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Returning to the Classroom

Crystal Galarza '13
Linfield College

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Like their classmates, Kathie Byers '14 and Stephanie Mulligan '13 tackle essays and tests. But at the end of the day these nontraditional students make the transition from college student to professional, attending to commitments as community activist and theatre professional. Byers and Mulligan are among the 3 percent of students on the McMinnville Campus age 25 or older.

Byers' return to school is tied to her community involvement. During a 20-year career as a paralegal, the Linfield business management major helped found LINC, Local Individuals Committed to Sheridan. Her work with LINC developed into a passion for working with youth.

"I realized I had to evaluate what I wanted to do with my life; did I want to remain a paralegal or keep working with youth in the community?" she said.

With the support of her husband and three children, she took a leap of faith, quit her job and pursued her passion.

Like Byers, Mulligan also came to question her career goals. When she started working in theatre, Mulligan had numerous opportunities without a college degree, ultimately landing at Artists Repertory Theatre in Portland as literary manager and artistic associate.

She works with playwrights, agents and casting and helps select the season's shows. Mulligan also handles the majority of the company's dramaturgical writing, and serves as director and stage manager for productions.

However, as Mulligan's career progressed she considered returning to the classroom. Attaining a degree became a personal goal.

"We only have so many trips around the sun," she said. "My return to school includes a personal pledge I made to my late mother and father, both of whom were in the education field. Now, having grown as an artist, I find a longing to finish what I started all those years ago."

Both say the process has been challenging. Finding the right fit to meet their educational goals and professional needs was important.

Days begin early for Mulligan, who has a 75-minute commute from Portland. Seizing every moment, she uses the drive to listen to recorded notes for class before working late into the night.

"I wanted to stay in Oregon and continue working but I also wanted to be challenged academically. I was not looking for a rubber stamp diploma," Mulligan said. "Linfield appealed to me through the prestigious quality of the educators and the small size of the institution that ensures the kind of personal attention needed to thrive."

Byers, too, is familiar with a hectic schedule. She commutes to campus four days a week while working 12-20 hours at LINC.

Similarly, Linfield had the qualities Byers was looking for, including convenient location. However, the size is what ultimately drew her. Juggling work, a household, parenting, marriage and full-time classes is no simple task and having professors who know their students as more than just a number was essential, she said. "I have professors who say, 'I will be here for you,'" said Byers.

"I realized I had to evaluate what I wanted to do with my life; did I want to remain a paralegal or keep working with youth in the community?"

– Kathie Byers '14



Kathie Byers '14 high fives students who participate in LINC, Local Individuals Committed to Sheridan, a program she helped found to support local youth.

e classroom



"That's the power of a small college. Once I got to Linfield I realized this was the perfect fit for me."

A scholarship from the Ford Family Foundation sealed Byers' decision.

Having support has been crucial to achieving both academic focus and a fruitful career. Both Mulligan and Byers said it can be difficult to maintain that focus.

"It's an enormous challenge and balancing act with two full-time jobs at Artists Repertory," said Mulligan.

"I feel blessed to have a supportive family that works together," Byers said. "It's important for me that I don't compromise that relationship with my family."

With family and work responsibilities outside the classroom, Mulligan and Byers must be intentional with their time and assignments.

"It's hard to be home and not get interrupted," said Byers. "If I have a test coming up I just tell my family I have to be in the library until late or do it after 9 p.m. when all the kids and my husband have gone to bed."

Mulligan is also strategic about time and location when getting work done. She does a lot of her homework on weekends in concentrated, often full-day blocks and late at night.

"Sometimes, I have to work on papers at 6 a.m. while getting ready for my morning drive," said Mulligan.

While juggling responsibilities is a challenge for both, it results in a unique perspective.

"The tuition money is my responsibility; I don't have parents to bail me out. Having a family and a mortgage makes me want to get everything I possibly can out of each class," said Mulligan.

Byers often sees the value of her experience in the classroom.

"There have been many moments where my life experiences affirmed what we were learning in class and texts," said Byers. "I have an advantage in that I can apply the concepts in the classroom to what I have experienced in my own life."

Stephanie Mulligan '13 works with Ty Marshall, professor of theatre, on drawings for a class, Fundamentals of Theatre Design and Drawing.

Both view their time in the classroom as an investment, and agree their Linfield education has made a tremendous difference.

"I cannot think of any circumstance in which an artist would not benefit from continuing education. I strongly believe in the adage 'learn something new every day,'" said Mulligan. "Challenging myself in the classroom makes me think and communicate with more focus; I gain fresh perspectives not only from my professors but from my fellow students."

Byers can see the impact of her education on her family.

"I've seen an academic improvement in my children since I've come back to school. I think I've inspired them to do better and prioritize," said Byers.

After Linfield, Byers plans to continue her work with LINC'S reaching out to youth in her community. Mulligan plans to continue her work with Artist's Repertory and connect internationally through collaborations abroad.

– Crystal Galarza '13

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– Stephanie Mulligan '13

