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## Exploring Creativity

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## Exploring Creativity

### Authors

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# Exploring Creativity

Thinking of a creative introduction for a series on creativity is daunting.

After all, creativity is something we do, not something we write about. We know Linfield faculty are creative, but how are they creative? We asked five professors that very question and then asked **Lex Runciman**, professor of English, to share the role of creativity in the liberal arts and at Linfield College.

We think you'll find their answers very creative.

We did.

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# Lex Runciman

Who has lived the sunny or rainy Monday that greets us as we wake? We may believe we know what a day will bring, but who can be sure? That sweater has a spot on it – can't wear it after all. We improvise. In this direct (if perhaps not so remarkable way), creativity defines human humdrum daily life.

Creativity defines a faculty member's teaching life: our effort in the classroom is to make the conditions learning requires. Rooms themselves won't accomplish that nor textbooks alone guarantee it – it's up to a teacher, drawing on her or his own expertise, to imagine the intellectual arc students could and ought to take. It's up to the teacher to devise ways to make that arc so focused, inviting, challenging and rewarding that students become willing co-constructors of their own education.

Faculty also see creativity as central to their own intellectual lives. They bring rigorous and restless minds to bear on questions inherent in (and sometimes across) their disciplines. Working from unpredictable combinations of data, focus, and awareness of precedent, they frame new questions and work to answer them. Faculty want to keep flourishing in themselves the same processes they hope students will embrace and internalize.

Creativity in the arts gets defined by every artist and every art work, and that makes for a big arena. As a writer, most often a writer of poems, my effort is to feed a set of habits I know will, if I am patient and persistent, yield eventually a complicated surprise. Writing poems has become my way to energize (and, I hope, broaden, deepen) my own engagement with the unclarity and complications and ongoing amazements of human experience. That sounds grandiose but it isn't really. Doesn't each of us experience delight? Doesn't each of us know disappointment? Doesn't each of us wonder often at what happens and how we're supposed to react and what it is we seem to be part of? What we do with such questions helps define us.

An artist in any area works principally to learn the tools and techniques of that art. I read a lot: language is, after all, my principal tool. Writing is another form of reading – it's just that the paper is blank. If you want to read something, then you have to be the person who fills the page (or the screen), the person who puts the words down in some kind of order. If you don't like those words or their order, you can always delete them or line them out with your pen or erase them with your pencil or revise it all onto a new page. Yet the effort itself never repeats.

Rarely, occasionally, having started with nothing, I realize that some of what I'm reading makes precisely what I want, need and am startled to find. Words on the page – words I could not have predicted – make a recognition, the right something, the something said right. Even just this effort makes the day more.

