

Meet the Prof: Chad Cotti

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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. Kevin McGee, professor of economics, wrote the introduction.

Last fall, one of the nation's top experts on the impact of smoking bans — an expert who was quoted in the Economist, the Atlantic Monthly and even Wikipedia — left balmy South Carolina to start a teaching job here in snowy Oshkosh, Wis. What was he, nuts? No, just returning to his roots.

Chad Cotti got his undergraduate degree at UW Oshkosh, and when a faculty position in the economics department opened up ... well, here he is.

How did you find your way to UW Oshkosh?

Actually, I received my bachelor's degree from UW Oshkosh in the spring of 2000. So I have had some affiliation with the University for many years before I joined the faculty.

Why did you choose to go into your field?

To be totally honest, as an undergraduate I decided to major in economics because I understood the material well. One might say it came easy to me. At its core, economics is a study of human behavior and understanding incentives.

Once one is trained to view the world through the lens of economics, it is hard to see it any other way. I liked this view point. It made sense. So I embraced it and decided to dedicate my professional life to applying the techniques and approach of economics to interesting research questions and to help pass on this perspective to my students in class.

What is your favorite thing about UW Oshkosh?

I enjoy many things about working at UW Oshkosh, but mostly I enjoy the people. Both the faculty and staff are kind, interesting and fun.

What leadership or service activities are you involved in?

Currently, I am a faculty advisor for both the Economic Student Association and the Omicron Delta Epsilon Honors Society in Economics.

What is the most common misperception about what you do?

Many people believe that economists study money. So I get a lot of questions about banking, the stock market, etc. It is, of course, true that many economists do study financial markets, but many more do not.

Economics is a very broad discipline, of which the study of financial markets is only a small part. In reality, economists study a wide range of issues that include divorce, child birth, pollution, crime, sports, healthcare, taxes, drunk driving, prostitution, fishing, farming, politics, etc.

In general, if people are involved, economists study it.

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

A project that investigates the potential impact of minimum wages on teen drinking and driving. A much greater percentage of teens are impacted by minimum wage increases than is observed in older populations. I want to see if an increase in earnings produces significant increases in teen drinking and drunk driving.

Describe some ways your department serves northeastern Wisconsin.

Several faculty, including myself, provide advice to local media and corporations on economic problems and issues. The economics department also houses a center of economic education, which provides training and resources to high school economics teachers throughout the state.

Tell us about your family.

I am married. My wife (Kasi) and I have been together over eight years. Kasi's parents live in the Madison area, which is where we are both from originally. My parents currently live in the Chicago suburbs.

What are your hobbies?

I enjoy golfing a great deal, although I am not very good at it. I also enjoy hiking, traveling and playing the occasional game of basketball (not really good at this either). That said, I can get interested in just about anything competitive.

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