WMU social work faculty member awarded for teaching excellence

School of Social Work Faculty Specialist II and Coordinator of Field Education Jennifer Harrison has been selected to receive the 2014-15 College of Health and Human Services Teaching Excellence Award based on her teaching skills in all three areas of the award criteria: classroom teaching; creative/innovative work as regards teaching, fieldwork, or supervision; and teaching that involves interdisciplinary or collaborative activity. Support for Harrison’s nomination came from a number of students and colleagues.

As a classroom teacher, Harrison creates an engaging, open and stimulating learning environment, sharing her own challenging experiences with the class in a way that makes her approachable. She is known to bring out the best in students, helping them realize their potential. According to one student nominator, this award recipient is “hands down one of the most influential and inspiring teachers I have been lucky enough to have.”

In her role as field placement coordinator, Harrison has used her creativity and skills to improve the field education curriculum and process, including implementing a new online system that saves a great deal of time and paper, while providing real-time updates to students’ learning activities and progress in the field. She also developed a platform for webinars, document downloads and online chats to help students prepare for and navigate their field experiences.

Harrison is also committed to interdisciplinary, inter-professional and international education, combining these in a study abroad trip which she implemented in partnership with the non-profit Transformational Connections earlier this year. Through the trip to Guatemala’s Lake Atitlan region, participants studied community health and permaculture in Guatemala. In nominating Harrison for the award, a student said of the trip, “While health is the topic, I should make it clear that there were nurses on this trip, a reconstructive surgeon, along with a historian. There was a rich exchange of ideas throughout our days which made me think from a new perspective each time someone lifted an idea.”

In addition to being an excellent, innovative teacher, Harrison is a member of several School of Social Work and College of Health and Human Services committees, a board member with the Martin Michigan public school system, an out-patient counselor, a mother, and a student in the Interdisciplinary Health Sciences doctoral program. Even with all of this, a nominator wrote that she “has a lot of life, vitality and energy to give...She obviously loves her job and takes it very seriously.” Another nominator added that she “is a role model for me. She is really an excellent teacher in my opinion. I look forward to learning so much more from Jennifer Harrison!”

Selected from among four nominees, Ms. Harrison will receive a monetary award and will be honored at a faculty/staff recognition celebration on December 4, 2015.