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Tenacity Key to Success

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Tenacity key to success

When Andrew Webber '10 gets excited, words tumble from his mouth so rapidly that it's hard to keep up.

His enthusiasm is as contagious as his passion for learning, his intensity tempered by a self-deprecating humor and eagerness to share. He admits that he has had to learn some restraint – every time he takes a new course, he wants another major or minor.

Webber enrolled at Linfield College as a political science major, with emphasis on the Middle East. But after one religious studies course taught by Professor Bill Millar '60, he switched to religion.

"I just fell in love with the discipline," he said. "I love political science, but religious studies encompasses so much more of what I'm interested in."

To gain an even deeper understanding, Webber joined a handful of students studying Hebrew with Millar this year. He plans to combine his interest in the language and his fascination with the Middle East during an immersion program at Hebrew University in Jerusalem this summer.

"Religious studies comes from a lot of disciplines – politics, gender, sociology and psychology," Webber said. "There are so many different ways to look at religion. Islam, Judaism and Christianity all can be traced to Abraham. When we realize that we do have a connection, that we have an identity with Jews and Muslims, maybe we can work together to make the world a little more peaceful."

His desire to read the Old Testament in its original language was the impetus to study Hebrew. He especially would like to attain a deeper understanding of the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures.

"If you read the Torah in Hebrew, each word has its own weight and could have a different meaning in different cultural settings," Webber said. "Through language you can see the melting pot of culture and influence.

It's a completely different level of analysis once you understand the language. I hadn't realized all the things that can be hidden in language."

Even a severe case of dyslexia, which prevented him from reading until the fourth grade, has not hindered Webber. He knows he needs extra time and extra effort to succeed.

"It's a lot of repetition and a lot of time, but I think that's the case with any language," he said. "I have to practice every day. You can never master a language or understand everything about it because it's always moving and ambiguous. That's why we still study English."

It's not only Webber's passion for the subject, but also his tenacity that make him a joy to teach, said Millar, who selected Webber to serve as his teaching assistant.

"He is tenacious," Millar said. "When others give up, he goes the extra mile and he never feels that the extra work is a burden. He outperforms his peers because he hangs in there."

Webber, a native of Vancouver, Wash., gave up his dream of playing college football to achieve his long-term goal – becoming a college professor. He devotes extra effort to his academics so he can earn the high grades he needs to reach his dream graduate program – Harvard Divinity School.

He's been a tremendous influence in class, Millar said, because the students pick up on his enthusiasm.

"He is not afraid to fail and he steps up where others hold back," Millar said. "He brings an energy and optimism to the class. When helping teach freshmen, he recognizes if they are having problems. He's approachable, interested and excited about college."

Webber's passion for learning isn't limited to religion. Everything excites him, from philosophy to international relations, gender studies and feminism.

"All of my classes are opening new doors, new levels of analysis and new perspectives that enrich what I am learning," he said. "There are so many different perspectives and ways of looking at things, it brings it to life for me and that's really exciting."

– Mardi Mileham



Bill Millar '60, left, professor of religion, consults with Andrew Webber '10, one of a handful of students studying Hebrew this year. Webber is the recipient of the Gabriele Hertrich Endowed Scholarship, established to assist students who are majoring or minoring in religion.