

The logo for OCUFA, consisting of the letters 'OCUFA' in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The background of the entire page features abstract geometric shapes in shades of green, teal, and dark blue, creating a modern, layered effect.

OCUFA

Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations
Union des associations des professeurs des universités de l'Ontario

2019-2020 OCUFA Teaching and Academic Librarianship Awards

Citation for Dr. Shoshanah Jacobs



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A *transdisciplinary transformer* is what comes to mind when you think of Dr. Shoshanah Jacobs. A teacher who places students at the very centre of learning, Shoshanah is not afraid to think beyond content. Instead, she challenges old practices and drives forward a new culture of teaching by creating safe learning environments that allow her students to take risks in a way that fosters their personal growth and professional development. One former student writes that, “Dr. Jacobs places students at the very centre of their learning experiences and emphasizes the importance of taking risks and being comfortable with what you don’t know”.

By focusing on students and their learning experiences, Shoshanah expands her biology classroom beyond cells and molecules, and provides students the opportunity to develop their critical thinking skills, while encouraging both creativity and collaboration. One shining example is the ICON course that Shoshanah developed with her colleagues, which teaches transferable skills using a scaffolded curriculum with an emphasis on multidisciplinary collaborative work. In this educational framework, students form partnerships with the community to solve real-world problems using sustainable solutions. By placing value on the student and what they can achieve, they are transformed and empowered through their experiences. One student in her ICON course said, “I don’t feel like I’m in a class, I feel like I am part of a team: a team that has to get something important done. My motivation comes from the fact that this work is not just a class paper, or a report, or a group presentation...but an actual thing that will be used in the real world.”

Diversity and inclusion are also at the centre of Shoshanah’s teaching philosophy. Diversity in her vast approaches to creating valuable student experiences, and inclusion in her ability to bring in a transdisciplinary team of collaborators. In Shoshanah’s design of a novel experiential Arctic Biodiversity field course in Nunavut, she brings together southern and northern students in an inclusive learning environment so that they may study biodiversity from a variety of knowledge systems. Her work with students also extends into other disciplines, including Psychology, Human Kinetics, Environmental Studies, and the Arts and Sciences program. And she’s working with the Campobello Island community on a multi-year endeavor that will support the work of both undergraduate and graduate students from several colleges at the University of Guelph. Her nominator states, “I have witnessed the far-reaching impact of Dr. Jacobs’ scholarship in teaching and learning, extending well beyond their home university. I can say, without a doubt, that Dr. Jacobs is the most innovative, inclusive, and impactful educator I have ever had the privilege of working with.”

Although I have never personally met Shoshanah, I recently stumbled upon her Twitter account. I recognized her name and smiled when I saw her adorable avatar. Soon I was immersed in her series of tweets welcoming this year’s incoming students to her introductory biology course. Her messages were energetic and supportive, clearly reflecting her commitment to her students, and setting the stage for a successful year ahead.

Congratulations to Dr Shoshanah Jacobs, recipient of a 2019-2020 OCUFA Teaching Award.