– *Lex Runciman, Professor of English*



# Jackson Miller



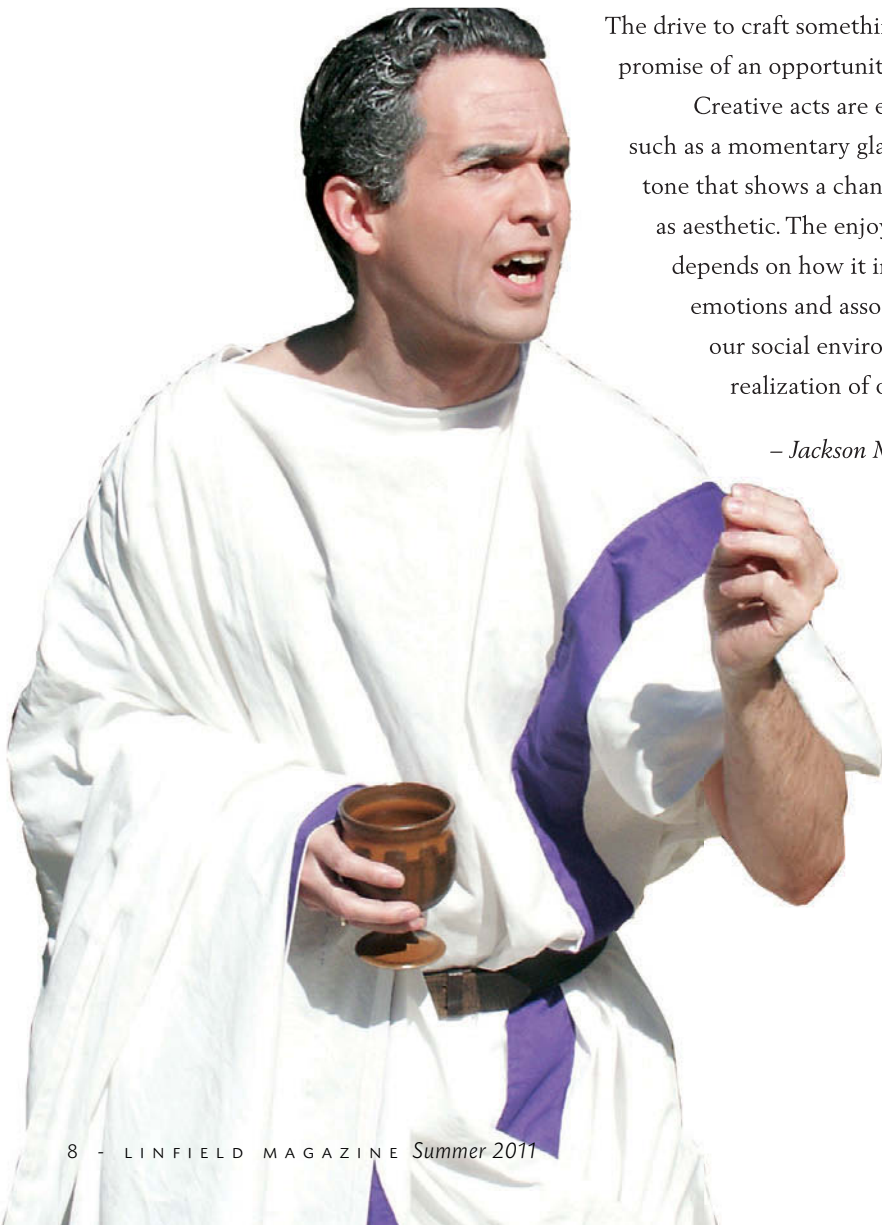
Social interactions are a form of art. For all the myriad outlets for creativity in our constantly connected electronic world, face-to-face encounters, whether they are sharing family stories with a loved one or performances from the Broadway stage, provide unique opportunities for entering into the realm of the aesthetic. Creativity depends on the ability to connect and communicate, and it is an integral part of everyday experience.

Simple acts that we do not necessarily label as artistic fuel our imaginations and lead to the development of new ideas and practices. Why bother to costume yourself before heading out to work or school in the morning by selecting a specific outfit if not for the audience that awaits you? Perhaps the costume helps you to get into the proper voice and body of the character that is your work or school persona.

The drive to craft something that is aesthetically pleasing results from the promise of an opportunity to share that creativity with others.

Creative acts are ephemeral and elusive. Verbal and nonverbal cues, such as a momentary glance that indicates the start of a story or a shift in vocal tone that shows a change in emotion, signal the decision to frame actions as aesthetic. The enjoyment that we receive from viewing a work of art depends on how it interacts with our experiences by prompting memories, emotions and associations. Communication calls forth creativity because our social environment provides the necessary medium for the full realization of our artistic impulses. 🍷

– Jackson Miller, Associate Professor of Communication Arts



*Jackson Miller, in costume for his "Cicero Speaks: A Performance and Program Discussion on the Art of Oratory."*

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# Richard Bourassa



I knew a man who was a bricklayer. His wife said she would like a larger doorway between the dining room and kitchen. What she got was a beautiful, artistic, brick arch doorway, much nicer and more functional than she had thought possible.

I had a friend who was a teacher.

While driving to school on a cool, crisp, sunny spring day, he observed a hot air balloon and its reflection

in a small lake in the city park. In telling his class about his inspiring experience, a young man interrupted and asked how this was relevant. The teacher said, “Young man, everything is relevant.”

