

## **Meet the Prof: Bill Mode**

**by Faculty Advocacy Committee - Tuesday, February 02, 2010**

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*The following faculty Q&A was submitted by the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Faculty Advocacy Committee, a committee of the Faculty Senate. Maureen Muldoon, associate geology professor, wrote the introduction.*

I am pleased to introduce Bill Mode, chair of the geology department, glacial geologist and one of the reasons I decided to join our department's faculty. I knew of Bill, prior to working here, as a well-respected researcher in glacial mapping and the use of pollen records to document climate change. After I joined the department, I came to value Bill for his mentorship, both of students and faculty, and his commitment to excellent teaching.

Even after 30 years on the job, Bill revises and improves his courses each semester. These efforts have earned him both a UW Oshkosh Distinguished Teaching Award and the University Honor's Program Outstanding Teaching Award. I feel fortunate to have known Bill Mode as a friend and colleague for over 20 years, and I value the leadership and commitment to excellence that he has brought to our department, the campus and the community.

### **How did you find your way to UW Oshkosh?**

When the opportunity to come to UW Oshkosh was offered to me in 1981, I jumped for it. My career goal was to become a university geology professor because I love to teach. At the time, I was a post-doctoral researcher at Ohio State University. The opportunity to return to Wisconsin, where I was born and raised, and to have a job where I would teach and do research was irresistible.

### **Why did you choose to go into your field?**

When I was born, the United States was pushing its students to go into science and technology fields. I was inclined that way from an early age and collected bugs, frogs, snakes, etc. As my freshman year in college ended, my physics major didn't seem as interesting when I heard about geology students going on field trips to places like the Grand Canyon. I decided this geology major might be the one for me.

### **What is my favorite thing about UW Oshkosh?**

Balance is what I appreciate most about UW Oshkosh. We appropriately value teaching and undergraduate learning highly, *and* we value the scholarly life that enables us to be effective teachers and learners. This balance of effort and activity benefits everyone here, students and staff alike, and it benefits the broader world as well through the well-educated students who graduate and through the contributions that faculty make, such as those listed below.

### **What is the professional accomplishment of which you are most proud?**

I have maintained an extramurally funded research program that involves many undergraduate students. They accompany me in the field and work in my lab analyzing samples for various characteristics, including fossils. Their projects usually result in papers presented at professional meetings. This has contributed substantially to the education of those students, to my professional growth and to the science of glacial geology. Our work has influenced thinking on topics such as climate change in the Arctic — one of our early summaries of Arctic climate change was incorporated into a major compilation titled Arctic Climate Impact Assessment.

**What leadership or service activities are you involved in?**

Though I am involved in many service activities, I will highlight one that may not be widely known. The State of Wisconsin licenses geologists for the protection of the public. Many construction and environmental projects require involvement of a licensed geologist. I chair the Geologist Section of the Wisconsin Examining Board of Professional Geologists, Hydrologists and Soil Scientists. We review applications for licensure as well as complaints. I was appointed to this board by Governor Doyle.

**What is the most common misperception about what you do?**

I suspect that many people think that geologists study dinosaurs or search for oil and little else. I don't do either. When I speak to public groups in our region on topics like climate change in the Arctic, they are often surprised to learn that this kind of research is being pursued at UW Oshkosh.

**What is the most exciting project you are working on right now?**

Several years ago, I began collaborating with colleagues at the Wisconsin Geological and Natural History Survey on a long-term project to map the glacial geology of east-central Wisconsin. The tools and understanding of glacial geology have changed dramatically since 1943, the last time this area was mapped. This has been rewarding and productive and has led to a number of spin-off projects and opportunities for students to be involved in research.

One particularly exciting project started when a farmer near Chilton contacted me about finding beaver-gnawed wood in a hole he was excavating. This led to a multi-year study of the fossils that were buried in the sediments of an ancient beaver pond. Five students worked with me on the project, and there is currently a display about the site, its fossils and paleoenvironments at the Weis Earth Science Museum in Menasha. Two of those students are now teachers, and both have the poster they produced on this research displayed in their classrooms.

**How does what you research help you to be an effective teacher?**

Glacial geology is all about environmental change, and this is a topic that is of crucial interest to our world and our students. Having done research in the Arctic and Wisconsin, I have a wealth of experience and examples that help students understand the global and local nature of environmental change. I also have a wealth of ideas for student research projects.

**Describe some ways your department serves northeastern Wisconsin?**

Faculty members and students provide talks, workshops and field trips for schools and other groups, like Kiwanis. They also provide their expertise to committees and task forces concerning issues such as storm-water drainage. Our graduates are employed in the environmental, oil and minerals industries, some working in the state and others scattered around the world. They also work in agencies, like the DNR, and they are teachers and professors — six of our graduates, now Ph.D. holders, are employed as professors in Wisconsin universities and colleges.

**Tell us about your family.**

I am married and have two children, Andrea, 25, and Sam, 20. Both children are adopted from South Korea. My wife of 35 years, Cath, is a Lutheran pastor in Neenah. We met in college. My mother, a retired art teacher, lives in Milwaukee. When I interviewed for the UW Oshkosh position, she and my father attended my research presentation.

**What are your hobbies?**

I enjoy hiking and bicycling when the weather permits, reading most any time, and traveling when we can afford it. My wife Cath is my favorite walking partner. We have logged many miles together and especially love hiking in the tundra where no trees impede the view.

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