

Graduate Student Spotlight



Rachel Stephens

PhD - Art and Art History

BA, Art History - The University of the South

MA, Art History - Vanderbilt University

**Winner of Best Presentation in the
Humanities Division at the 2007 James F.
Jakobsen Graduate Conference**

Please describe your thesis project in a short sentence.

I'm writing about Ralph E.W. Earl, an early nineteenth-century American painter, who painted Andrew Jackson and his circle.

How did you decide to go to graduate school?

After studying art history in Europe my junior year of college, I knew I wanted to continue pursuing it. Also I had wonderful professors at Sewanee who I wanted to emulate.

What made you decide to go to graduate school at Iowa?

I initially applied here on the recommendation of my master's thesis advisor because of the combination of strong department, excellent library, and nice place to live. I came here because Dr. Dorothy Johnson (one of my advisors) made me feel welcome and comfortable on my visit.

What are your long-term goals beyond your graduate degree?

I would like to teach art history and encourage the study of art of the American South.

How has being a graduate student at Iowa prepared you to achieve those goals?

Our department is wonderful and very multi-faceted. The range of experience and expertise among our professors has allowed me to seek advice and get a number of different perspectives. Also the quality of teaching and the level of expectation is quite high.

You are a winner of one of the top awards at the Jakobsen Conference in a previous year. What did you enjoy most about the Jakobsen Conference experience?

I most enjoyed the interdisciplinary atmosphere of the conference. I presented with students from a variety of disciplines and it was great to interact with graduate students from other programs.

What are some of your interests outside of school?

I'm a sports junkie and I love to travel and socialize.

Are there any particular challenges you've faced as a graduate student at Iowa?

I changed my dissertation topic and therefore my major after comps. This created a unique set of challenges in my department. I had to re-take my comps, work with a new thesis advisor, and work toward getting my new topic approved.

Hometown: Nashville, Tennessee

Advisor: Joni Kinsey