FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

Dr. Tracy Fawns
Assistant Professor of Nursing
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By Malia H Adamson

Dr. Tracy Fawns, Assistant Professor of Nursing has been at Dixie State University (DSU) since January of 2018. Her teaching specialties lie in research, which she does as much of as she can, as well as organizational leadership and health systems. She contributes this knowledge to the DSU Undergraduate Research Committee, as well as the research committee for the College of Health Sciences, and chair for the research committee for the DSU Department of Nursing. Outside of DSU, she is on the Board of Directors and sits on the Nominating Committee for the Western Institute of Nursing Research, for which she participates in podium presentations at their annual conference each spring.

INNOVATION IN TEACHING

Designing the Online Teaching Experience

Teaching online is not something that is new to Dr. Fawns. Before coming to DSU, she taught online courses for undergraduate and graduate level programs at various universities, and ever since then, she has been trying to re-implement those past techniques in her current teaching. This past year was the perfect opportunity for her to hone in on those skills and make a fun online experience for her students.

Dr. Fawns sometimes teaches using a flipped classroom, meaning that she pre-recorders lectures, posts them online for students to watch before class, and then uses class time to build on the online information. However, her online materials get a lot of love and some Dr. Fawns’ flair added to them as well; she creates specially designed videos which include closed captions, illustrations, animations, photography, and full audio narrations done by Dr. Fawns. The videos are posted on her own YouTube channel, which makes access very easy for the students.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE TO DO OUTSIDE OF WORK?
When it comes to non-scholarly landscape painting in both acrylic and watercolor. She also worked for quite some time as a rafting and kayaking guide, and often puts that expertise to use when taking trips as a solo packrafter, a form of camping where one hikes in with all of the necessary gear into a water source, and then camps and paddles and hikes back out, instead of traditional driving or hiking.

An unusual fact about Dr. Fawns is that she has 11 toes! She's also super introverted, which isn't something most students think after having her as an outgoing teacher. Because of this, she actually enjoys remote teaching quite a bit.

Active Learning for In the Classroom

Dr. Fawns uses in-class time to create active learning opportunities, such as breaking down case studies with the students, or creating breakout sessions for the students to ask questions about the material to each other and her. As an additional activity, Dr. Fawns has actually created her own games and brainteasers for the students to do in class. For example, she has started doing virtual escape rooms, where students work as a group and answer concept-related questions that help them escape. For the escape rooms, she uses Google Forms as an easy program to create them. A creator can design the clues so that if students get the answer correct, they go to the next question, or if not, they are sent back to the previous one. She also adds illustrations and other things to make it fun and a little immersive. She often does about 10-15 questions in the rooms, and it takes her students about a half hour to do, but they really enjoy it and it engages them well into the topic they are focusing on for the day.

These games work well because they bring a lot of energy to the classroom, and gives students a unique way to retain information. Prof. Fawns makes sure to mix up the activities so that students do not know what activity that they will be doing that week. It might be a case study, might be an escape room, or it might be a group activity. This way, students can have a bit of excitement about the course and how it will go ahead. As well as this, she rewards students with small prizes for winning the activities or completing them first, which further engages students to pay attention and do well.

Learning in a Pandemic

As well as this, Dr. Fawns has put a lot of thought into working with the students in the time of a pandemic. She does not want to penalize any student for being sick, and as such, she provides everything they need to know in a virtual environment. This way, all students have access to the same resources, whether they are in class or not.

With this approach to class, she has had greater student attendance this semester than any of her other semester. She believes that this is because the time period is less daunting, and that the time is more useful to the students, so they want to come and participate. It's tolerable, doable, and exciting.

WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO COME TO DSU?

Really, it was just time for a change. Dr. Fawns had traveled down here on road trips quite often and really liked the area. When she decided to start looking for a new teaching job in nursing, DSU ended up being the perfect fit. With no family to have to worry about making a move, it was an easy transition for her and her dog, Henry.
Dr. Fawns is from the southern Oregon coast. It has been quite the climate change, but with having summers off, it hasn’t been too bad of a difference, since she can escape the heat by going somewhere cool. In the summer of 2018, she hiked across Ireland. And, this past summer, she hiked the Colorado Trail.

In the nursing program, Dr. Fawns works with a student for two years instead of just one class. Every semester is a new cohort of 48 new students, so often there will be 200 students at a time across the program. Over such a long period of time, one really gets to know the students and a bit about their lives. One of Dr. Fawns’ favorite parts of learning to teach was learning a Socratic teaching method, which helps prompts the students to expound on their thoughts and knowledge. The pleasure in this comes from listening to the students share their own knowledge and ideas. She has been learning to step back and let the students have more participation in the class. When students teach each other, and the quiet or shy students even get involved, it’s an amazing experience.

