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Spanish Professor Honored by Medieval Association

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Spanish Professor Honored by Medieval Association

Veronica Menaldi recognized for creative classroom activities

DECEMBER 15, 2022 BY ERIN GARRETT



OXFORD, Miss. – Veronica Menaldi takes special care with her students when discussing the significance of history. Her dedication, enthusiasm and innovative teaching methods are why the **Southeastern Medieval Association** presented her with its Award for Teaching Excellence at its annual conference in November.

“I love the moment when they realize that this stuff matters,” said Menaldi, an assistant professor of Spanish at the **University of Mississippi**. “What was written in fiction then is still relevant today. Subjects like heartache, grief – things that make us human.

“Beyond that, I like to encourage them to think about the dangers of not really knowing the past. If we don’t know what came before, it can be repeated in the worst way.”

At the university, Menaldi teaches several courses in Spanish that focus on the Middle Ages. They cover literature from the period and connect it, when relevant, to the present. Her courses also give special attention to themes such as food, magic, music and religious diversity.

“Although it is called the Southeastern Medieval Association, SEMA draws nationally for its membership,” said Daniel O’Sullivan, chair of the **Department of Modern Languages** and professor of French. “The distinction is noteworthy; Dr. Veronica Menaldi’s teaching award means that she excels as a teacher when compared to some of the best teachers in the nation.”

SEMA specifically acknowledged Menaldi’s innovative pedagogy for premodern Iberia. To demonstrate the cultural interconnectedness of Iberia, she created a group exercise where her students joined with students in Arabic literature.

In many of her classes, Menaldi instructs on Aljamiado, which is mostly made up of phonetic Spanish in Arabic script.

“I want to expose them to this unique writing system,” she said. “It looks like Arabic, but it is actually Spanish with some code switching. In class they have the opportunity to both create and decipher messages in this hybrid script.”

“Aljamiado helps my students think about representation and identity. We look at this premodern minority group and talk about what they went through to create this language. Myself, I’m born of immigrant parents, so I understand that these notions are still relevant today.”

Menaldi puts a strong emphasis on hands-on activities to engage and excite her students. For example, her premodern magic course requires students to create a spell book using elements they study in the class.

“They would take a paper and burn it to make it look like it was used,” Menaldi said. “A student told me that it was one of the most fun senior projects they had worked on.”

Kaylee Crafton, who is pursuing a master’s degree in integrated marketing communications at Ole Miss, took courses from Menaldi during her time as an undergraduate student. She appreciated Menaldi’s teaching style.

“I discovered her to be incredibly patient with her students, taking the time and effort to carefully explain everything and clear up any confusion,” Crafton said. “Along with that, I witnessed how enthusiastic she was about the material and seeing her students grasp the concepts and formulate their own ideas.

“She provided us with creative assignments and projects that helped us better understand the material,



Spanish professor Veronica Menaldi has been honored for her innovation in the classroom. Submitted photo

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Students Learn ‘Real Politics’ in Washington, D.C., Winter Session

OXFORD, Miss. – Eleven University of Mississippi students spent their winter break learning about the people who work behind the scenes of the American government in Washington, D.C. Lead by Jonathan Klingler, assistant professor of political science, the students of Pol 391: Applied Politics met not with candidates, but with the people who make candidates’

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OXFORD, Miss. – Stephanie Jennings Teague, of Chicago, sees her commitment of \$100,000 to the Patterson School of Accountancy’s new building at the University of Mississippi as a means of saying “thank you.” “It is a way to show a small token of my appreciation to Ole Miss, the faculty and staff, and the accounting

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U.S. inflation roller coaster prompts fresh look at long-ignored money supply By Michael S. Derby NEW YORK – The amount of money sloshing around the U.S. economy shrank last year for the first time on record, a development that some economists believe bolsters the case for U.S. inflation pressures continuing to abate. The Federal Reserve’s



Students in Veronica Menaldi's SPAN 593 created this 'spell' to cure COVID as part of a group project, drawing inspiration from premodern spells. Menaldi often assigns creative group projects, and this one tasks students with creating a message in Aljamiado. Submitted image

collaborate with one another and find excitement in the learning process. A class that I had once been nervous about was quickly transformed by Dr. Menaldi into a class that I eagerly looked forward to."

Besides accepting the teaching award, Menaldi was part of a panel discussion at the SEMA conference.

"Receiving this award was an honor and I'm really touched by it," Menaldi said. "It was also great to present on teaching. I was able to share ideas, get positive feedback and learn how to keep improving.

"I always want to find new ways to do things so that my classes are more enjoyable and the students learn more."

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