

Sacred Heart University

From the Selected Works of Bronwyn Cross-Denny, Ph.D., LCSW

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Bronwyn Cross-Denny, *Sacred Heart University*



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SAGE Marketing Manager Shari Countryman presents the award to Professor Bronwyn Cross-Denny.

From Wall Street to social worker, Sacred Heart University's Bronwyn Cross-Denny's ability to effectively teach social work research to students in an innovative way led to her winning the SAGE Publications and Council of Social Work Education (CSWE) Award for Innovative Teaching in Social Work Education this year.

Cross-Denny, assistant professor and program director of social work at SHU, submitted an application for the award with low expectations. In September, to her astonishment, she found out she was a winner. Two recipients or teams win the award each year.

"I didn't think there was any way I was going to win," Cross-Denny said, who started at SHU in 2009 as an adjunct professor and by the following year was full time.

At the CSWE's Annual Program Meeting conference in October, Cross-Denny accepted her award and also taught a workshop based on her innovative teachings titled "Making Research Accessible: Reducing Research Anxiety While Developing Competence."

According to the CSWE website, the SAGE/CSWE 2015 Award for Innovative Teaching in Social Work Education was "established in February 2012 to honor and recognize innovative teaching in social work education. The award's purpose is to promote innovative teaching in social work by highlighting it as it emerges, and recognize the individuals who have played

significant roles in bringing it about.” Award recipients are selected based on effectiveness, transferability and significance.

Before Cross-Denny found social work, the Michigan native put her knowledge towards computer science. “I was really good in math, so I was taking a lot of math classes,” Cross-Denny said about her undergraduate career at Western Michigan University. “I starting taking computer science and I got my bachelor’s in that.”

After graduation, Cross-Denny moved to New York, and got a job on Wall Street doing end user support. “I hated it,” Cross-Denny said. “What I liked about it was helping the people solve their computer problems. I liked working with people.”

While at JP Morgan, the company was involved in a mentorship program. Youth from the Bronx were bused in and assigned a mentor. It was at this point that Cross-Denny knew what she wanted to do. She quit her job and through networking became a caseworker with Talbot Perkins Children’s Services in New York City.

Cross-Denny moved up the career ladder and took on leadership roles at various agencies counseling and helping families and children in a number of ways. She even worked on a recovery initiative at the Family and Children’s Agency in Norwalk, which was responsible for helping those affected by 9/11.

Eventually Cross-Denny received her master’s degree and doctorate in social work from Fordham University where she found her knack for teaching. She was an adjunct professor at Fordham for several years. “I never thought I would love teaching so much,” Cross-Denny said.

When SHU was in need of a professor to teach research, Cross-Denny was up for the challenge.

Cross-Denny said she remembers sitting in her master’s research class and all the students around her were “freaking out. I thought, ‘this really isn’t that hard,’” Cross-Denny said. “I thought they were letting their anxiety get the best of them.”

In teaching her class, Cross-Denny didn’t want students to “freak out.” She believes women, especially, have an anxiety about math and research, and her goal is to teach students to embrace math and embrace research, but to first handle their anxieties.

The semester-long research course is rigorous, Cross-Denny said, but it helps students become better social workers. In the course, students have to understand the research process. Cross-Denny developed a step-by-step process that takes students through developing research proposals. “It really seems to help them,” she noted.

Cross-Denny provides feedback and lets the students know they should always be thinking “outside of the box.” She also asks students what they are anxious about; are they anxious about the research or the content? Whatever the anxiety, they deal with it head on. “Often it’s anxiety about the program,” she said. “So we have them debrief and address it. Anxiety gets in the way of learning.”

These methods of teaching earned her the award. Cross-Denny taught others her innovative ways at the workshop held at the CSWE conference last month.

“Dr. Bronwyn Cross-Denny was selected because of her innovative, step-by-step methods for breaking down the research process for students,” said a SAGE spokesperson. “Her methods have helped students reduce anxiety associated with research and develop confidence and competence for future success in social work.”

Cross-Denny was pleased to receive the award and the validation of her methods.