



For release immediate August 18, 2025

Contact: **Dr. Mark Robbins**, DMC Professor of History, at [mrobbins1@delmar.edu](mailto:mrobbins1@delmar.edu) or 361-698-1370 or Richard Guerrero, Jr., Media Relations Writer/Digital News Content Developer, at [rguerrer20@delmar.edu](mailto:rguerrer20@delmar.edu) or 361-944-0230 (mobile)

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## **College announces 2025 Recipient of Dr. Aileen Creighton Award for Teaching Excellence during Fall Convocation today**

*Peers select History Professor Dr. Mark Robbins for coveted DMC faculty recognition, choice based on Robbins' focus on service learning*

Just outside the north-facing doors of Memorial Classroom Building (MCB) on the Heritage Campus is perhaps the most tangible example of Dr. Mark Robbins' service learning-oriented approach to teaching: a Texas Historical Marker from the Texas Historical Commission for Del Mar College.

The marker was the result of a multiyear student research project overseen by Robbins. Students Troy Nessner and Preston Martin poured over college records, old yearbooks, back issues of the student newspaper, *Foghorn*, oral histories and other historical documents to gather the requisite details for the marker's application, which was approved long after the semesterlong project for Robbins' Academic Cooperative class had received a grade.

In his courses, Robbins focuses on experiential learning activities to help history – especially local history – come alive for his students.

One such project was the subject of a *Corpus Christi Caller-Times* article by reporter Olivia Garrett in early 2023. Garrett detailed the preservation and documentation work on a historic yet mostly forgotten farmworker cemetery – Rancho Colorado Cemetery – in rural Nueces County by a group of students led by Robbins and Texas A&M University-Kingsville (TAMUK) Anthropology professor Christine Reiser Robbins, Ph.D. The project remains ongoing to this day.

Such examples are just a few reasons why **Dr. Mark Robbins was recognized as the college's 2025 Dr. Aileen Creighton Award for Teaching Excellence recipient during today's fall convocation on the Heritage Campus in Richardson Performance Hall.**

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Robbins is the 23rd recipient of the coveted faculty award established for its namesake, the late Dean Emeritus of Arts and Sciences and English Professor Dr. Aileen Creighton. Each year after the nomination and selection process, the college keeps honorees' names in secret until a special video unveils the recipient for the campus community to see.

The award represents Dr. Creighton's legacy as a "master teacher" during her 41-year career with Del Mar College and serves as the benchmark faculty must emulate to receive the honor. Known for her dedication to students and higher education, the late educator's example provides inspiration to DMC faculty.

During his acceptance speech at Convocation today, Robbins noted that he has been inspired by a tradition of excellence during his time at the College.

"It's an incredible honor to be named alongside the previous recipients here – many of whom are friends and mentors who I look up to and think the world of," Robbins said.

Robbins began teaching history in the Social Sciences Department at DMC in 2009 after holding teaching positions at Brown University, the University of Rhode Island-Providence and the Johns Hopkins University Center for Talented Youth. His work on oral history, labor history, memory, cultural history and consumer politics has appeared in *Labor History*, *The Historical Journal of Massachusetts*, *American Educational History* and *The Sound Historian*. He is the author of *Middle Class Union: Organizing the 'Consuming Public' in Post-World War I America* (University of Michigan Press 2017) and co-directs the South Texas Hispanic Farm Labor Communities Heritage Project.

In a statement to the Creighton Award Selection Committee, Robbins said that his teaching philosophy draws on service learning, local history and community collaboration to empower his students to connect history to their lives and communities.

"Through experiential learning activities – from community archeology to onsite analysis of local monuments, students in my courses are able to think as historians and apply their analysis to the places where they live, to their own family heritage, to their professional aspirations and to the other subjects that they are studying," he wrote.

It is precisely these learning experiences that prompted colleague and 2019 Creighton Award recipient Dr. Bryan Stone, DMC Professor of History, to enthusiastically support Robbins' nomination for the award.

"Mark's trademark approach and the thing that sets him apart from the average professor is experiential learning," Stone stated in his nomination letter. "His students don't just learn about history in a classroom but practice it with him in the field."

Perhaps the most telling example demonstrating Robbins' impact is the support letter from DMC alumnus Jesse Kelton, now a successful mechanical engineer.

The DMC Hall of Famer detailed his transformation from a nontraditional student who left high school to complete his GED a decade before becoming a DMC graduate with an associate's degree in Physics in 2013. Kelton's experience in Robbins' class during his first semester at DMC helped him find his footing and thrive at the college and beyond. He graduated from The University of Texas at Austin with a bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering.

"There are very few people in this world who burn so bright that they sear themselves into your memory for life. But I can still remember sitting in his class, watching him teach and [noting] the joy in which he did it to this day 15 years later," Kelton wrote.

Robbins earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in History with high honors and high distinction from the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor in 2003. One year later, he earned his master's degree from Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. In 2009, Robbins earned his Ph.D. from Brown, where he served as a Teaching Assistant, Writing Center Associate and Visiting Instructor/Teaching Fellow.

Robbins has been awarded several grants and received awards for teaching and research, including Teacher of the Year (2014); DisAbility Advocate of the Year; Excellence in Teaching Award for the Del Mar College chapter of the National Society of Leadership and Success; Kenneth E. Hendrickson Jr. Best Article Award for *Sound Historian*; and the Daniel E. Kilgore Award for Local History.

In addition, he is a member of the Nueces County Historical Commission and past Vice Chair of the City of Corpus Christi Landmark Commission.

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