

## **Meet the Prof: Jennifer Szydlik**

**by Faculty Advocacy Committee - Wednesday, May 27, 2009**

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/1987/meet-the-prof-jennifer-szydlik/>

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

Jennifer Earles Szydlik is a tireless supporter of elementary school teacher preparation at UW Oshkosh. She unifies her belief that anyone can learn to love mathematics with her scholarship in mathematics education.

Thanks to Jen's devotion to teaching, our exemplary math courses for future elementary school math teachers offer deep mathematical content using activities-based instruction that includes technology and history. Her past work also includes supporting the improvement of instruction for new mathematics faculty throughout Wisconsin by planning and coordinating meetings and workshops on issues related to college teaching.

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

I was a graduate student at Madison when I fell in love with Wisconsin. It also helps to have family nearby: My parents live in the UP in the summer, and my sister teaches chemistry at St. Norbert College in De Pere. I was offered several positions back in 1995 — but this one at UWO was the best fit for me.

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

Well, my mom and dad are both mathematicians, so I suppose they had some influence. My interest in mathematics education came about when I was a teaching assistant in graduate school and I wanted to better understand my students' mathematical thinking.

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

The students. No question.

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

I am most proud when a former student who is now an elementary teacher writes to me to let me know how something we studied in class made a difference in her work.

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

I supervise the Math Tutor Lab here in the department, and I am the coordinator of the graduate program for the Master of Science in mathematics education.

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

I think that many people believe that my job is just about teaching, when really that is maybe only a third of my work. University faculty do not just teach ideas; they create ideas and knowledge through research. They don't just use a textbook; they write them. They also write policy, evaluate and hire faculty and staff, administer programs and generally run the University.

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

My colleagues, Carol Seaman and John Beam, and I are working on developing activity-based textbooks for prospective elementary teachers.

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

Since I am a mathematics educator, my work directly informs my teaching. In fact, much of my research takes place in classrooms on campus or in the local schools. Right now, I am focused on understanding how to help people become more mathematically sophisticated.

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

Our faculty regularly create and give presentations at programs for children (e.g., Math and Science Rock or College Day for Kids), for practicing teachers (e.g., Wisconsin Mathematics Council workshops) and for local schools (e.g., Face-Off: the Math Game Show). We also help to prepare Northeast Wisconsin's future elementary, middle and high school mathematics teachers.

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

Steve Szydlak (another mathematics faculty member here at UWO) and I have been married for almost 18 years. I love that we can work together and talk "work" together and that we have offices only two doors apart — even if we see one another only in passing during the school day. We have two boys: Joe is 10 and a serious Packers fan. Ben is 8 and loves to play in the snow.

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

I love to play Sheepshead and Bananagrams, sing karaoke loudly, work on my drafty old house, dig in the dirt, drink good coffee, pick berries and bake pies, hike in High Cliff State Park with my family, and read and write trashy 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](mailto:uwot@uwosh.edu).*