

## **Meet the Prof: Druscilla Scribner**

**by Faculty Advocacy Committee - Thursday, December 10, 2009**

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/2395/meet-the-prof-druscilla-scribner/>

*The following faculty Q&A was submitted by the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Faculty Advocacy Committee, a committee of the Faculty Senate. Tracy Slagter, assistant professor of political science, wrote the introduction.*

I am very lucky to count Dru Scribner as my colleague and my dear friend. She joined the faculty one year before I did, and in many respects she has served as an inspiration for both my teaching and my research.

Dru is a dedicated teacher, always challenging her students with innovative assignments and contriving new ways to assess their learning. Her research has recently earned her a three-year National Science Foundation grant to study constitutions and gender in Africa and Latin America, and this is only one example of a research agenda full of investigations into judicial and women's politics. She and I collaborated on a study abroad adventure to Germany, and our students and I will forever remember what we learned from and the good times that we had with Dru.

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

I was living in Denver, Colo., with my husband and two young children and had just completed my Ph.D. when I saw the UW Oshkosh position advertised. I was especially excited about the position at Oshkosh because this was the kind of school I was looking for (with a simultaneous focus on teaching and research) and the kind of community in which we could lay down roots as a family.

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

My path to political science has been a twisted one. After I graduated with a double major in economics and psychology from the University of California Santa Cruz, I spent about a year and a half traveling and working in Central America and South East Asia. I found that many of the questions I had pondered as an undergraduate student of economics likely had political answers. I went on to get master's degree in development studies from the London School of Economics, focusing on the politics of economic development.

I returned to the U.S. and interned in Washington, D.C., writing for the Council on Hemispheric Affairs and volunteering, but I was eager to travel to South America and put my degree to work. I moved to Chile, where I eventually landed a job as a business consultant with a Chilean firm specializing in strategic planning and sustainable business practices. In the mid 1990s, Chile was transitioning to democracy from 17 years of dictatorship and, as much I loved my job and corner office, I was drawn to trying to understand these political changes. I applied to graduate school in political science and moved back to the U.S. to pursue a more comprehensive understanding of what had become my passion: Latin American politics.

**What is your favorite thing about UW Oshkosh?**

My favorite thing about UW Oshkosh is the students. In my relatively short time here, I have had wonderful, smart and engaging students. I feel very fortunate to be able to teach in an environment where faculty can really get to know their students. I also like my department and enjoy bouncing ideas off of my colleagues. I know that my teaching and research is stronger because of their input.

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

Doing original research is one of the many things I love about my job. This summer I was awarded a multi-year National Science Foundation research grant for a collaborative project on gender and constitutions that I have been pursuing for several years with a colleague. This grant will allow us to study closely how and why the treatment of gender in constitutional law matters for women's political and economic standing.

The outcome of this research will help us to better understand the relationship between law and social change. It will contribute to debates about the influence of constitutional design on democracy and may impact the political strategies of women's advocacy groups, both domestic and international.

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

In addition to my academic service on campus, I supervise our Political Science Student Association. I am also the coordinator of the Latin American Studies minor and involved in the Women's Studies program as well as the International Studies program. I have mentored a number of students on their independent research projects and am now working with student research assistants as part of the National Science Foundation grant. I also co-led a study abroad trip to Germany in the summer of 2008. Outside of the University, I serve on the Board of Directors for the Fox Cities Community Health Center in Appleton.

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

The most common misperception that I come across is the assumption that political scientists "do politics" — that is, run for office or run campaigns or advise those who do. Most political scientists work to explain why the political world works the way it does, but do not run for public office.

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

I have two projects that I am particularly excited about. One is my project on gender and constitutions, which requires fieldwork out of country. I am looking forward to returning to Chile, Argentina and Uruguay in 2011 to interview legal scholars and activists as well as traveling to southern Africa (Botswana, Namibia and South Africa) in 2012 for similar research.

The other project I am working on is with my colleague, Tracy Slagter, who specializes in European politics. We are examining the impact that regional human rights courts, such as the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, have on the way politicians craft legislation. This research should help us to better understand how courts exercise political influence outside of the courtroom itself.

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

My research on Latin American politics and the study of gender and politics directly influences and enhances my teaching. I bring my knowledge, expertise, and passion for these countries and topics to lecture, course discussions and the work I assign to students.

In addition, the time I spend abroad in research means that I have first-hand knowledge of these countries and can incorporate personal observations into my lectures. In some cases, teaching enhances my research: The gender and constitutions project was partly inspired by my courses on women and politics and comparative law.

### **Describe some ways your department serves northeastern Wisconsin.**

The Department of Political Science trains students for a wide array of professions, including law, business, education, politics and nonprofit work, and in these roles our graduates engage in countless acts of public service. Moreover, faculty in the department provide expertise to journalists, government agencies and officials, and the broader public on issues as diverse as “how do we prevent war” to “how should presidents prepare for the job.”

Most importantly, through classes, lectures and public forums, the Political Science Department provides civic knowledge and understanding that is essential for an informed citizenry. Our students, in particular, develop a critical understanding of how public policy is created and how they can exercise democratic citizenship locally and globally to impact their world,

### **Tell us about your family.**

I am married and have two boys, age 7 and 5. I met my husband over dinner with friends in Guatemala where we were both studying Spanish. We commuted between San Diego, where I was working on my Ph.D., and Denver, where he worked as a doctor in a community clinic for those who would not otherwise have healthcare.

After I finished my field work in Chile and Argentina, I moved to Denver, where our children were born. We do not have family in Wisconsin; however, we still manage lots of grandparent time. My husband’s family lives in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and I take the boys to California every summer to visit my parents. We also have a wonderful dog, a curious cat, two guinea pigs and two fish. There is never a dull moment in our house!

### **What are your hobbies?**

I grew up riding horses, and the somewhat obscure sport of endurance racing has been a life long pursuit. My horse’s name is Max. Together we’ve ridden thousands of miles, including finishing the Tevis Cup (100 miles in 24 hours) and the Outlaw race (250 miles in five days) four years in a row. Max is retired now and lives with my parents in Northern California.

My other hobbies include downhill skiing, swimming and pottery. I enjoy my kids’ activities, which include soccer, karate, tennis, swimming, skiing, sledding, hiking and inventing new Star Wars LEGO

spacecraft as well as spending time with family and friends. This spring I will be coaching my son's under-6 soccer team.

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