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It's about Making a Difference

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It's about making a difference

Barbara May's life has been about making a difference.

In the slums of New Jersey, in battered women's shelters in Montana and Oregon, and in the classroom, May's life has been defined by reaching out to the disadvantaged and disenfranchised.

She's taken her three great loves – nursing, research and teaching – and combined them into the perfect profession. In recognition of her accomplishments, she received the Samuel I. Graf Faculty Achievement Award last spring, given each year to a faculty member who has performed some outstanding achievement beyond his or her regular duties.

The nursing profession is about making a difference, May said, and she's been able to do that in a variety of ways. She's worked in hospitals and in the community, serving people of different cultures, ages and economic levels. At Montana State University, where she completed her master's degree, she began her work with battered women, raising grant funds to establish a women's shelter and collecting data to begin a fledgling research project that has burgeoned into one that is garnering national and international recognition.

"My interest in working with abused women came out of trying to make a difference," said May, a professor of nursing at the Linfield-Good Samaritan School of Nursing. "How could I help reduce the violence in the world in my own way? I was a child of the '60s and did a lot of volunteer service as a teen. That carried over as an adult. I just feel it's a value of mine."

She brought her passion into the classroom when she first started teaching at MSU and found it was a

perfect fit.

"I loved it from the beginning," she said. "I like to get my fingers in a lot of pies and saw that I could do a lot of things – the teaching, the research, the service – it could all fold into one job."

Her work with abused women continued in Portland at Raphael House and later in Albany at the Linn County Child Victim Assessment Center. She's now on call with Legacy Health System, and many of the psychiatric consultations she does are with abused women.

Sharing what she has learned, sharing the stories of what these women have gone through, helps prepare her students for what they will face on the job. Studies show that health care providers are not prepared to deal comfortably or confidently with people who are in abusive situations.

"It's not a matter of 'if' they will encounter someone in an abusive situation, it's 'when,'" May said.

"I love working with the students," she added. "They teach me just like I teach them. I don't have to teach, but for me it very much goes together. I enjoy being able to share my stories. As long as I have more to share, I want to work with students."

She and her research partner, Barbara Limandri, a visiting associate professor of nursing at Linfield, continue to model intervention strategies for abused women's self-efficacy. Their work, funded by a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health, is getting noticed nationally and they have even had one inquiry from Iran. Her passion is contagious and bubbles up as she talks about her work.

"I have some kind of internal



Barbara May, right, looks over a chart with Jen (Ausen) Goodrich '04, an RN in the Trauma-Recovery and Acute Care Unit at Emanuel Hospital. May is working to better educate students on how to deal with people who are in abusive situations. She is developing a proposal for the Curriculum Committee at Linfield that will outline a specific number of hours students will need to be competent in the area.

motivation that propels me forward," she said. "I love working with my colleagues, I love the students. For me, it's been more about working with people and in something I feel engaged in and passionate about. I love the college's philosophy of life-long learning, something I deeply believe in. I keep thinking one of these days I'm not going to have any more ideas, I'm not going to have anything more to give. It hasn't been true so far."

–Mardi Mileham