

2016

An Interview with Tracy Wharton

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Recommended Citation

Moran, Carrie (2016) "An Interview with Tracy Wharton," *Illuminations*: Vol. 4 : No. 2 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/illuminations/vol4/iss2/4>



An Interview with Tracy Wharton

Interview by Carrie Moran
User Engagement Librarian
November 10, 2016

Tracy Wharton is an Assistant Professor in the Social Work department.

Carrie Moran: How long have you been at UCF?

Tracy Wharton: I got here in the fall of 2014.

CM: What have you learned about UCF in those years?

TW: That we have an incredible diversity of people here. I've met researchers studying endlessly fascinating things and things that I've never heard of, learned about sea turtles and been amazed at the migrations, talked with people sending science to Pluto and building nanotechnology, been able to try video capture technology that is used in video games, and worked with students advocating for some of our most vulnerable populations. It's easy to get overwhelmed by academia, or pulled down into the stress of the work or of the world, but we are surrounded by amazing people doing amazing things. I have found that there is always something to inspire me and help remind me of the wonder in the world.

CM: Where did you come from before your time at UCF?

TW: I was at the University of Michigan Medical School and Ann Arbor VA. I had a postdoctoral fellowship there with a joint appointment: Geriatric Psychiatry at UMich, and HSR&D (research) at the VA. I also taught policy in the School of Social Work.

CM: Are you involved with any faculty organizations on or off-campus?

TW: I'm a member of the PRIDE Faculty organization, the Council for Social Work Education, and involved with professional organizations for faculty and researchers in

both social work and geriatrics. I've also been involved with the Center for the Success of Women and the mentoring group there.

CM: Can you give us a secret about UCF? Something you like to do, or a tip for newcomers to campus.

TW: Best tip I can give- download the Tapingo app and use it. I'm in HPA1, so I order a sandwich at Einstein's or a smoothie at Smoothie King and it's ready by the time I walk over there. Also- salmon skin rolls at Kyoto near the arena, although they're not on the app yet. Still- worth the walk.

One other neat thing that people might not know is that there are big turtles and fish in the wetlands pond by the boardwalks between the Union and HPA buildings. If you stop and look over the edge, you'll see them waiting for people to drop food.

CM: What are your current research interests?

TW: I study community-based older adults and the healthcare system, with a focus on dementia caregivers and the kinds of supports that are available for their long-term well-being. I'm interested in the implementation of evidence-based practices in real-life settings and the development of our future workforce in healthcare, which will be interprofessional, not just in geriatrics but across the practice fields. Right now, I have a study going on that is looking at the early development of aggressive behaviors in dementia, and beginning to examine sentinel events that could be early intervention points. Imagine if we could screen for early development of dangerous or challenging behaviors in primary care settings, and work with families before the disease progresses to educate them on what to expect and how to plan for it before it becomes a crisis. We think that not only would this give control back to the families, but could help people live at home longer and more safely.

I've also been involved with equine-facilitated psychotherapy for over 10 years, and continue working with colleagues here in Florida, as well as in Alabama and Wisconsin to collect data on outcomes and treatment protocols.

CM: What career moment or accomplishment are you most proud of?

TW: My team won the Rosalyn Carter Institute for Caregiving Leadership Award in 2007, and I got to have dinner with the President and Mrs. Carter. After pouring my heart and soul into our pilot program for 3 years as the Program Director, to be recognized for our contributions to the field and to the lives of our clients (patients) was humbling and amazing. We were recognized for the community-based adaptation of the Resources for Enhancing Alzheimer's Caregiver Health intervention that we did in four regions of Alabama. Having two such amazing people hold my hand and tell me that I had done good work was a moment that I will never forget. It continues to inspire me in the work that I do today and the letter of thanks from Mrs. Carter for a workshop that I did at the Institute that year hangs on the wall in my office.

CM: What do you like to do when you are not at work?

TW: I have an Arabian mare named Picabo. We like to trail ride. I don't get to go as often as I'd like, honestly. She helps keep me sane. I also have a number of African drums that I play, again, not as frequently as I'd like these days. I do get to travel a lot, though, and I love it- especially if I can go somewhere that I haven't been before.

CM: If you'd like other UCF faculty to connect with you via social media, let us know your handle.

I'm on Twitter! [@trcharisse](https://twitter.com/trcharisse)