

Meet the Prof: Lori Carrell

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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. Tony Palmeri, associate professor of communication, wrote the introduction.

Dr. Lori Carrell's vision is "to educate, inspire, and equip others to maximize the transformative power of the spoken word." At UW Oshkosh, she has given shape to that vision in a myriad of ways. Students with a reputation for being reserved or silent always seem to "come out of their shell" in Dr. Carrell's classes. I believe this is because of Dr. Carrell's enthusiasm, ability to empathize with all students and role modeling of excellence in communication.

Dr. Carrell's rigorous scholarship also brings much positive attention to the UW Oshkosh Department of Communication. Dr. Carrell presents her scholarship to audiences in a manner that is engaging and, like her teaching, transformative. When I see her name in the program of a professional association, I know that UW Oshkosh and my department will be well represented!

How did you find your way to UW Oshkosh?

After teaching speech and theatre in my hometown high school in southern Indiana, teaching Eskimos in Alaska and completing graduate school in Colorado, I was looking for a place to be a professor and start my family. My research partner and best friend in grad school graduated from Ripon and knew some people here at Oshkosh. He told me about the opening in communication education here and sold me on the "great Wisconsin lifestyle" — so I came for an interview in 1991. The rest is history. Ironically, my friend Kent Menzel took a position at DePauw near my Hoosier family!

Why did you choose to go into your field?

Not a short answer ... but I'll try. I wanted to have a life that made a difference and truly believed the spoken word has the *potential* for constructive impact, passionate about teaching and learning — it all fit together. When I saw the list of classes available for the Ph.D. in speech communication at the University of Denver, it was like gazing at the Baskin Robbins menu. Perhaps it's a calling. I know that I am convinced there is high relevancy in the study of communication for almost all of us as well as great need for people to increase their competency and understanding. The research contexts in this discipline are endless, energizing me and preventing the possibility of burnout.

In high school, I enjoyed theatre and forensics but was also fascinated with psychology. I was especially interested in what people chose not to discuss and how such decisions affected relationships as well as how one person's words (or silence) influenced another person's actions. I found studying such things intriguing, and I loved being in the classroom.

In this discipline of communication, we study how meaning is constructed among human beings. It's just riveting ... what can I say?

What is your favorite thing about UW Oshkosh?

My students.

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

When I discover that a student has gone into a profession in which they are using what they learned here to have a constructive impact; for example, recently, a first-generation college student who started at UW Oshkosh with very little interest in learning, caught the passion, studied abroad, connected with her subject matter in communication and ... (drum roll) ... now she's in the Peace Corps at great sacrifice to her personal life and great promise for her Ukrainian students and her future.

Such things don't go on my resume, but they are the type of outcome that provides the most satisfaction. I'm not sure it's a professional accomplishment, but I know I was a part of her journey, and that feels really good.

What leadership or service activities are you involved in?

My primary leadership role at this stage of my career is as director of the Center for Scholarly Teaching (CST). I also find great joy in coaching the graduation speakers.

What is the most common misperception about what you study?

The most common misperception is that the discipline of communication has an "s" on the end of it — communicationS. It does not.

Another misperception is that relationships end because of a "lack of communication," when actually, it's not about quantity, it's about quality.

A third myth about communication is that spoken words (unlike print) evaporate once they have been uttered. Wrong again. Every utterance has the potential to exist permanently in the mind of another.

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

My research on sermon communication has been extensive, with more than 30,000 listeners and hundreds of clergy from across the country providing data for analysis through the Lilly-endowed Center for Excellence in Congregational Leadership. It's interesting to learn that most clergy have not had communication training, even though they are in a profession that requires face-to-face public speaking on a weekly basis.

Last year, my focus was on listening, including coding of listener journals as well as measuring the impact of listener communication training. This year, I'm examining the usage and impact of story. I just completed the analysis of 54 sermons and thousands of listener-impact surveys. Narrative is underused in

this context, given its universal appeal ... more results to come!

With the privilege of a recent trip to Oman and a trip to the Grand Mosque there, I've begun to ruminate about the feasibility of expanding this work to global contexts. We'll see what's next.

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

The sermon research assists my teaching of public speaking and research methods, and it is also connected to adult learning theory and practice. All my other research is specifically focused on teaching and learning. The challenge is to practice what I learn so that the quality of my teaching increases continuously. I've studied teacher clarity, student learning styles, student motivation, diversity and other variables that affect learning in college classrooms. In my role as CST director, I organize workshops that bring such information to the UW Oshkosh teaching community and also support others who are investigating teaching and learning research questions.

The research that changed my teaching most was a project I did after returning from a study abroad trip to Ecuador. My students were so amazing on that trip. Many of them made incredible progress in their learning about intercultural communication — truly dramatic transformations. I wanted to figure out how it happened, so (after approval from the IRB), I analyzed their journals to discover catalysts of learning that could be utilized in the regular classroom. To my surprise, those catalysts included ambiguity, anxiety and teacher authenticity.

It might be better if we could just drop every student into the jungle, but given certain legal and financial realities, I try instead to integrate those findings into the learning opportunities in my classes.

Describe some ways your department serves Northeastern Wisconsin.

Individual department members are major contributors to life in this community. We live out our philosophy that the spoken word can have constructive influence by participating in city council, judging debate and forensic tournaments, providing keynote addresses and communication workshops, coaching and consulting with public speakers, serving on boards and committees of local organizations, and mediating conflict.

Many of our communication students participate in similar activities, with service to non-profit organizations, speaking engagements, internships and oral interpretation performances. Last year, they performed at the ArtWalk, the Senior Center and several local schools.

Tell us about your family.

My children are Cody, who is graduating from Oshkosh West in June, and Cheyenne, who is a sophomore. Cody was born during my first year here at UW Oshkosh, so both kids are true cheese heads. My husband is Thom Nustad. He is currently serving as the director of development for BEAMING Inc., a nonprofit organization providing therapeutic horseback riding for people with emotional and physical disabilities. We also house the community's fattest feline and most adorable puppy, Gracie.

What are your hobbies?

I love to be outside, near water and trees — engaged in deep conversation. Is that a hobby?

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