One of Dr. Fawns’ past nursing instructors. One particular instructor she had connected really well with her, so they stayed in touch, and ended up being a mentor to her for the remainder of her own education career. Now that Prof. Fawns teaches, she still keeps in touch with her previous mentor, and the two of them are able to share information and experiences to help each other grow. It’s been quite the journey, and she’s enjoyed having them as such an amazing resource.

On the side of physical teaching resources, Dr. Fawns is extremely tech-savvy, and as such, uses a lot of technology to help her teach her courses and make them interactive. For example, she uses Kahoot for a lot of in-class quizzes. Camtasia by TechSmith as well as NearPod, however, have been her favorite programs, as they allow her to create her online videos for the class, allowing a combination of videos, images, quizzes, and narration. For face-to-face classes, Mentimeter has been super helpful in creating an engaged classroom with real-time polls, quizzes, word clouds, and Q&As.
WHAT INSPIRES YOU IN YOUR TEACHING?

The most inspiring thing for Dr. Fawns is seeing students that have graduated from her classes go on to complete higher education, publish books or research, or just do anything successful in the field. It is so nice to see that something you have done in your teaching has made an impact on a student’s life, and it makes all the effort in teaching worth it.

In a shorter term, something that really inspires and re-invigorates Dr. Fawns is the students’ final research projects. The students in her classes do a project that spans the whole semester, and they then present their findings on that project to her and the rest of the class at the end of the semester. Dr. Fawns loves seeing what each student has learned over the semester, and what they have gotten out of their work. It helps her to see what makes an impact on students over the semester, and what has helped them to understand their bigger career goals.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE CLASS TO TEACH? WHY IS IT YOUR FAVORITE?

Evidence-Based Practice and Research Methods is Prof. Fawns’s favorite class to teach, as research is her area of passion. She is excited and motivated when it comes to research methods, so she has had a blast putting together the course for students. It’s a hard concept, so it is fun to come up with creative ways to help students understand and learn it. Often the entry-level nursing students that take the class are often hesitant on the subject because they don’t yet see how it applies to them. But reaching out and being able to show these students just what can come from the area is something that Dr. Fawns greatly enjoys.

WHAT IS YOUR MOST CHALLENGING TEACHING EXPERIENCE?

[Image of Dr. Fawns in a classroom setting and a student research project display]
What Advice Would You Give to Other Faculty Teaching at DSU?

Dr. Fawns encourages staff to be supportive of the students, especially at this time of a pandemic. They are a lot more stressed than they are letting on, and it is a hard time for all of us. It doesn’t take a lot of effort to be a bit more forgiving and lenient with participation because of circumstances outside of the classroom.

Something that has really surprised Dr. Fawns is that, because of this semi-relaxation in the student relationship, the students have actually respected her more than in previous years, and have been much happier and more engaged in class than ever before. As long as learning is happening, the little things don’t matter as much. As well as this, when a student is late, Dr. Fawns will reach out to them and ask what is going on. Perhaps they have kids at home with them, or they’ve had a job change with the pandemic that takes up much of their time. When one can reach out, it lets the students feel like they are cared for, as well as gives the instructor an opportunity of better understanding that may help going forward with the class. Just be patient and understanding in times like these.

Student Reviews:

“One thing I feel that Professor Fawns has done to help her students be successful is communicating effectively. She always communicates with us as students and asks our opinion. She is open to listen and accommodate certain things to help us to be the most successful we can!”

- M. M.
“Dr. Fawns has been absolutely wonderful in providing a flexible yet well-supplemented education to her students. She has done a fantastic job in collaborating with us in making sure we understand the material required as well as adapting to our learning style collectively. She does a great job in making sure we are informed of any changes that occur to the course while we are online. I am very impressed and grateful for her help and what I have learned from her courses.”

- Z.M.

“Dr. Fawns’s narration videos are very helpful and I can tell that she spends a lot of time making them. They’re an easy way to learn and an easy resource to go back to especially when things are crazy with online learning!”

- M.J.

“Dr. Fawns is an amazing educator! She is definitely one of the smartest and most put-together professors I’ve ever had. Her organization and planning help us to fully understand the material. She creates pre-recorded lecture videos for us so that we can learn part of the material before class. This way, some of our class time can be used for fun learning activities through Kahoot and Zoom chat rooms. Dr. Fawns is also very kind and patient with answering our questions, and we are so lucky to have her!”

- J.M.