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Speer, Ouachita archivist, recognized by national Council of State Archivists

By Stephanie Bell

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ARKADELPHIA, Ark. – Dr. Lisa Speer, associate professor and university archivist, has been honored with the Victoria Irons Walch Leadership Award by the national Council of State Archivists (CoSA). This award recognizes her leadership as former state historian and director of the Arkansas State Archives. Speer began serving at Ouachita in February. She accepted the award this month at the Joint Annual Meeting of CoSA, the National Association of Government Archives and Records Administrators and the Society of American Archivists in Washington, D.C.

“The Council of State Archivists selected Dr. Speer because of two conspicuous leadership attributes,” said Dr. Ray Granade, director of library services and professor of history at Ouachita. “First, Dr. Speer’s leadership is a collaborative one that extends to those who work at the state archives but also to stakeholders in the larger archival world, particularly in Arkansas but also beyond. Second, her leadership looks forward, encompassing the brave new digital world that lies before all archives. Both traits illustrate her inclusive leadership style and her belief in active archival outreach instead of a passive waiting approach.”

“It is both a privilege and a pleasure to welcome Dr. Lisa Speer to the position of archivist in Riley-Hickingbotham Library’s Special Collections,” Granade added. “We have been blessed to have exemplary leadership in Special Collections, and we know that Dr. Speer will continue that tradition of excellence.

The Council of State Archives (CoSA) acknowledges institutions, individuals and programs that have enriched and strengthened state and territorial archives. The Victoria Irons Walch Award recognizes the sustained leadership and outstanding contributions of an individual or institution in the field.

“My first thought when I saw the email with the ‘Congratulations’ subject line was that it had been sent to me in error,” said Speer, who also is a Ouachita alumna. “I was stunned, especially after I read the nomination sent in by my former colleagues at the state archives. To know that they considered my time at the state archives to be ‘transformative’ was incredibly humbling. Then to know that their nomination had been supported and affirmed by the Council of State Archives Awards Committee and the CoSA Board of Directors, both of which are made up of state archivists, is truly a career highlight.”

In her colleagues' nomination submission, they said Speer's "leadership and service at the Arkansas State Archives left it a changed place and continue to benefit the organization she led and the archival staff she supported. It is not enough to say that Lisa Speer did her job and directed the archives; Dr. Speer changed the archives' direction."

"I've never worked with a more cohesive and dedicated group of people," Speer said of her former colleagues. "I am so proud that I had the opportunity to work with them and to serve the state of Arkansas."

In addition to the outstanding team at the Arkansas State Archives, Speer acknowledged her passion for her work and as a major contributing factors to her success.

"Regardless of the type of archives one works with, you are playing a role in something so much bigger than you. You are just a dot on the continuum helping to preserve the historical record for the ages," she said.

"I also love working with people," Speer added. "Sometimes you make lifelong friends of donors and researchers by simply helping them find information or making a big decision about where to donate their records. That's very rewarding."

In addition to her work in Ouachita's library, Speer will coordinate Ouachita's public history program in the Department of History, bringing her years of experience to the classroom for the benefit of the students in Ouachita's Sutton School of Social Sciences.

Ouachita Baptist University's Riley-Hickingbotham Library physically houses an open-stack main book collection of about 170,000 volumes, about 330,000 selected federal and state government publications and some 400,000 non-book items in addition to serial and journal titles, multimedia resources and access to numerous electronic databases. In addition to university archives, Riley-Hickingbotham Library Special Collections include archives of the Arkansas Baptist State Convention and Clark County Historical Association, as well as a rare books collection and political papers from U.S. Representative Jay Dickey, Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee, U.S. Senator John L. McClellan and U.S. Representative Mike Ross.