

Distinguished Alumna Martha Nell Smith, LC'77, Is an Emily Dickinson Scholar and Author


Martha Nell Smith (LC'77) is a scholar who has focused her career on the life and work of Emily Dickinson, on American poetry, and on feminist and queer theory and criticism.



In 2009 the Livingston Alumni Association (LAA) of Rutgers University honored Smith as a Distinguished Alumna. Smith additionally earned a Master of Arts (1982) and a Ph.D (1985), both in English, from Rutgers' Graduate School-New Brunswick.

As of 2021, Smith is a Professor of English, Distinguished Scholar-Teacher, and Founding Director of the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH) at the University of Maryland, College Park.

Her numerous print publications include five books on Dickinson:

- *Rowing in Eden: Rereading Emily Dickinson* (1992)
-  *Comic Power in Emily Dickinson*, coauthored with Suzanne Juhasz and Cristanne Miller (1993)
- *Open Me Carefully: Emily Dickinson's Intimate Letters to Susan Dickinson*, coauthored with Ellen Louise Hart (1998)
- *A Companion to Emily Dickinson* (2008), co-edited with Mary Loeffelholz
- *Emily Dickinson: A User's Guide* (2012, with a revised edition planned for publication in 2022)

Smith also has written more than 40 articles and essays in *American Literature*, *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, *South Atlantic Quarterly*, *Women's Studies Quarterly*, *Profils Americains*, *San Jose Studies*, *The Emily Dickinson Journal*, and *A Companion to Digital Humanities*.

Smith was an early proponent of using technology to advance scholarship, and in 1994 she began the Dickinson Electronic Archives.

At the Digital Humanities 2009 conference, hosted by MITH, Smith said: "Content counts first, and we use the technology, the technology does not use us."

"I am really interested in how we can import literary theory and philosophy and actually do something innovative in terms of knowledge-building. So as an editor I'm really interested in ways we can import social editing into scholarly editing."

In 2010, Smith was named a Distinguished Scholar-Teacher at the University of Maryland. In 2011, she was appointed ADVANCE Professor in the College of Arts and Humanities and in 2012 was appointed an ADVANCE Fellow. In May 2011, Smith was voted Chair-Elect of the University of Maryland Senate, and became Chair for the 2012-2013 term.

Smith transferred to Livingston College from Rutgers College as a senior, taking 39 credits at Livingston in the 1976-1977 academic year. In a 2009 interview and profile for the Distinguished Alumni Award, Smith says: "I often refer to the year I was at Livingston as the year I learned more than anywhere else.

"That passion and that belief that learning is crucial, vital and important, I carry with me to this day.

"Be generous, follow your intellectual passion, not what is trending but follow what you really want to do, and specifically for Livingston, never forget the legacy of serious-minded politics. ... Be great citizens, be fabulous students all throughout the rest of your life."

Watch the LAA's interview and video tribute to Smith (3 minutes, 13 seconds), embedded on this page, or open in a new window.

Photos: (top) Courtesy of University of Maryland; (bottom) From the 1977 Livingston College yearbook, The Rock, Volume II.