

**Profile of  
Janna Cowen  
Professor of Economics, University of Wisconsin-River Falls  
2003 Regents Teaching Excellence Award Recipient**

**Background and Experience (Selected)**

- Twenty-four years as a faculty member at the University of Wisconsin-River Falls.
- Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.
- Teaches courses on Modern Economics Issues, Principles of Microeconomics, Quantitative Analysis, Public Regulation of Business, Labor Economics, Intermediate Microeconomic Theory, Senior Interdisciplinary Capstone in the Social Sciences.
- Selected as UW-River Falls' Distinguished Teacher of the Year in 1987, and as Outstanding Teacher in the Social Sciences in 1988; both awards are decided by graduating seniors and alumni.
- The above awards may be received only once in the teacher's career, and then they are listed as "not eligible" on the list of faculty sent to graduating seniors and alumni. Nonetheless, students continue to nominate her. In 1995, a student wrote: "It says she is not eligible, but I feel she is, because she is a wonderful teacher who helps students at their convenience. She was wonderful and taught me a lot about Econ."
- Co-author (with J.M. Brux) of Economic Issues and Policy, a popular economics textbook, used at River Falls and by universities throughout the U.S, and now in its second edition.
- Leadership role in the newly reorganized College of Business & Economics.
- Active in department, college and university governance.

**In Professor Cowen's own words:**

- "I believe that education is what the student learns, which is not always what the teacher teaches. If my students are learning what I am teaching, I am satisfied with my performance. If they are not, I am dissatisfied. So my job is really simple. It is to teach so that my students are willing to put forth effort to learn, and can learn, the material I am presenting."
- "I came to UW-River Falls 24 years ago because I wanted to teach, and the campus offered me the opportunity to teach a wide variety of classes and to have contact with students in class sections small enough so that I could learn my students' names . . . . If my door is open, my students are welcome in my office, and my door is open most of the time."
- From her syllabus for Social Science 496, an interdisciplinary capstone course for seniors: "Since you take this course near the end of your undergraduate program, it is assumed that you are ready to think, listen, and participate in scholarly discussions on social issues. It is assumed that you will draw from your knowledge and experience. We will not cover all the great ideas in all the social sciences in a two-credit course. But all the social sciences are concerned with one overarching idea: social justice."

**In the words of her students:**

- “As a student in Dr. Cowen’s class, my understanding of economics increased dramatically. I must admit that I was a demanding student. I always wanted to know more and asked many questions. She didn’t mind my questions; she encouraged them.”
  - Elaine Moses, 1995 UW-River Falls Economics Graduate
  
- “I finished [Professor Cowen’s] class with a B and I am still proud of that grade. It was not the only time I was challenged by an instructor, but I can honestly say that it was the longest and most sustained challenge I had in my college experience. I told her after that class that she was the best instructor that I have ever had and that still holds true to this day . . . . I have been fortunate enough to be fairly successful in my career. I was able to buy the company I worked for and did this by age 30, and have been able to grow my company to become one of the most successful businesses in our industry. I hear many people taking credit for mentoring me that I would never have given credit to. Janna Cowen is definitely a person that I would. She challenged me to the point that I had to prove to myself that I could compete and succeed. I will always treasure her wisdom, insight, and ability to connect to students.”
  - David Chisnell, Business and Economics Graduate, UW-River Falls

**In the words of her colleagues:**

- “As I am relatively new to the UW System, I have only known Dr. Cowen for less than two years. It does not take a newcomer long to realize, however, that Dr. Cowen is well known as one of the most accomplished teachers on campus. I meet students and they want to sign up for her classes because they know they will accomplish much; students complete her classes and talk about how they were able to reach academically much higher than they had ever expected; and each alumni asks how Dr. Cowen is, and then relays some story of her outstanding skills as a teacher, and how she has made a positive difference in their life.”
  - Barbara H. Nemecek, Dean, College of Business and Economics, UW-River Falls
  
- “Dr. Cowen has had a particularly positive impact on students who possessed the necessary ability to succeed but lacked the other ingredients of success such as focus, positive role models, and a willingness to take risks. Dr Cowen has nurtured these students and provided the environment that allowed these students to grow and be successful. She is a wonderful role model and mentor for our students.”
  - Dr. Glenn Potts, Director of Graduate Studies and Professor of Economics, UW-River Falls
  
- “Dr. Cowen is known by the students across campus as a thorough, demanding, and fair teacher . . . . Time and time again, the student who was hesitant of their capabilities in the quantitative areas of study, completes one of Dr. Cowen’s classes and reports it as an extremely challenging, but rewarding experience. She is able to create a classroom environment in which each student feels they can contribute in a positive manner. Because of her unassuming, strong support for each student in the class, they are able to academically reach beyond their own expectations . . . . Over her years of teaching, Dr. Cowen has become one of the fond legends of the institution.”
  - Dr. Virginia M. Coombs, Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, UW-River Falls