Creativity comes in many forms. It is spontaneous, a “creative solution” to a problem that just came up. It is seeing an inkling of creativity showing up in a student’s work – something that goes deeper, that beckons to possibilities for future creative and meaningful contributions. But mostly it seems that creative people work very hard to develop a skill, or craft, or way of doing things that demonstrates to others a high level of competency in that particular area (the bricklayer). Creativity, then, is the ability to see possibilities (everything is relevant), to combine possibilities with the competency gained through hard work, and then to give birth to a different way of hearing, of seeing, of understanding. 🍷

– Richard Bourassa, Professor of Music



# Charles Dunn

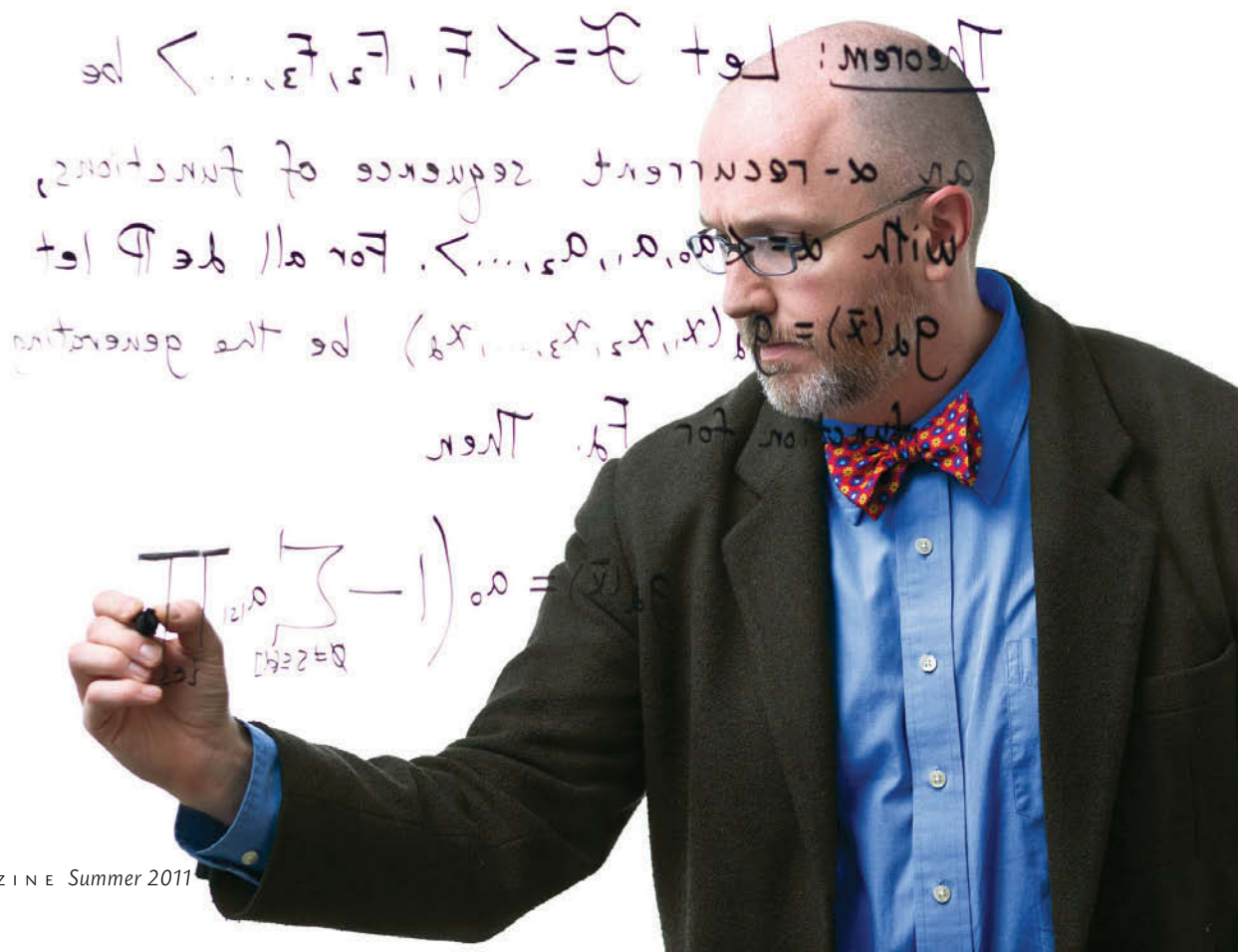


I believe that the act of doing mathematics is a creative feat of invention.

While properties of arithmetic may seem universal, the complex and beautiful world that the human mind has built upon that foundation is confirmation of our great capacity for creativity. As a working mathematician and teacher of mathematics, I know that I see creativity – and occasionally display it, too, when I am fortunate – every semester. Students find correct ways of proving theorems or solving problems that are elegant and that I could not predict. My colleagues and I find new ways, often with metaphors and analogies, to help students understand concepts that heretofore may have seemed beyond their reach. While these abilities may be described as cleverness or talent, I believe it is pure creativity.

The hallmark of creativity is shaping meaning in an unexpected way. This rings true in mathematics as loudly as in the arts, with which creativity is more often associated. Clearly math has rules that must be obeyed; however, so too are there rules in painting, poetry and music. It is when those rules are obeyed, but seemingly bent or expressed in original ways, that something magical happens. When a mathematics student creates a proof connecting two or more ideas that on the surface appear unrelated, how can one not describe that as creative? These imaginative associations are one of the primary reasons that I absolutely love what I do. 🐦

– Charles Dunn, Associate Professor of Mathematics



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# Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt



