



Dr. Laurie Smith

*Professor of Sociology
School of Natural and Behavioral Sciences, '91*



*Center For Excellence in
Christian Scholarship*

Dr. Laurie Smith is a lifelong Texan, spending most of the earlier part of her life in Central Texas. She cites the most significant event of her young life as being baptized at the age of 7. Dr. Smith feels she was fortunate to have wonderful Christian role models in the form of her mother and her maternal grandparents. Smith's mom

also provided a model for her in my career choice, because she was a teacher for over 35 years.

Dr. Smith chose to go to college at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor which was as she says, "a whopping 1.5 miles from home," so she was a four year commuter. When she started at UMHB, Smith planned to major in English and minor in History, with the intent of teaching high school English someday. After the first year, she was feeling very "lukewarm" about History, and had discovered that she really didn't want to teach in the public schools. However, during her first semester, Dr. Smith took Introduction to Sociology, primarily, "because I needed a Social Science credit, and it fit into my schedule." Little did she know what an impact that one course would have on her! "My sophomore year, I decided to make Sociology my minor, but by the time I was a senior, I had enough hours to do a double major, along with English. I was still intent on teaching English, however, but at the college level. I had applied and been accepted into the Master's program in English at Baylor. In the spring of my senior year at UMHB, I began to realize that my passion for English had subsided and that Sociology was what I was truly interested in. I contact the graduate advisor in Sociology at Baylor via snail mail (no quick e-mails back then!), and the same week I mailed the letter, I got a phone call from him, telling me they wanted me in Sociology, and they were offering me both a tuition waiver and a graduate assistantship. I don't think God could have been much clearer than that about what I was supposed to do," says Smith.

After receiving her Masters Degree at Baylor, Dr. Smith attended the University of Texas at Austin to do her Ph.D. work. In her last year of coursework, she was hired by ETBU. Smith shares, "When I started at ETBU, I was Ms. Young, but within a year, I became Dr. Young, and less than six months later, I would become Dr. Smith. Needless to say, it was a year of many transitions for me: the move to East Texas, which was the farthest I had ever lived from home, starting a new job, finishing my doctorate, and meeting and marrying my husband, Michael."

Dr. Smith and her husband Michael have three sons. "Jacob and Lucas are both students at Hallsville High School. Our youngest son, Andrew, passed away from SIDS at the age of almost

three months in 2001, but remains forever in our hearts. The boys and I are active members of First Baptist Church in Hallsville."

Overall, Dr. Smith shares this about her life, "Through every part of my life, the one constant has been that God is in control of everything—both the good and the not so good—and that His unconditional love never wavers or fails, despite our human shortcomings."

What brought you to ETBU?

I was about to finish my coursework at UT and start my dissertation when I began thinking about where I would want to work after my degree when I found a listing in the ASA Employment Bulletin for an Assistant Professor's position at ETBU, and it sounded exactly like the kind of position that I wanted. Since I wasn't finished with my degree, I was hesitant to apply. Also, the deadline for applying was just days away. However, something kept nudging me to check it out. I called the university, and initially spoke with the department chair and the Academic VP, both of whom discouraged me because I was ABD, and they insisted they were looking for someone with a completed Ph.D. That still, small voice kept telling me to go forward. I sent in my application in mid-February and waited. When I didn't hear anything for several weeks, I had pretty much given up hope of being considered for the job. Around the middle of March, I got a call from the department chair, telling me that they had narrowed the applications down to around 8 people, and I was still in the running. Finally, at the beginning of April, I got a call that I was in the top 3, and they wanted to bring me to the campus for an interview. It was my first time in East Texas, and the moment I set foot on the ETBU campus, I felt like I had come home. Obviously, the interview went well, and here I sit 22 years later, never failing to see God's hand at work in all that brought me to this wonderful place that has become my home.

What makes a student successful in your class?

Academics doesn't come easily to all students, and for me, student success is not necessarily measured by making a high grade. Of course, we all love those bright kids who just blow the tops off of the exams, but I also think the student who gives it everything he or she has got just to pass the course could be considered a success, as well. Any student who is willing to try to do his or her very best, whether that is an A or a C, can be considered successful.

What is the most valuable lesson you have learned from your ETBU colleagues?

I have the blessing of working with some of the finest Christian educators you could find anywhere. I have learned from them the importance of demonstrating a Christ-centered life both inside and outside of the classroom. I have also learned that all of us—every faculty member and every staff person—are a team, and we must work together if we want ETBU to be a worthy institution that serves our students in the most beneficial way.

What is the most valuable lesson you have learned from your ETBU students?

I have learned so much from my students in the time I have been at ETBU, but two of the bigger things are patience and compassion.

How do you promote Christian Scholarship in your classroom?

Especially in the research courses, I encourage my students to hold true to their Christian faith and values in both their academic work and research efforts, something that is not always easy to accomplish in a world where they may have to take a stand against a majority who may not have an appreciation for their perspective.

Academic Credentials

B.A., University of Mary Hardin-Baylor

M.A., Baylor University

Ph.D., University of Texas at Austin

Areas of Expertise

Criminology

Death and Dying

Women's Studies

Professional Affiliations

Southwestern Sociology Association

Southwestern Social Science Association

Southern Sociological Society

American Sociological Society