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Passionate Number-Cruncher

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Mike Jones

Passionate *number-cruncher*

Mike Jones may owe the launch of his teaching career to an empty stomach.

During a 3 a.m. snack break, while finishing a project for Arthur Andersen & Co., Jones glanced at his mail and found an ad seeking an accounting professor at Linfield College.

“If I hadn’t been hungry, I wouldn’t have seen the ad and I’d be rich and retired right now,” he said with a laugh.

Instead, as the Harold Elkinton Professor of Accounting, he has spent the last 30 years teaching more than 4,500 McMinnville Campus students the intricacies of a profession that continues to excite and challenge him. He carries that passion into the classroom, sometimes so absorbed in his subject, he fails to hear the bell. His enthusiasm for accounting has taken him around the world, where he has honed his expertise in international accounting methods to help his students understand the complexities of the global marketplace. He’s known as a taskmaster in class, but is a caring professor who goes the extra mile for his students.

“He is passionate about a subject that you don’t think anyone could be passionate about,” said Dave DeLap ’80, who now heads the Portland accounting firm DeLap, White, Caldwell and Croy LLP. “He was exuberant in his classes and always smiling.”

Jones was attracted to teaching for a variety of reasons, including the urge to spend more time with his young family. It didn’t take long for him to realize he had a flair for it.

“It’s fun to talk about things you know really well to people who are eager to learn them,” he said.

But even as he stepped into the classroom, he kept one foot in the accounting world and remains well-known around the state. For many years he assisted in administering the CPA exam, helped write regulations governing CPAs in Oregon and served on numerous professional committees.

Those ties have paid big dividends for his students and he’s been able to match them up with accounting



Mike Jones, professor of accounting for 30 years, is known as an enthusiastic teacher and a mentor to countless Linfield students.

firms, both large and small. Linfield alumni have established a reputation for high quality work and most years every accounting major who wants a job has one by the time he or she graduates. For example, DeLap hires Linfield alumni not through loyalty but because of their quality.



Numbers aren't the only things that feed Mike Jones' soul. He says his perfect retirement job will be playing fiddle – or maybe harmonica – in a country music band. It's not unusual to see him riding to campus on his Yamaha FJR 1300 with his fiddle strapped to his back so he can practice in his office over lunch. He can also sometimes be found playing one of the 20-plus harmonicas in his collection while sitting in traffic.

“If our students are in demand, it may be because we are not an accounting program in a college of business. We are an accounting program in a liberal arts college and I think that's attractive to some employers,” Jones said.

Michelle Lanouette '05, a senior audit associate at KPMG in Portland, said Jones inspired her to become an accountant, recommended her for a position at the firm and helped her prepare for her job interview.

“He challenges you and expects a lot from you,” said Lanouette, who hopes to attend graduate school and ultimately teach. “At the same time, he will make himself available to help you and will do everything he can to help you learn.”

Jones' professional ties have also given him an edge in the classroom. He became an expert in international accounting practices through skills he honed on sabbaticals with Arthur Andersen offices in Munich, Germany, and Beijing, China. He's well versed in Swiss banking, and his book, *Swiss Bank Accounts*, is now in its fifth printing. He's the editor of all the international accounting chapters in the textbook *Advanced Accounting*. He's taught CPA review courses to accountants in Hong Kong and consults for businesses with ties to Asia.

His interests shifted from Europe to Asia after he spent a semester teaching at Wenzhou University, Linfield's sister institution in China. He's currently working on a project to link classrooms at Linfield and Wenzhou, once some technological hurdles have been resolved.

Linfield students benefit from Jones' international accounting experience in multinational operations, foreign subsidiaries, import and export, and foreign currencies.

“It's very complex, and my time in Germany and Beijing only served to increase the depth of my knowledge in those areas,” he said. “The real meat for me is when we talk about comparative accounting and foreign subsidiary consolidations. It's very technical and it's not artsy at all – you either know how to do it or you don't. For me, it's fun to teach.”

Jones' influence is not limited to students. Rich Emery, professor of accounting since 1986, considers him a mentor. Jones helped Emery through the promotion and tenure process and also found opportunities for him to serve the accounting profession in Oregon, such as his current position as chair of the Oregon Board of Accountancy's Qualifications Committee.

“Mike sets high standards for himself and expects his colleagues to maintain the same standards, yet he does all that he can to help his colleagues excel,” Emery said. “He is extremely concerned with doing everything he can to make the business and accounting program at Linfield the best it can be. He constantly strives to stay current in the subjects he teaches and is always looking for new and better ways to reach his students by making the subject of accounting more interesting.”

– Mardi Mileham

