

**Profile of
Kathryn Olson**
Associate Professor of Communication, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
2006 Regents Teaching Excellence Award Recipient

Background and Experience (Selected)

- Joined the UW-Milwaukee faculty in 1991.
- B.A. from the UW-Eau Claire, M.A. from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Ph.D. from Northwestern University.
- Recipient of the 1996 Wisconsin Communication Association Andrew T. Weaver Award for Wisconsin's Outstanding College Educator, and the 1993 Central States Communication Association Outstanding New Teacher Award.
- Selected as a Wisconsin Teaching Scholar in 2002-03, a Center for Instructional and Professional Development Scholar in 2001-02, and a Wisconsin Teaching Fellow in 1995-96.
- Recipient of the 2005 Daniel Rohrer Research Award for "the outstanding research monograph published in argumentation research during the given year," from the American Forensic Association, and the 1995 and 2005 Golden Anniversary Monograph Award for "the most outstanding scholarly monograph published during the previous calendar year" from the National Communication Association.
- Conducted professional workshops across the country on the teaching of rhetoric to other instructors.
- Authored over thirty articles on teaching and rhetoric.
- Spearheaded the creation of a Rhetorical Leadership Certificate at the graduate level for the Department of Communication at the UW-Milwaukee.
- Devoted considerable effort to educational outreach activities working in the community to improve the understanding of political debates, including appearances on WUWM radio.

In Professor Olson's own words:

- "My main objective is to empower learners to become agents of change. Thus, I need to help them develop critical thinking and arguing skills as well as an ability to discern multiple options in any given circumstance. Realizing this objective entails three goals: 1) facilitating students' mastery of *new ways to understand or approach their worlds*; 2) encouraging students to develop *skills that they can use to improve those worlds*; and 3) helping students *to recognize everyday situations in which they might use their abilities to address concerns that matter to them, then challenging them to do so.*"
- "**Positive empowerment** involves not only what one knows, but also *what one can do with that knowledge (...)*. First, it demands a commitment to *active learning*. No one masters a skill that they can use independently by solely observing someone else demonstrate that skill. Thus, I constantly use learning strategies that incorporate games, role-playing, journaling, small groups, debates,

videos and short writes in classes. Second, (it) requires creating opportunities for students to practice a skill multiple times and receive ample feedback (...). Third, it is important *to make practice engaging and fun*. Finally, positive empowerment demands coaching students to make connections between course content and their own concerns, to recognize when which skills are applicable. (...) My Rhetorical Leadership program especially cultivates a responsibility to get involved beyond the classroom and campus.”

In the words of her students:

- “Of Kathryn Olson’s many positive teaching skills, including enthusiastic leadership of class discussions and ability to take an interdisciplinary approach to studying and teaching communication that enhances students’ understanding of rhetoric, I find that her greatest pedagogical strength is the ability to transfer an excitement for writing and critical thinking to her students.”
 - Betsy Ellis Widup, first-year law student at Loyola University
- “What puts Professor Olson above other teachers is her ability to push students to new levels of critical thinking, while at the same time making learning fun and inviting. She accomplishes this by having a student-centered approach to teaching, in which she presents information through various channels for visual, auditory, and hands-on learners. Professor Olson understands that all students do not learn the same way and strives to give every student the same opportunity to excel.”
 - Christina Fey, undergraduate student at the UW-Milwaukee.

In the words of her colleagues:

- (Kathryn Olson) “is an excellent and committed classroom teacher, employs extremely effective teaching strategies to enhance her students’ learning, and has had a significant impact on many of her students’ intellectual development. (...) she has touched, and changed, the lives of many students in her career. As her colleague, I see her contributions to the lives of students in Communication everyday.”
 - Renee A. Meyers, Professor of Communication, UW-Milwaukee
- “Professor Olson’s contribution to education at UW-Milwaukee has led to the development of the Rhetorical Leadership program. (...) The goals of the program are the teaching of argumentation, critical thinking, combined with an ethical consideration of issues in public advocacy. The need for the development of responsible participation in public discourse makes this contribution and the students graduating from the program prepared to participate in a thoughtful and constructive manner in public policy. No other program of this kind exists in the U.S. and we expect that eventually this will serve as a model to other institutions seeking to make the contribution of the humanities more directly into the lives of the students.”
 - Mike Allen, Professor and Chair, Dept. of Communication, UW-Milwaukee