

## **Meet the Prof: Tracy Slagter**

**by Faculty Advocacy Committee - Wednesday, April 04, 2012**

<http://www.uwosh.edu/today/17979/meet-the-prof-tracy-slagter/>

The following faculty Q&A was submitted by the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Faculty Advocacy Committee, a committee of the Faculty Senate.

David Siemers, professor and chair of the political science department, wrote the introduction.

I have the great pleasure of introducing you to my wonderful colleague and friend, Dr. Tracy Slagter. From the day Tracy set foot on our campus six years ago she made a positive difference for our students, for our department and for the University as a whole. Tracy strives to be the best teacher she can be every day and inspires and assists our students in becoming the best they can be.

Tracy's accomplishments are many, and always focused on students: She is the faculty editor of our undergraduate journal, *Oshkosh Scholar*. In this capacity she teaches students how to do research, which helps them to succeed in a variety of fields. For the last four years she has served as our campus pre-law adviser, shepherding many students through the potentially intimidating process of applying to law schools. This year, she was a leader of our general education reform effort, a massive undertaking, which has produced a terrific plan.

In short, Dr. Slagter is an ideal colleague and mentor for our students. We are so fortunate to have her and other dedicated teachers like her at UW Oshkosh.

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

"I knew I wanted a job in the Midwest after I finished graduate school, and told our placement director at the University of Iowa that, ideally, I wanted a job in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa or Michigan. He laughed at me and said that such specificity was a tall order, and he was right: I had four interviews before I finished my Ph.D., all of them at colleges on the East Coast. None of them felt right to me. But while I was finishing up some dissertation research in Berlin, Germany, I got an email from a friend containing the posting from UW Oshkosh, and I applied immediately. I interviewed here just a week after returning from Europe (on my birthday, no less!), and while on campus I felt immediately at home. The campus and the culture actually felt a lot like where I received my bachelor's degree, the University of Minnesota, Duluth. It was (and continues to be) the right fit."

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

"I knew since the 10th grade that I wanted to be a professor of something, and initially I thought I wanted to go to graduate school for a Ph.D. in German and German Literature. I studied abroad in Austria for the better part of a year while I was an undergrad, and ended up having an internship with an Austrian law professor that really changed my outlook on everything. She introduced me to the study of human rights and to the laws that govern the international community. I was hooked. My interest in all things Europe

and in political institutions (such as legislatures, courts and the European Union) continued through graduate school and was nurtured by my dissertation adviser at the University of Iowa. I guess I'm lucky that I knew that this was the type of career I wanted from a very early age—I feel like my path was set before I even graduated from high school."

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

"There's a lot to love about UW Oshkosh, and certainly the students are a huge part of that and I am motivated and inspired by them every day. But honestly, my favorite aspect of UW Oshkosh is working in my own department, where my colleagues are also my close friends and where our students hang out simply because the environment is so good for questioning, thinking, learning and laughing."

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

"I study international courts (specifically the European Court of Justice, which is essentially like the Supreme Court for all 27 European Union member states) and wrote my dissertation on the relationship between courts and national legislatures in Europe. I turned part of it into an article that was published in the best journal for European Union research. That alone thrilled me, but I was even more excited when I found out the piece was chosen by other scholars as "Best Article of the Year." This meant so much to me, because the topic of the paper and the methodology was a bit unconventional, and the validation from other scholars was nice.

"More than that, though, my proudest accomplishments are things you'll never see on my CV: Students out in the world doing successful things because of their time spent here at UW Oshkosh."

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

"I am the faculty adviser for *Oshkosh Scholar*, our campus undergraduate research journal, as well as the campus pre-law adviser (with my colleague Dr. Jerry Thomas). Additionally, I'm on the General Education Reform Leadership Team, among other things. I really enjoy my service activities, as they allow me to get to know other amazing people on this campus.

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

"The following comments are sure to drive me batty: "You must have a lot of free time if you only teach on Tuesdays and Thursdays!" and "Summer's almost here, and you must be excited to have three months off!" There's a common misperception that faculty members are only working when we're standing in front of a classroom, and it's completely incorrect. As a faculty member, the part of my job that takes the *least* amount of time is actually teaching my classes. When I'm not doing that, I'm preparing for those classes, grading, in meetings, helping students with research, advising students, working on my own research, attending to other University-related projects, etc. And I think most faculty members agree that the summers are a vital period we use to complete major projects that we cannot complete during the intensity of the regular semester.

"As a political scientist, I think there's a misperception that somehow my job involves telling my students *what* to think politically. In actuality, my job is to give students the tools to think critically about

politics, to ask good questions, and to help them find unbiased answers to those questions grounded in sound research. My favorite moments are those when students are forced to reconcile their beliefs with political science research, especially when they've conducted that research themselves."

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

"Since becoming a Wisconsin Teaching Fellow in 2010-2011, I've been very motivated by the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. I've been taught to critically examine my teaching from a researcher's perspective: What really works in my classroom, and why? How can I ensure students are learning what I'm teaching? How can that knowledge be useful to them after they leave my classroom? I have several on-going projects right now related to teaching in Political Science, and these are both interesting and immediately useful to me.

"In addition, I'm always excited to be working on anything related to Europe, and I really enjoy projects that give us a window into how political institutions all over the world operate. Currently, I'm returning to research on the European Court of Justice and examining how this very powerful court can be influenced by the governments of the member states of the European Union. As we know from the American experience, courts are tremendously political actors, and I've always been curious about the ways in which courts – especially one vested with as much authority as the ECJ – make their decisions."

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

"In order to be a good teacher I think you have to have a passion for your discipline, because students know when their professor isn't engaged. Research gets me excited about my discipline and further convinces me of its importance, and that excitement is contagious in the classroom."

**Describe some ways your department serves Northeastern Wisconsin.**

"On a broad level, the members of my department strive to show students and citizens how politics impacts *everything* they do, and that understanding how local, state, national and international politics work is essential to their future success. It's easy to be overwhelmed by politics, to resign yourself to not knowing anything about the Republican primary, why people protested last year in Madison, why the Greek debt crisis isn't resolved yet or why NATO intervened in Libya but not in Syria. Our department gives students the tools to understand and objectively analyze the world around them, separating fact from spin. In a world where you can find any number of blogs, podcasts or TV programs to support your particular point of view, critical thinking and research are essential, lifelong skills.

"My department is visible in the community, and my colleagues who specialize in American politics are constantly active as experts on local, state and national political activity. Members of our faculty who specialize in international or comparative politics are on-hand for comments about politics outside the United States. Our department is a driving force behind the American Democracy Project, which regularly contributes to campus speakers and programs that draw attendees from all over campus and the community. Most importantly, however, we are a department of committed and excellent teachers whose finest and most lasting contribution is our students, who are successful in Wisconsin and beyond."

**Tell us about your family.**

"My husband, Todd, and I met in college and have lived together in Minnesota, Colorado and Iowa. Todd is an attorney in Oshkosh. Together we have two children who keep us busy; Nathan is 8 and Meg is 4, and both are pretty amazing individuals. We often joke that our third child is our house, which we are constantly (and happily) renovating."

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

"I recently became a vegetarian, and so I'm really enjoying learning how to cook recipes that satisfy my family (not vegetarians) while still being meat-free. Additionally, I'm an avid reader not only of political science research (which I enjoy even if it's not related to a project or a class I'm teaching) but also of literature, poetry and cookbooks. And of course, if there's a room to be painted somewhere, I'm your girl."

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