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A View from Melrose

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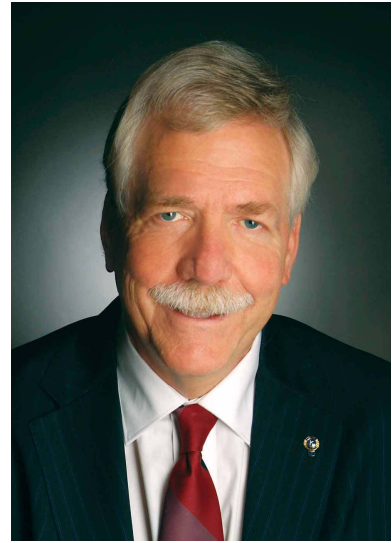
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Cultivating the restless yet disciplined intellect



We all know and relish the stereotype: a fussy, aging professor with yellowing note cards from which he delivers the same dreary lectures year after year. When the note cards were first composed is a mystery. Where the yellowing comes from is not, for time has bypassed this stereotypical professor. The only thing current about him is the mirth of his students.

Happily, in 11 years as dean reviewing and evaluating the work of every faculty member at Linfield College, I never encountered yellowing note cards. Linfield faculty members are always changing something: their selection of readings, their delivery of material, their use of information technology, their selection of class projects, their deployment of small group discussions, their laboratory assignments, their field trips and even their course venues – visiting hospitals, factories, explorer clubs and exotic cities throughout the world.

Faculty members arriving at Linfield today, in the 21st century, face a greater challenge than that faced by their predecessors. At the normal age of hiring, they can contemplate a teaching career of some 35 years. Yet the half-life of information compiled in their Ph.D. dissertations is less than seven years. That is, half of what they took such care in mastering and wielding into a disciplined thesis will be superseded in seven years or fewer. Simultaneously, faculty members must tap into the restless idealism and energy of each rising generation of students. To maintain standing with their intellectual peers as well as their students, today's faculty members have no choice but to be restless themselves; they must continuously learn as much as ever they did in graduate school.

A faculty of the caliber of Linfield's craves continuous learning and intellectual renewal, and the institution strives to provide the support that makes it possible. Each year the college provides funds for projects such as that of a young faculty member in the Department of Mathematics. Prof. Charles Dunn will travel to Europe this summer to make contacts with mathematicians in

Basel, Switzerland; Berlin, Germany; and St. Petersburg, Russia, in preparation for a January Term course centered on the renowned 18th century Swiss mathematician Leonhard Euler. It will be the first January Term travel course that the mathematics department has offered.

In another current example, Prof. Robert Gardner, a new member of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, spent this January in New Orleans and vicinity as part of a study of the sociological effects of the forced migration of Gulf Coast residents in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. This project will lay the groundwork for continuing research and for a January Term course that Prof. Gardner plans to teach on location next year. Beyond that, he notes, "I will be able to integrate my research and field experiences into every class that I teach and bring real-world experiences of disaster, stories of human suffering and conflict, and victories of community and solidarity directly to my students."

Unfortunately, there are many more applications from faculty for such activities than there are funds to support them. To narrow the funding gap, Linfield is engaged in an effort to secure grants and to build a \$1 million endowment that will support faculty development efforts of all kinds. In a complementary effort, the college has launched a program to assist faculty in obtaining outside grant funds for research, fellowships and other development projects.

Yellowing note cards would be a far greater travesty today than for our stereotypical professor of yesteryear. Without faculty restoration and renewal, students will suffer. This is why it has been truly said that "faculty development is student development." Most important of all, faculty restoration and renewal are key to keeping the college itself vibrant and youthful, even as it approaches the venerable age of 150.

– Marvin Henberg
Interim President