

English Professor Named Emerging Scholar By Diverse Magazine

Kabria Baumgartner engages students in questions of equity

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UNH faculty are once again being recognized at the national level for scholarship that is changing the way we think and teach about race, gender and equity.

The news magazine *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education* recently named UNH English professor Kabria Baumgartner part of its 2020 cohort of Emerging Scholars — a distinction awarded to just 15 professors across the country for interdisciplinary academic excellence.

“She’s kind of a nexus unto herself.”

“It’s a great honor,” says Baumgartner. “I know of other amazing faculty here who have received this award, so it’s an added bonus to be in good company.”

It was an African American history class at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, where she earned her Ph.D, that prompted Baumgartner to focus her studies on the intersection of gender, race and education in American literature and history.

Today, her scholarship and teaching bridge the disciplines of English, history, gender and American studies. Published in 2019, her first book “In Pursuit of Knowledge: Black Women and Educational Activism in Antebellum America,” captures the big picture of school desegregation in the northeast through the lens of girl’s education. Baumgartner is currently at work on her second book, an examination of slavery and African American girlhood.

At UNH, Baumgartner teaches courses in the English department on slave narratives, myths and legends and the history of American education. In her courses, students are empowered to ask questions that transcend disciplines — all toward prompting new thinking about how race, education and narrative fit into the arc of American history.

“I take an interdisciplinary approach in my teaching, which means that I use literary, historical, and, to a lesser extent, social scientific methods,” Baumgartner explains. “For instance, I am teaching a course this semester on Toni Morrison and we are starting to read her novel, ‘A Mercy.’ Instead of diving into the novel, we are first talking about race as a sociohistorical construction, indigenous history, the chaos that defined seventeenth-century North America, European colonialism, and origin myths.”

Baumgartner adds “We need this context, I argue, to appreciate Morrison’s fine storytelling and to understand her intervention.”

Alongside her teaching, Baumgartner was a part of the team at UNH that created the [Postdoctoral Diversity and Innovation Scholars Program](#), which has helped to ensure that a wide range of voices, perspectives and backgrounds are represented among departments’ tenured faculty.

“She’s kind of a nexus unto herself,” UNH provost Wayne E. Jones Jr. said of Baumgartner in *Diverse*. “She brings lots of different people together, lots of different disciplines together, and I think makes the conversation on campus more effective.”

Diverse has recognized exceptional professors at the start of their careers for nearly two decades. This year’s class of Emerging Scholars represents a host of academic disciplines, from medicine to education. Last year, UNH education professor [Elyse](#)

Hambacher was also recognized for her work at the intersection of literacy and social justice.

- WRITTEN BY:
Ali Goldstein | CPA

PHOTOGRAPHER:
Perry Smith | Freelance Photographer

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