

Fall 2006

Faculty Excellence: Orr, Bourassa Earn Linfield Distinctions

Laura Davis
Linfield College

Mardi Mileham
Linfield College

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Recommended Citation

Davis, Laura and Mileham, Mardi (2006) "Faculty Excellence: Orr, Bourassa Earn Linfield Distinctions," *Linfield Magazine*: Vol. 3 : No. 2 , Article 13.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/linfield_magazine/vol3/iss2/13

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Faculty excellence

Orr, Bourassa

Samuel I. Graf Faculty Achievement Award

Personal interests spur research for Orr

Amy Orr is a problem solver with a knack for multitasking.

A quantitative sociologist who routinely works with statistics and surveys, Orr relishes a good project — or 10.

Since coming to Linfield in 2001, Orr, associate professor of sociology, has put her skills to work as a dynamic teacher, committed faculty member and respected researcher. For her efforts, she earned the Samuel I. Graf Faculty Achievement Award, given each year to a faculty member who has made an outstanding contribution that extends beyond his or her regular duties to the life of the college.

Her secret? Lots of sleep, organization and a big black book... a planner in which she chronicles to-do lists, appointments, student schedules and family activities.

“My husband refers to it as ‘my life,’” she said with a smile. “But I sleep well at night because I have everything written down on a daily basis.”

By her own admission, Orr has little downtime, either at work or at home. But that’s fine by her.

“This is who I am,” said Orr, who earned a bachelor’s degree at Nebraska Wesleyan and a master’s and Ph.D. at the University of Notre Dame before coming to Linfield. “I’m involved with things that really intrigue and matter to me. I’m interested in the educational environment and I see the

things I do as important and needing to be done.”

Orr’s research and personal interests are often one and the same. For example, her interest in gender and education provides a backdrop for conversations with Linfield colleagues discussing a gender gap developing in education as more women than men graduate from college. Orr calls the trend “complex and intriguing” and teaches about it in her classes, but she has a personal stake as well, as the parent of an elementary-aged son.

On campus, Orr has immersed herself in college life. She chairs the Faculty Executive Council, co-chairs the Student Success Team and co-chairs a subcommittee on the accreditation steering committee. In addition, she is a faculty advisor for two international honor societies. Last year, she also served as a mentor in the New Faculty Mentor Program and as vice-chair of the January Term Ad Hoc Committee.

Her involvement extends beyond Linfield and into the community, where she is a regular volunteer in her son’s school and has spoken at Henderson House, a local women’s shelter. She is an active member of the Council of Undergraduate Research and chairs the Membership Committee of the Pacific Sociological Association. She has published extensively, most recently an article on wealth and the black-white test score gap and other issues dealing with education.

Orr’s favorite role is that of teacher and mentor. As the department thesis coordinator, she works closely with students as they progress through individual research projects. Strong student evaluations are a testament to her passion and excitement, according to Barbara Seidman, interim dean of faculty.

“Amy knows her field intimately,” Seidman said. “She inspires others with her passion for its nuances, challenges them to engage its complexities, and does so all with an approachability that fosters confidence — what more could one ask of a teacher?”

— Laura Davis

Amy Orr, associate professor of sociology, talks with, from left, Marie Rode '08 and Erika Rosenfield '10.

earn Linfield distinctions

Edith Green Distinguished Teaching Award

Teaching and music compose a harmonious blend

Richard Bourassa is a teacher who composes music, rather than a composer who teaches music.

For Bourassa, that distinction is paramount. And it's obvious his students agree.

"It's clear to me that Dr. Bourassa is more than a professor who brings life to the Music Department; this is an individual who has selflessly devoted his entire being to serving others," wrote Christine Bronson '09, one of 19 students and faculty who nominated him for the Edith Green Distinguished Teaching Award.

Bourassa, who served as department chair for 10 of his 14 years here, received the award last spring for his contributions to the intellectual growth and academic success of his students. He will describe the art of music composition in a special lecture to members of the President's Club on Oct. 26.

Bourassa has been called an inspiring educator, thoughtful mentor, gifted composer and strong leader. He teaches music theory and composition, guiding budding young musicians as they develop their own musical style. He was instrumental in the planning of the new Vivian A. Bull Music Center. He has composed over 100 pieces, including setting to music two poems by poet and English Professor Lex Runciman. He was commissioned to compose two very different works, one that premiered in honor of Vivian Bull's service as president and a second performed by the Northwest Symphony Orchestra in Seattle last winter. The second piece will be performed by the Linfield Chamber Orchestra Nov. 3 for the dedication of the Richard and Lucille Ice Auditorium, formerly Melrose Auditorium.

Bourassa isn't quite sure if he picked music or music chose him. At the age of 8 and with some monetary support from his parents, he purchased his first piano. By the age of 9, his first composition premiered when the Whitefish (Mont.) High School choir performed his song, "Going Fishing."

Although he played the trumpet in junior high and high school and the euphonium in college, the piano remains his favorite instrument.

"When I sit down to play piano, the things I don't know how to explain verbally I can express musically," he said.

His teaching follows him everywhere. It's a chance encounter with a freshman he has yet to have in class. It's sitting side-by-side with a student at the piano or at the computer in the music studio, offering suggestions on a new composition or working through a piece, line by line or movement by movement. It's attending dozens of concerts, recitals and rehearsals throughout the year – because in one way or another, each of those students is special to him.

A kind and thoughtful man who is quick to smile, Bourassa's compassion for his students is evident when he talks about what motivates him as a teacher.

"The intense value I feel is from the students entrusting themselves to me," he said. "I want to do all I can to return that trust positively. I think what I get and what I give is an opportunity to get to know students in an in-depth way and to let them know me in an in-depth way. I hope that what I give them will help them to make their world a better place, just like I hope I'm making the world a little bit better because I am here."

– Mardi Mileham

Professor Richard Bourassa works with Casey Frantum '07 in his new studio office in the Vivian A. Bull Music Center.

