

Jennifer Fellabaum-Toston

Associate teaching professor of educational leadership and policy analysis, MU College of Education

MU faculty member since 2012

Jennifer Fellabaum-Toston dedicates herself not only to the continuous education of her students, but also to the teaching preparation of her colleagues at the University of Missouri and beyond. Serving as a professor, advisor for master's and graduate certificate students, and director for Missouri Statewide Cooperative Ed.D. program, Fellabaum-Toston embraces her research, administrative duties and experiences in the classroom as ways to prepare future educators and facilitate a comfortable learning environment. Fellabaum-Toston regularly attends professional conferences and encourages student contribution in her courses to improve her skills as a "facilitator of knowledge."

Bradley R. Curs, chair of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis, said Fellabaum-Toston's outstanding student evaluations speak to her exemplary quality of teaching. Of the 34 courses Fellabaum-Toston has taught, 29 of them have garnered evaluations that either met or exceeded the courses' departmental averages.

"Dr. Fellabaum-Toston has made significant contributions to the department through her teaching, advising and administration of academic programs that exemplify the essence of a Kemper Fellow," Curs said.

Chelsea Fricker, a Mizzou alumna currently looking to pursue a doctoral degree in educational leadership, attributed her passion in this area of study to Fellabaum-Toston's validating teaching style and selfless desire to help students grow. Outside of the several classes Fricker took with Fellabaum-Toston, Fricker said Fellabaum-Toston was her "life advisor" while she was in graduate school, always making herself available to assist with class, graduate assistantships and job searches.

"In a trip back to Columbia a few months ago, one of my first stops was to Jennifer's office," Fricker said. "Talking to her has always provided clarity, confidence and comfort. That same clarity, confidence and comfort are felt in her classroom and by every single student who has the privilege of working with her."

Other faculty at Mizzou have learned from Fellabaum-Toston's impressive teaching methods, especially through an online medium. Michael Steven Williams, an assistant professor in the College of Education, said her guidance helped him to be more comfortable with online teaching.

"In addition to sharing course assignments and expectations weekly—as she does in her traditional in-person courses – she also leverages available technology by using VoiceThread both for lessons and to offer feedback on student work," Williams said, noting that this interaction helped establish a connection between Fellabaum-Toston and her students. "She believes and helped me to believe that teaching online can be as transformative as teaching in person if you go about it with care and intentionality."

Fellabaum-Toston's guidance has even spread across Missouri through her role as the director of the Missouri Statewide Cooperative Ed.D. Program, an initiative that joins Mizzou with Missouri State University, Northwest Missouri State University, Southeast Missouri State

University and the University of Central Missouri to discuss cooperative curriculum and the instruction given to educational leaders.

Jeni Hart, dean of the graduate school and vice provost for graduate studies, said that Fellabaum-Toston has proven to be an outstanding leader by facilitating teams of faculty to continuously review and improve the program.

“The program is now more than 20 years old, and under Jennifer’s leadership, the program has won a regional and two national awards, reflecting the excellence of the program’s design, curriculum and instruction,” Hart said.

In addition, Fellabaum-Toston received the University of Missouri Faculty Council Shared Governance Award in 2017 and was selected as a member of this year’s University of Missouri System Leadership Development Program cohort.

Even though Fellabaum-Toston’s wide array of accomplishments and contributions to teaching and learning extend beyond her roles at Mizzou, she is always happy to help when she knows students are interested in making themselves better educators.

“I see my role as a facilitator of knowledge and growth rather than an expert imparting knowledge,” Fellabaum-Toston said. “I view teaching and learning as an ongoing process, with no boundaries on the knowledge we are able to explore.”

Fellabaum-Toston posts thank you cards from former students on a bulletin board in her office to remind her of the impact she can have on the lives of her students. Among the students’ compliments about her expert instruction and mentoring capabilities, one over-arching theme was evident: Fellabaum-Toston’s willingness to meet students where they are and to encourage them to be the best people they can be, so that they can touch other students’ lives for years to come.