

Meet the Prof: Bill Wacholtz

by Faculty Advocacy Committee - Thursday, May 21, 2009

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/1978/meet-the-prof-bill-wacholtz/>

The following faculty Q&A was submitted by the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Faculty Advocacy Committee, a committee of the Faculty Senate. David Siemers, associate professor of political science, wrote the introduction.

I wanted to find a way of profiling all the interesting people we have here at the University, so we are going to profile individual faculty members.

Who better to start this out than our current Faculty Senate president (through summer 2009), Bill Wacholtz? I know Bill from a variety of settings but mainly from the racquetball courts, where he is an excellent player. Far more important than that, Bill is a very nice guy. He is originally from Montana and he received his Ph.D. in chemistry at Tulane University in 1987.

How did you find your way to UW Oshkosh?

In 1989, the chemistry department was looking for an inorganic chemist with a strong physics background who was interested in research and teaching. I applied and was offered the position out of approximately 70 candidates.

Why did you choose to go into your field?

I was always interested in chemistry and especially how light interacted with chemicals. When I found that I could synthesize new colored materials, which under the right conditions glowed, I was hooked.

What is your favorite thing about UW Oshkosh?

The strong and enduring relationships I have had with many of my students and colleagues.

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

I am very proud of winning the UW Oshkosh Distinguished Teaching Award in 2004; however, in 2003 one of my undergraduate students was invited to give a presentation of our work at a National American Chemical Society meeting, and that certainly rates as a close second.

What leadership or service activities are you involved in?

I am currently the Faculty Senate president and co-chair of the department of chemistry.

What is the most common misperception about what you do?

Most people think I teach one class a week and that I make a lot of money. The reality is vastly different; however, I do greatly enjoy the many aspects of my job.

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

In my research, I am currently working on metal-based (inorganic) and organic molecules that change shape when they are excited with light. These materials could be placed on the back of a reflective material that can have its shape altered in order to actively change the focusing ability of the reflective material. This is known as adaptive or reactive optics, and we hope to further develop these materials to be applied in the next generation space-based telescopes.

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

By staying active in my research area, I can enhance my teaching in several ways. First, I can engage students by having them work directly with me in my research laboratory. This one-on-one activity is one of the best and most rewarding teaching environments.

In my formal teaching environments (lectures), I can stimulate the students by showing them the latest edges of science and how the basis for all new discovery is built on the basics we hope they embrace in their education.

Describe some ways your department serves northeastern Wisconsin.

In our role as educators we try to help the students of our area get a strong foundation in the chemical sciences to expand the number of technologically trained students as we move forward into the 21st century. As the job market in Wisconsin moves towards more technologically demanding requirements for its workers, this mission becomes even more valuable.

It is the goal of my colleagues and me, as researchers, to continue to develop new and innovative ideas that can be expanded into useful applications. Ideally, these applications could lead to new jobs in Northeast Wisconsin along with the possibility of closer business/education developmental relationships and educational opportunities such as applied internships.

Tell us about your family.

My wife Margaret and I have one daughter, Rachel, married to Josh Owens, and two wonderful grandchildren, Conner and Wyatt. Margaret works at Oshkosh Corp., formerly Oshkosh Truck. My mother still lives in Missoula Montana along with my older brother Jeff. My younger brother David is living in Spokane, Wash.

What are your hobbies?

I am an avid fan and player of racquetball. I am a certified soccer official (23rd year), a collector of glowing rocks and crystals, a strong supporter of greyhound rescue, a not-so-successful hobby gardener, and I love to read historical fiction.

- [Read more faculty profiles.](#)

Faculty, staff and students are encouraged to contribute calendar items, campus announcements and other good news to UW Oshkosh Today at uwot@uwosh.edu.