

SEGUE

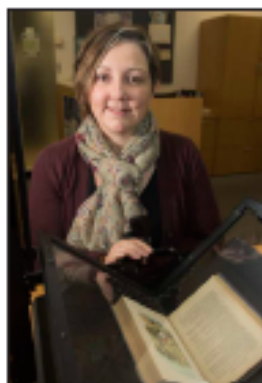
SIUE's DeSpain explains digital scholarship

By Madelaine Dearthuff
For the Intelligencer

Program Note: Dr. Jessica DeSpain's 2018 Going Endowed Professor Lecture, "Maybe Life is Only Stories," took place on Thursday, Nov. 29 at Lovejoy Library. This episode of Segue was recorded prior to the event.

The College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville presented its 2018 William and Margaret Going Endowed Professorship Award to Jessica DeSpain, Ph.D., associate professor in the Department of English Language and Literature, and co-director of SIUE's Interdisciplinary Research and Informatics Scholarship (IRIS) Center.

On this week's episode of Segue, the premier radio show about the people and ideas of SIUE and beyond, CAS Dean Greg Budzban, Ph.D., interviews DeSpain about her work with the IRIS Center, her research into digital storytelling, and more. This episode will air at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Dec. 16,



DeSpain

on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound and siue.edu/wsie.

"In many ways, the Going Award is the most distinguished award the College of Arts and Sciences gives unto its faculty; promotes a kind of teacher-scholar model we focus upon, and connects scholarship in fundamental ways to inform and enrich the academic careers of our students," Budzban says. "Thank you for being here and doing that for students. Congratulations again on being this year's winner."

"Thank you! It means a lot to me because I truly strive to have the

teacher-scholar model be a part of how I understand myself as an SIUE faculty member," DeSpain says.

"I always begin these episodes with a brief discussion of what brought our guests to SIUE. What brought you to our campus?" Budzban inquires.

"I was a graduate student at the University of Iowa. That was so formative to my experience that nearly all of my papers begin with, 'I was a student at the Center for the Book at the University of Iowa,' and that normally formulates a lot of what I am going to talk about today."

"I was in the English department, and the Center for the Book was a certificate program where we wrote and printed books by hand and did calligraphy," DeSpain mentions. "It was quite helpful to me because, as a book historian, I can learn about the 15th through 18th century by doing all of these things. That experience, learning by doing, allowed me to find my own peda-

gogy, and who I was as a teacher and also as a scholar."

DeSpain came to SIUE in 2008 after graduating with her doctorate in English from the University of Iowa. Soon after coming to campus, she and her colleague, Kristine Hildebrandt, associate professor in the Department of English Language and Literature, began to think about a center that houses research in the digital humanities.

The digital humanities have a lot of variation and possibilities in what you can do, but it is basically using technology related to computation and computers to rethink the age-old questions we have always asked in the humanities of who we are, how we are informed by where we are, what we do and what we read.

"Kristine and I realized that if we banded together, we could create a space where we could do a type of digital scholarship on campus," DeSpain says. "We started the IRIS Center in 2009,

and it has been slowly and steadily growing ever since."

The IRIS Center recently moved into the second floor of Peck Hall, and the co-directors are thrilled to have a space where the humanities and technology can coexist.

"Once again, the Going Award is the College's most distinguished award," Budzban mentions. "What did you propose to receive it?"

"Kristine and I had previously written a proposal for a grant for the national endowment for the humanities alongside the Marjorie Jackson Center for the Humanities Foundation called 'Conversations Toward A Brighter Future 2.0,'" DeSpain mentions.

"When I wrote the proposal for the Going Award, I was excited to think about age and intergenerational relationships and to develop some classroom patterns, pedagogy and also scholarship on that topic."

"In the meantime, we won the \$200,000 grant!" DeSpain

exclaims.

"Conversations Toward a Brighter Future 2.0" involves eight area high schools and works with students to read works of literature, think about oral histories, music, novels, arts and plays that consider intergenerational relationships. As a result, the students work with members of the community to develop digital storytelling projects, mostly videos with music and in-person interviews and photographs, which tell the story of a person's life.

At the lecture, DeSpain spoke about age and intergenerational relationships, and about the public facing the humanities. The professor explains what, as a scholar, it means to write for broader audiences and collaborating with broader audiences outside the academy.

To hear more of Budzban and DeSpain's conversation, tune in to Segue at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Dec. 16, on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound or siue.edu/wsie.