

Faculty Spotlight

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Dr. Samantha Larson, Assistant Professor, Public Administration

Could you tell us about your research interests?

I have come to identify myself as a social equity scholar. I apply that lens within public policy and program implementation, evaluation, and analysis. But more specifically, I examine how the field of policy and public administration can better understand and advance social equity, belonging, democracy, community resilience, and healing. I've looked at these topics both theoretically and practically in areas such as public transit, public health, emergency management, and higher education.

What research projects are you currently working on? What would you like your next project to be?

I have several research projects in the works, but three stand out at the moment. First, I'm leading a study to assess the social vulnerability, disaster resilience, and adaptive capacities of 14 counties in East Central Wisconsin, which is funded by the Sustainability Institute for Regional Transformations and Faculty Development. Second, I'm a co-principal investigator on an ADVANCE grant aimed at enhancing equity and inclusion in STEM departments at UWO while also mitigating the systemic factors that create inequities in the academic profession, which is funded by the National Science Foundation. And third, I'm a co-principal investigator on a research initiative that will provide a roadmap for recruiting, training, and managing a modern public sector workforce in Wisconsin, which is funded by the Tommy G. Thompson Center on Public Leadership.

What challenges have you faced in your career to date? What have you learned from those experiences?

Finding the right balance between scholarship, teaching, and service has been an ongoing challenge for me. It takes a lot of time and focus for me to reach a state where I can dive into my research and churn out anything meaningful. That's hard to do when teaching three to four classes per semester. One strategy I've learned is to seek the intersection point between those three areas of the job. For instance, I try to conduct collaborative research with students by building it into my classes. One example of this is the study on social vulnerability and resilience in emergency management planning, which was informed by analyses my Master of Public Administration students performed in a special topics course I developed in the fall of

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2021. Students gained analytical skills and I have been able to utilize those preliminary results as a starting point for future research projects. I love to look for crossover opportunities like that.

Can you share your experiences applying for and receiving extramural funding?

Since coming to UWO in 2017, I've applied for several extramural research grants. However, most of my successes have come in the last year, including the three grant-funded projects previously mentioned. I think I can largely attribute that to two things. First, I received a course release through my position as Deputy Director of the Whitburn Center for Governance and Policy Research in 2021-2022. Part of my responsibilities for the Center include grant writing. It takes a lot of time and effort to do it well. Applications require a lot of attention to detail, and a strong mix of hard data and qualitative stories that demonstrate need for and importance of a project. Second, collaboration with other faculty, staff, and students is also a key factor. Partnering with other folks that bring their own areas of expertise to a project is really important as well. And many funders are looking for interdisciplinary teams and those that are looking to have an impact beyond the literature itself, but on a practical level.

What advice would you give other UW Oshkosh faculty applying for grants?

Before becoming an academic, I worked in the nonprofit world, cultivating relationships between private foundations and nonprofit grant seekers in rural Colorado. Through conversations with funders, I learned that it is important to *apply* (even if you don't feel 100% ready to do so). The same rule applies for research grants. You'll never know if you don't apply. And that is also how you get to know the people working at the funding agency, get constructive feedback (even if you don't get funded), and apply that feedback to improve your proposal the next time. Many people groan at the thought of applying for grants, but I have come to love the process. It's all about continuously building mutually beneficial relationships. Again, it's also important to remember that grant seeking, writing, management, and evaluation takes a lot of dedicated time. When we don't get funded, it can be easy to get discouraged. So, I encourage folks to look up the percentage of applications that get funded in order to have realistic expectations of success.