

# 10 minutes

## WITH DR. BARBARA SCHIRMER

*From New York City to Defiance College, get to know the new provost and vice president for academic affairs*



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Defiance College officially welcomed Dr. Barbara Schirmer to campus on July 1 to the position of provost and vice president for academic affairs. However, Dr. Schirmer had already become a familiar figure on campus with her frequent visits to get to know DC better.

Dr. Schirmer came to Defiance from the University of Detroit Mercy where she served over the past seven years in the roles of professor, vice president for academic affairs, student affairs, and provost and special assistant to the president. Among many other accomplishments, she has also served as Associate Dean of the Graduate School of Professional Studies at Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon, Chair of the Department of Educational Foundations and Special Services at Kent State University, and Dean of the School of Education and Allied Professions at Miami University.

An announcement of her appointment and a comprehensive list of her accomplishments appeared in the previous issue of the Defiance College Magazine. To get to know her better, we asked Dr. Schirmer a few questions for this edition of the magazine.

**We know you came to DC from Detroit.**

**Is that where you grew up?**

I grew up in New York City, where we lived in a three-room apartment in the Bronx. My brother and I shared a bedroom, and my parents slept on a pull-out couch in the living room. It was on the fourth floor and there was no elevator in the building. I have no idea how my mother carried a baby and groceries up and down the stairs, let alone the laundry as the washers were in the basement. When I was seven, we moved into a house we shared with my grandparents in White Plains. A few years later, we moved into an apartment, which is where we lived when I graduated from high school.

**What drew you to education as a profession, and specifically, to higher education?**

I always wanted to be a teacher and would play-act at teaching with my dolls when I was little. In college, I majored in elementary education and planned to be a classroom teacher. My junior year, we visited a variety of programs for children with disabilities. I was particularly interested in St. Mary's School for the Deaf because my maternal grandmother was deaf and the person who guided us through the school said that deaf children were the hardest to teach because of their challenges with learning English. So, with my dad's urging that I get my master's degree in mind, I decided to pursue a master's in teaching deaf and hard of hearing children. I never thought about higher education until I was involved in a research study conducted by a doctoral student from the University of Massachusetts with my class of deaf and aphasic children at the Boston School for the Deaf. So when we moved to Buffalo, I decided that pursuing my doctorate would help answer the many questions I had about how best to teach deaf children to read and write. I didn't start thinking about how I was going to apply this information to a real job until I was close to finishing my doctorate. At that point, I realized I wanted to share what I'd learned with students who were studying to be teachers of deaf and hard of hearing children.

**What attracted you to Defiance College?**

At DC, I saw an institution with a mission and values which resonate with me of providing an excellent student-centered education that prepares students to be knowledgeable and contributing citizens of a global society.



*Dr. Schirmer talks with Charlene Williams, Admissions graduate assistant.*

**Since you've had time to get acquainted with DC, what are some of your initial impressions?**

It has been very clear to me how dedicated everyone here at DC is. Though individuals may have differences about what needs to be done or how something should be done, I see an underlying agreement about working in the best interests of the college. I also have realized how many hats everyone wears not only because there is so much to be done but also, I think, because as a small community, each person can make an impact on many facets of life within and outside the college.

**You have a passion for working with a special needs school in Detroit. Do you mind telling us about it?**

I'm always delighted to talk about my work with the teachers and students at the Michigan School for the Deaf, which is in Flint. Since 2005, I have been assisting them with their literacy curriculum. As the major struggle for deaf students is with reading and writing, implementing high quality literacy instruction is the highest priority for educational programs. As I am fairly well known internationally for my research

on strategies for teaching literacy to deaf students, the teachers contacted me shortly after I came to Michigan. Throughout the last several years, we have implemented new curriculum, assessed outcomes, and conducted research on the effectiveness of the approaches.

**What interests do you and your husband have beyond those related to work?**

Our family, of course, is our major interest including our daughter and son, their spouses, and our three grandchildren. Much of our travel is to visit our children as our son lives in San Francisco and our daughter lives in Princeton Junction, New Jersey. When we do travel for pleasure, it is usually to another country or to spend a week at the ocean. When we're home, we like to go out for a quiet dinner and when the weather is nice, to play golf. ♦