**Get to Know Claudette Grinnell-Davis**

**What is your role in the School?**
I am an Assistant Professor on the Tulsa campus.

**Have you always lived in Oklahoma? Or, are you a transplant? Tell us more!**
I was born and raised in Owosso, Michigan (thus why I say "the other Owasso" from time to time). I also spent two different stints in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in addition to living in Grand Rapids, MI and Omaha, NE, where I was an assistant professor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

**Where did you go to school?**
I have a Bachelor of Science degree in psychology, a master of science in psychology, and a PhD in social work and psychology, all from the University of Michigan. My MSW is in interpersonal practice from Western Michigan University, and I also have a master's degree in theological studies (focus: philosophical theology and social ethics) from Calvin Seminary in Grand Rapids. I have a lot of alphabet soup after my name, now that I look at it…

**What are some of your favorite places you’ve worked, work you’ve done?**
I think my favorite job I've done was my work as a reunification specialist, the last practice job I held before going back to get my PhD. Reunification services are a woefully underutilized strategy for reducing child welfare recidivism but are so urgently needed. Think about it… children and their parents had issues before separation, then the children experience something different in foster care - they see a family operate in a way other than what they were used to. And then the children come back to the original career with their experiences from foster care, both good and bad, and aren't sure they can trust the parent while still loving them as their parent. It is the ultimate test of family services work. It's definitely a worthwhile challenge.

**Why do you like working at OU?**
Where do I start?? I think the first thing that jumps to mind is being so close to Indian Country and having so many students who are affiliated and still actively involved in the collective life of their tribes. As someone who was raised largely away from her tribe (Ojibwe), it's been amazing to talk to students who are far closer to their roots and heritage than I ever had the chance to be, and to see how that connection shapes the way they think about social work.

Going along with that is the sense of collegiality and camaraderie that already exists with the students, and between students and faculty. This is a unique place, and the leadership, both among students and faculty, works hard to cultivate that collegiality and sense of shared vision to go out and work for the underserved in Oklahoma.

**What motivated you to pursue your area of research?**
My experience in reunification. It gave me a chance to get to know women (I never worked with men in the reunification process) who, in many ways, had childhoods that were at best only minimally different from their children's childhoods, with the exception of child welfare system involvement. I don't think we know enough about parents in the child welfare system, and our policies and practices certainly don't reflect any knowledge drawn from them. I think the questions of when - and how - a 1st generation victim becomes a 2nd generation perpetrator - or not - is one of the critical pieces of understanding we need to do better child welfare work.

As a specific expansion of this concern, my research has pointed me in two other directions: teen parenting and the specific needs they have to prevent child welfare involvement; and then empowering indigenous families. Despite the protections of the Indian Child Welfare Act, American Indian children and their families are still disproportionately represented in the child welfare system nationally and in Oklahoma, over a third of children identified in the national foster care database (AFCARS) are identified as Native children (and that's not including the cases that are monitored in tribal jurisdictions - that's only in OKDHS cases). That's a lot of historical trauma, a lot of children who may be separated not only from their parents but also from their tribes, their culture, and their sense of who they are. That has to end.

**What goals do you have for your time here at OU?**
I've only been here for three months, so I'm still learning my way around and aren't sure what goals I have. But I'm invested in supporting the tribes in developing a fully trained and decolonized child welfare workforce that can preserve and empower indigenous families and simultaneously protect the tribes' children. I'm also interested in figuring out what
we can learn cross-nationally about indigenous child welfare work. In particular, I'm hoping to go to Aotearoa/New Zealand sometime and see what has happened there in indigenous social work among the Maori. The NZ government is a lot further along than the US is in its inclusion practices for Maori groups. In addition, family group conferencing originated in New Zealand using Maori societal structures and cultural values, and I'm not sure we've done a good job of translating it into the American context. But in terms of the social work program... I'd like to be a part of strengthening its offerings in children's mental health and family services.

What is your favorite thing about social work – or what surprised you about social work?
I think what I like most about social work is that it's never the same job twice, in large part because people aren't readily predictable. I entered undergrad many years ago as a chemistry major, and while social work doesn't involve the mathematics chemistry does (outside of complex statistical modeling), in many ways it's much harder. I've been pleased that figures from the so-called hard sciences like Neil deGrasse Tyson have spoken out about the challenges inherent in the social sciences. Human beings are hard to study, especially when taking context and ecology into account. So we shouldn't be deceived into thinking that the resolution of social problems caused and shaped by human beings will be at all simple. Despite what it can seem in social work, there are no "cookbooks" - no guarantees that if you do A, B, and C, then D, E, and F will result.

Do you have any hobbies? Please tell us about one?
I used to be far more of a piano player than I am now, but music has always been a central part of my life. I've played a whole bunch of instruments, and I'm usually always listening to music. Classically I love Russian music, especially Shostakovich. I'm also a massive fan of Dave Brubeck, both as a jazz composer and as a civil rights activist. But the majority of the time I'm listening to 80s music or shoegaze. My favorite artists include Depeche Mode, New Order, Cocteau Twins, The Church, and Pet Shop Boys. I also like to garden and to cook, especially converting regular recipes for other gluten-free folks like myself.

Tell us an interesting fact about yourself that few people know or that would surprise people?
I have some reading fluency in 10 languages, and surprisingly one of them is not Spanish. That should probably be the next one - that or Arabic. But I'm also interested in learning Ojibwe and Cherokee so...

Free space: Anything else you’d want people to know?
I consider myself a nerd. Even though I am passionate about practice, I am a stats junkie and many of my collaborations with others are a result of my statistics capabilities. I'm also a lifelong Doctor Who fan, and I'm excited to watch on Christmas night as the Doctor for the first time regenerates as a woman.

Learn more!