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2018-2019 OCUFA TEACHING AND ACADEMIC LIBRARIANSHIP AWARDS

CITATION FOR DR. JENNIFER IRWIN



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Fifty years ago this month (in October of 1969), country music singer Glenn Campbell released a song that went on to dominate the musical charts for several weeks. It was called, 'Try a little kindness.' Most of us gathered here today likely know that song. It has been re-released by many singers since then, including by Campbell himself. Today, I want to acknowledge how Dr. Jennifer Irwin of Western University's School of Health Studies has elevated the core message and gist of that song – kindness – into an effective pedagogical tool for active and engaged learning and as the essence of good health.

Dr. Irwin is gripped by a passion for health promotion. It propels her to search for the pedagogical and curricular keys that make for both student and societal transformation. Kindness and compassion, Dr. Irwin has concluded, function not only as learning goal and desired outcome, but as the means to that end. In other words, the goal of kindness is attained via the methodology and its process, which is also kindness.

Dr. Irwin's students have been infected by her passion and eagerly undertake kindness projects such the one they have called: "The Butterfly Effect: A Legacy Through Kindness," for which they spread out across the campus and undertake random acts of kindness or RAK. Through this exercise they too are transformed and learn how kindness helps both giver and receiver feel better as a result of a genuinely kind and friendly encounter.

The emphasis on teaching her students kindness has not diminished Dr. Irwin's commitment to academic rigour – nor has it reduced her commitment to effective and engaging classroom teaching on other curricular subjects. Student response serves as both testimony and measure



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thereof. For example, Dr. Irwin posts her lectures on-line and yet the seats in her classroom lectures are still mostly full, much to the envy of her colleagues. Similarly, her teaching evaluations are consistently in their own stratosphere – way above any university or departmental mean or median.

Dr. Irwin's own scholarly output is further evidence of her commitment to doing the deep digging required of a professor. She has served in various roles on committees for over 60 Masters and 40 PhD students. And she has published 95 peer-reviewed journal articles. But she also recognizes that all of this is mere detritus if her students and the communities they will go on to serve do not nurture the centrality of kindness for human health and wellness.

What I find most inspiring are the testimonials from colleagues and students who point out that Dr. Irwin practices her belief in kindness: "She lives her philosophy." It should come as no surprise, therefore, that *Western News* portrayed Dr. Irwin with a cape as a Kindness Crusader. Her students certainly feel that way and enthuse with accolades for Dr. Irwin, with comments like: "Dr. Irwin is the best professor I have ever had."

Our world needs more students who have learned the divinely human art of kindness. In other words, we need to have more Dr. Irwins who are willing to try a little kindness in their pedagogy. Please join me in congratulating Dr. Jennifer Irwin as a 2018-2019 OCUFA Teaching Award recipient.