

## Faculty Spotlight

**Dr. Katherine M. Wix**, PhD, LPC, NCC, ACS,  
PEL: School Counseling  
Governors State University  
Division of Psychology & Counseling

Interviewed by Myisha Meeks

**MM: Dr. Wix, congratulations on winning the 2016 Illinois Counselor Educator of the Year Award. Please tell us something about yourself?**



Dr. Katherine Wix (pictured on the right) and the Illinois School Counselor Association President, Sherri McLaughlin

**KMW:** I completed my doctorate at Northern Illinois University and was ecstatic to learn that GSU had a position in school counselor education so I could stay in my home state of Illinois!

**MM: What were the driving factors in your decision to join the GSU faculty? Please provide and anecdotal evidence you feel contributed to this desire?**

**KMW:** I decided to join the GSU faculty because I have always heard wonderful things about their counseling programs, but also because of the diverse student population. I had always heard there wasn't a typical student at GSU, and I am thrilled to say that I found that to be true. I love the vast experiences that each student and faculty member bring to class. Additionally, I really appreciate and stand by the commitment to service that GSU faculty have to adhere to.

**MM: What's your teaching philosophy or your outlook on higher education, and what how did those values shape the way for you to receive the 2016 Illinois School Counselor Educator of the Year award?**

**KMW:** As a counselor educator, I actively apply principles of social constructionism in the classroom. I also utilize Piaget's information processing theory and Bandura's social learning theory. I strongly believe that we learn from one another through observation and modeling. I work to create a safe classroom environment where students take risks and share their understanding of course material. I also take into consideration students' developmental growth, genetic influences, and experiences. I design and engage my students through a constructionist lens, where my overarching goal is to create a collaborative learning environment in which I am both conversation manager and co-participant in classroom dialogue. I design activities through which students and I are able to experience first-hand the topics about which we are learning. By co-constructing a meaning-making

conversation, all learners must assimilate and accommodate new information as they make sense of novel constructs in line with their existing schema. I think these values are strongly correlated to my nomination for 2016 Illinois School Counselor Educator of the Year. I try to be as transparent in my teaching as I can be so that students realize that I am not an expert but rather have knowledge that I want to share and look forward to hearing their interpretation of the content learned so that we can co-create a shared meaning. I want my students to know that I value their experiences too!

**MM: How do you see your role on campus, outside of teaching?**

**KMW:** I see my role as an active participant in the GSU community, which means participating in various GSU sponsored activities and committees. Additionally, I see myself as community participant – one who values hearing GSU student and faculty stories – getting to know the GSU community on a collaborative level.

**MM: What are some of your favorite things to do when you're not teaching?**

**KMW:** When I am not teaching, I enjoy reading, hanging out with my husband and dog, and my family and friends. When I allow the television to distract me from my work you might find me binge-watching American Crime, The Family, sports games, and MotoGP. In the summer months I enjoy boating, riding motorcycles, and traveling.

**MM: Please list any awards or significant accomplishments that you are proud of?**

**KMW:** Seems silly to say, but I was most proud of my Counseling Student of the Year Award, which I earned in 2005 from Northern Illinois University. This award reflected several years of dedicated, hard work, research, and community building in the NIU counseling program. Additionally, I am really proud of the completion of my doctoral degree this past year.

**MM: What do you love most about your job, Governors State University and your department?**

**KMW:** I love the students most, the dedication to service, and the true collaborative partnerships created in the Counseling Department. My colleagues are genuine, compassionate, and caring individuals who really work to create friendships, which makes work fun!

**MM: What are your goals for Governors State University and your department? How do you plan to achieve those goals?**

**KMW:** My goals for GSU and my department are to educate students (counselors-in-training) to be self-aware, prepared, and eager to learn. I plan to achieve those goals by constantly implementing changes that make the curriculum meaningful and challenging. I also appreciate the nature of the program's exit interview where we seek specific examples of meaningful experiences which drive progressive programming.

**MM: Do you have any advice for current students?**

**KMW:** Counseling programs require students to be self-reflective learners, thus growth and change are inevitable. The best advice I can give to current students is to be open to the process, stay in the here and now, learn who you are, and learn to love yourself.

**MM: Have you developed any long lasting relationships with former students? What are some of the ways you stay in touch with them now?**

**KMW:** This question is particularly meaningful for me as I have developed long lasting relationships with former students from my days working as a school counselor in Illinois Community Unit School District 300, students in undergraduate classes in California, undergraduate and graduate students at NIU, and I hope that this carries over to the connections I have made at GSU. Some of the ways in which I stay in touch with students is via phone calls, text message, coffee 'dates', etc. I also really like to invite students to come speak to my classes.

**MM: If you had to sit next to someone one on a plane for the next 8 hours, who would it be and why?**

**KMW:** If I had to sit next to someone on a plane for the next 8 hours it would be my Nana. She died when I was 9 but I have very fond memories of her, and wish that I had more time to learn how she managed to navigate her life journey while being a loving and dedicated wife and mother able to balance her personal life and her professional life. I would want to know how she became such a strong, independent, empowered, and courageous woman.