**A**n image. A sound. A memory. A dream. A brush stroke. A forest. A full moon. An old photograph. The smell of rain on dust. My grandfather's glasses. Our first car. My leaving. Your arrival. Our communal loss when he was gone. And then the laughter that pierced through the newly painted white washed walls, still smelling of lime.

These are random thoughts, yet as a writer there is nothing to design without these random thoughts.

We want to escape from banality. We want to dream of the fantastic. We want to stand witness to our historical time filled with love, greed, excess and brutality. We want our words to serve as testimony for the next generation to come. We all want justice.

*Jane Eyre, Little Women, A Tale of Two Cities, Kubla Khan, Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner, Beloved, Maps, Midnight's Children, Gitanjali, Toni Morrison, Alice Walker, Nadine Gordimer, J.M. Coetzee, Nobokov, Maya Angelou, Salman Rushdie, Edward Said, Toni Cade Bambara, Adrienne Rich, Carolyn Forché, Nikki Giovanni, Lucille Clifton, Pablo Neruda, Czeslaw Milosz.*

These are my maps, my inspirations, my obsessions, my collective muse – all echoing the complexity of human conditions. Their worlds and their words mark my history, my journey, my beginning and everything that is in between. Your thoughts and your maps may be different than mine. Yet, you and I, we both are constantly creating, recreating, deleting, revising this thing called life. What else is there to do? 🌱

– Reshmi Dutt-Ballerstadt, Associate Professor of English





# Liz Obert



Everyone can be creative, and creativity can be applied to everything. It's simply examining the world as it is, then turning it upside down and inside out. It's questioning the normal. When I am faced with a problem, whether it pertains to object making or the world at large, I first look at the obvious, then I put that aside and try to think of something radically different.

Liz Obert, Associate Professor of Art



## About the cover

I am inspired by the practices of archeologists who unearth artifacts, consisting of the detritus of ancient cultures, including the flora and fauna of their environment. These discards form a narrative of ancient lives. I use this methodology, along with creative license, to document the present. To begin, I take a photo of my specimens and then print the image. Next, I use an old typewriter to record the data on a sheet of stationery and take a photograph of the combination of objects. After I print these works, I draw on top of each, creating a monotype.

— Liz Obert

