Get to Know Kim Cassie

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'm a two time Tulsa transplant. I like to say I am just from the south. My family traveled a bit when I was young and I never really put down permanent roots in a community to consider it representative of where I am from until adulthood. I was born in Florida and spent part of my childhood there. Then we moved to Alabama, Tennessee, North Carolina, Kentucky and I even spent a bit of time in Tulsa.

Where did you go to school?
I received a Bachelor's degree in social work from Oral Roberts University in Tulsa, OK, a Master's degree in gerontology from Appalachian State University in Boone, NC and a Master’s degree and Ph.D. in social work from the University of Tennessee, in Knoxville.

What are some of your favorite places you’ve worked, work you’ve done?
I can honestly say that every job I have held has prepared me for this moment in my life. Early in my career I began working with older adults in nursing homes. For almost seven years I worked with the State of North Carolina inspecting nursing homes for compliance with Medicare and Medicaid guidelines. In this work, I saw a lot of nursing homes residents in a variety of facilities across the state and I kept trying to understand why facilities that had to comply with the same rules and regulations could provide such different care to residents. One facility would provide outstanding, personalized care while another treated residents as though they were inanimate objects on an assembly line. I'm still searching for the answer to that question, but those observations and experiences were the catalyst for my future research career.

Why do you like working at OU?
I was immediately attracted to the faculty at OU. Everyone is kind and helpful. Their collaborativeness and camaraderie drew me to the University of Oklahoma. It's very important to me that I am part of an organization that truly cares about their students and I found that at OU. Everyone I have met has a driving passion to make Oklahoma a better place to live and work, not just for students, but for every person in the state, particularly those in disenfranchised and underrepresented groups. I am very happy to be a part of group of people with that kind of commitment to their students and the citizens of Oklahoma.

What motivated you to pursue your area of research?
I have been fascinated with older adults from a very young age. I grew up in a multi-generational home with my mother, my grandparents and a great-grandmother. I watched my grandmother care for her mother in our home until her needs
became too great to manage at home. When my great-grandmother moved into a nursing home I was a regular visitor and I didn't just limit my visits to her, I visited all the residents on my great-grandmother's hall. Ironically, as I mentioned earlier I went on to work in nursing homes and then for the State of North Carolina focused on finding ways to improve the life of frail elders dependent upon the care of others in long term care facilities. It remains a mission of mine to see advances in the care and treatment of older adults.

What goals do you have for your time here at OU?
My goal is to share my love of aging with the students and faculty at OU. I hope to help faculty infuse more gerontological content into our existing courses in order to awaken an understanding and interest in our students about the needs of older adults and how we as social workers can help older adults. I'd like to see specialized courses offered in gerontological social work and multiple field opportunities that expose students to working with Oklahoma's growing population of older adults. While most of my work has been focused on helping frail elders, I want our students to graduate realizing that life doesn't end at 65. Today's older adults are more vibrant and active than ever. To treat them all as incompetent or incapable is a grave error on our part and a stereotype we need to fight in society. I look forward to the day when every graduate, regardless of their area of practice, is prepared to encounter and work with older adults.

What is your favorite thing about social work – or what surprised you about social work?
I think the most surprising thing to me about social work is the multifaceted need for social workers in variety of occupational settings. When I think of the skills possessed by social workers I see a never ending need for social workers in places that haven't even been formerly accepted yet. I am encouraged by the emerging roles of social workers among first responders and in primary care settings, but I see a need for social workers in employee assistance programs across disciplines to provide support to the working poor, family caregivers, working parents of children with special needs, among others. Imagine a judicial system with social workers in critical roles as conflict resolution mediators or a community where every church had a social worker to help link parishioners with community resources and assistance. I suppose I am an idealist. I envision a world where social workers eradicate the concept of the working poor and homeless veterans or untreated mental health disorders are a thing of the past. My favorite thing about social work is the never ending possibilities in front of us to make a difference in the lives of so many whether through one-on-one counseling services or large scale advocacy efforts.

Do you have any hobbies? Please tell us about one?
I enjoy spending free time with my family. Time is fleeting. Health is precious. Growth is quick. I cherish every opportunity to share a laugh with my husband or experience life through the eyes of my children or to build memories with those I love that will be recalled for years to come. When time permits I enjoy reading or tinkering with arts-n-crafts, DIY projects or home decor.

Tell us an interesting fact about yourself that few people know or that would surprise people?
It's hard to believe that I now hold a doctorate degree. I almost didn't receive a bachelor's degree for many reasons. Here's one of those reasons. Back when I was studying at Oral Roberts University (ORU) they required all undergraduate students to pass a swim proficiency test in order to graduate. (I don't know if that policy is still in place now or not…hopefully, not).

Growing up in Florida I had a pretty traumatic experience as a toddler. My grandfather had taken me to the beach for the day and when he was distracted for just a second, I took off toward the mesmerizing, beautiful, blue waves of the Gulf Coast and started crawling into the bay. As a child, I thought that's what everyone was doing…just crawling in the water. It looked fun so I started crawling too. I was quickly in over my head in the bay and couldn't fight the water to get out. My grandfather rescued me, but it traumatized me nonetheless. I became so afraid of the water, I wouldn't even take a bath anymore. My grandmother had to set up a small washtub for me to use for years.

Fast forward to college and I still carried this intense fear of the water with me. I couldn't pass the swim proficiency test so I had to take a swimming class at ORU. I took and failed the swimming class twice! On my third semester in the class, the teacher finally had mercy on me and gave me a D, otherwise I would still be trying to earn my bachelor's degree! Oh, and in case you are wondering…I still can't swim and you can't teach me to swim no matter how good you think you are!

Learn more!