

**Profile of**  
**Mimi Rappley Larson**  
**Associate Professor, Social Work Program**  
**Department of Human Behavior, Justice, and Diversity**  
**University of Wisconsin–Superior**  
**2022 Regents Teaching Excellence Individual Award Recipient**

**Highlights from nomination materials:**

- Post-Graduate Certificate, Montlake Institute, Seattle, WA; Master of Social Work, University of Washington, Seattle, WA; Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Political Science, St. Olaf College, Northfield, MN.
- Serves as a tenured Associate Professor of Social Work as well as the Program Coordinator for UW-Superior’s Social Work Program within the Department of Human Behavior, Justice and Diversity.
- Developed a three-step teaching process reflecting the three aspects of empathy: a cognitive understanding of what empathy is; an affective awareness of how one’s mirror neurons activate emotions in us; and a behavioral component to communicate genuine interest in the other.
- Conducted a scholarship of teaching and learning research project on this method in the Interview and Interpersonal Skills course, a core methodology class in which students learn basic and advanced skills necessary to conduct social work interviews.
  - Project sought to assess the effect of the three-step process on students’ understanding and practice of empathy as the first step in creating a trusting relationship with the other person.
  - Collected quantitative and qualitative data including pre/post measures, small group discussions, weekly journaling, videos, roleplays, and skill practices to reinforce learning.
  - Data analysis showed a statistically significant improvement in students’ understanding and practice of empathy. In addition, the students’ feedback and the course evaluations were and continue to be positive and encouraging.
- Co-authored a chapter, “How Do You Effectively Teach Empathy Skills to Students?” in *New Directions for Teaching and Learning: Big Picture Pedagogy: Finding Interdisciplinary Solutions to Common Learning Problems* (Jossey Bass, 2017); this work provided the chance to diver deeper into the significant role of empathy in social work practice.

**In Mimi Rappley Larson’s own words:**

- “I began my teaching career with over 10 years of experience as a social worker, allowing me to bring invaluable ‘real world’ perspectives of child protection, mental health, addiction, crisis intervention, and abuse and trauma to the classroom....In 24 years of teaching,...these practices have culminated in an approach grounded in empathy, or simply being willing to understand what a person is experiencing in the moment.”

**In the words of colleagues:**

- “Although she carries many responsibilities on and off campus, she has always understood the most important obligation that she has in undergraduate education is to foster quality, effective teaching for students. She is committed to student learning in her tireless dedication to creative teaching.” —*Maria Stalzer Wyant Cuzzo, Interim Provost/Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UW-Superior*
- “Mimi is the embodiment of an effective teacher and lifelong learner. From their first day she plants powerful seeds about compassion, empathy, and seeing the strength in others. She helps students see that they can navigate something that feels impossible in the moment. The children, families, groups, neighborhoods that our social work students are tasked to work with all benefit from Mimi’s teaching brilliance.” —*Lynn Goerd, Associate Professor of Social Work, Chair, Human Behavior, Justice and Diversity Department, UW-Superior*