ricoeur's second naïveté, 'the critical evaluation and discussion of religion as a scholarly topic in the context of society and history.' His goal is not to turn people away from religion, but to have students think more deeply about their own beliefs and understand the implications that other faith systems have on the world around them. Because of this, his students are better prepared to navigate an ever growing and complex multicultural world.

In each and every course, Grieve merges humor, enthusiasm and scholarship into his teaching as he constantly emphasizes critical thinking which "develops their power to perceive the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves. Through critically thinking about religion, media, and popular culture students come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in

transformation.” Grieve is a leader in the application of digital technologies to religion studies. Professor Grieve has embraced the potential that social media and gaming technology have in facilitating a student’s exploration of new perspectives on religion. In his courses popular video games, such as Shyrim, have become powerful tools for a technology savvy generation to develop their critical thinking skills and place religion and religious discourse into their own ethos. “Why think, write and create digital products about religion media and popular culture? While not always easy to think about critically, its study helps students map contemporary life. It allows them to understand what cultural texts and ideas build our society, and aids in seeing the forces that threaten, as well as those that enable responsible human communities.”

Professor Grieve received his BA in media studies, summa cum laude, from San Francisco State (1987); his master’s degrees in general studies of humanities (1993) and in the history of religions in (1994) from the University of Chicago, and his doctoral degree in the history of religions from the same institution in 2002. He joined the University of North Carolina at Greensboro as an assistant professor in 2002 and was tenured and promoted to associate professor in 2008 and is head of the Religious Studies Department. Grieve also is a founding member of the International Academy for the Study of Religion and Digital Games.

Q. The Teaching Awards were established in 1994 to underscore the importance of teaching and to encourage, identify, recognize, reward, and support good teaching within the University. What does this award mean to you?

A. Being awarded the Board of Governors Award for Excellence in Teaching has given me a profound sense of responsibility. North Carolina’s constitution states that “[r]eligion, morality, and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools, libraries, and the means of education shall forever be encouraged.” Higher education is not a luxury for the few, but a core North Carolina value that ought to be available readily and affordably to all residents of every background and ZIP code.

Q. What was your path into the teaching profession?

A. It was in my first year of college that I decided to become a professor. After all the trouble I caused them, my elementary school teachers would laugh to find that I have become an educator. I have always been intensely curious, but as a child often found school a needless distraction from real discovery. In college, however, I was introduced to professors who cultivated my curiosity and creativity rather than attempting to tame it. For the first time in my life, caring, knowledgeable faculty inspired me, and I saw school not as a set of arbitrary rules, but as an intellectual feast.

Q. Besides this award, is there one particular achievement in your career that makes you especially proud?

A. I greatly value being honored by my peers, the University and the Board of Governors. Yet, “proud” is a devious, even dangerous, concept because it leads away from what has made for an authentic and meaningful career. Obstacles are part of any career, and it is the struggle of overcoming obstacles that has ultimately formed me. Struggle cannot be avoided. Yet, in the end, struggle is the greatest blessing and is what has made me a patient, sensitive teacher.

Q. What teaching methods do you use to engage students?

A. A college education is about making a life as well as making a living. With the spread of the Internet and social media, and the disruption of many traditional livelihoods, to simply be human seems to have become more difficult. Luckily, we are not the first people in history to face such issues, and the past bequeaths a treasure trove of time-tested methods for flourishing. My area of expertise is religion in popular culture. Because religion is where people describe their highest values, religion plays a crucial role in understanding what it means to be human. Many look for the essence of humanity in high art. I want students to see the humanity in themselves. And I want them to critically look at popular culture.