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Teaching Always Comes First

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Teaching always



When Hillary Crane arrived at Linfield, she was amazed that students immediately sought her out.

"I was surprised by how much the students here expect to have close interactions with their faculty," she said. "And then I was surprised by how much I liked it."

Now Crane, an associate professor of anthropology, looks forward to offering advice on papers, sharing ideas, or just talking with students on any topic.

"Those one-on-one meetings where you have conversations about the meaning of life, the nature of reality and other things are truly fun," she said of her students, whom she calls earnest and eager to learn. "When the ideas are cool and the students are excited, how could you not get caught up in that?"

Crane has earned the devotion and respect of her students. In November during the President's Circle dinner, Gabi Leif '14 spoke about Crane's influence and impact on her education (*see story on page 20*).

Crane is quick to laugh and, like any anthropologist, she peppers her comments with stories and examples. Her research interests are diverse: Buddhism in Taiwan and celiac disease. But, she quickly admits, the biggest reason she is at Linfield is because she loves to teach.

"Teaching is our priority," she said. "I get to mentor students in their research and I keep myself active as a researcher. But, I love teaching."

Anthropology, the study of humans past and present, looks at cultures and people who have dramatically different views, and studies a complex array of interrelated issues. "In teaching anthropology, you are asking people to think from the perspective of others," she said, adding that a foreign cultural practice may seem wrong to an American, but if you climb into another culture,

you can see why it is logical for another society to live that way.

Crane's classes include students majoring in fields ranging from nursing and political science to business and environmental studies. Anthropology involves also understanding human behaviors by examining them in their wider cultural contexts. It is applicable to nearly every discipline and profession. Business students find it useful in marketing and nurses need to be able to understand patients from different cultures. It can help people who study or live abroad adjust to different cultures. Concepts can be applied to college campuses and families.

"Anthropology touches every aspect of our lives," she said. "It looks at human phenomena in their wider cultural contexts. Humans can be complicated and messy and our holistic perspective makes anthropology useful to anyone who wants to understand human behavior."

Metaphors as a tool

Crane, like all anthropologists, uses stories and illustration in her teaching. Her classes are rigorous, combining extensive reading, writing and fieldwork to help students grasp complex theories and understand the intricacies of how societies operate.

But her use of metaphors is one of her best teaching techniques, according to Arielle Ramberg '12, who is currently teaching 10 classes of English between kindergarten and 11th grades at a private Catholic school in Dakar, Senegal.

"It is a strategy that I have found helpful to explain complicated ideas to others," she said. "I will always think of the process of writing an essay as making a braid, with each of the strands signifying different elements coming together to make a complete braid. The way I immerse myself in Senegalese culture

The Crane file:

At Linfield since 2007
B.A., history, Seattle University
M.A., Ph.D., anthropology, Brown University

Book:

Missionary Impositions: Conversion, Resistance, and other Challenges to Objectivity in Religious Ethnography
Co-edited with Deana Weibel
2012 (Lexington Books)

Academic interests:

Sociolinguistics and linguistic theory, medical anthropology, religion, gender and sexuality, ethnicity, East and Southeast Asians, and Asian Americans.

comes first



and find meaning in the local Wolof language to give me cultural insight comes directly from Hillary's teaching."

Fieldwork and research

Anthropology has been described as "making the strange familiar and the familiar strange." Fieldwork is a critical part of that and it is integral in Crane's classes and research. Crane said students gain an understanding of concepts by conducting social experiments.

For example, Ramberg's study group chose to violate normal etiquette in elevators by facing the back of the elevator, singing or striking up conversations with people and then observing the other riders' reactions.

"Those projects provided concrete examples of what we learned in class, encouraged self-reflection and were also entertaining," Ramberg said.

Because anthropology is a discipline based on the study of culture, knowledge can shift constantly, Crane said. "That fluidity of knowledge and imperfect understanding is something I want students to get comfortable with," she added. "They often feel like they have to master something before they can use it. Life is not like that. It's not like a high school math test or a grammar test. It's not about memorizing concepts. It's about understanding why something matters."

Collaborative research

Crane has a personal interest in one aspect of her research. While she was completing her dissertation, she was diagnosed with celiac disease. Now

Linfield students collaborate with her on research into the disease, and she has been surprised by some of their findings.

For example, student researchers found that some celiacs resent the trendiness of the gluten-free diet and feel like their disease is not taken seriously because people treat them like they are following the fad. They also discovered some pop culture lingo, such as "glutard," which is how some younger celiacs refer to themselves.

Crane gives students autonomy in the field and they often struggle at the beginning, as though they have been pushed in the water with no life preserver.

"I want them to bring a fresh perspective," Crane said. "That requires that I can't give them a lot of direction. It's not until you are doing research that you realize what questions matter in the context of what you are studying. You have

to think on your feet and be adaptive. The way to develop those skills is to practice them."

Craig Geffre '11, who recently completed a Fulbright grant teaching English in Thailand, said his celiac research experience taught him how to use and develop theories, conduct fieldwork and interpret results.

"The skills I learned were immediately applicable and helped me immensely in Thailand as I sought to navigate and understand a culture that is very different from my own," he said. "Students get a real sense of what it is to be an anthropologist by doing fieldwork, thinking critically about culture and analyzing existing research. They come away with a solid understanding of how anthropology can be applied to everyday lives, regardless of their field of work or study."

—Mardi Mileham



Gabi Leif '14, left, said Professor Hillary Crane has had a major impact on her education and growth as a student and world citizen. Leif is a theatre and anthropology double major. Crane is an associate professor of anthropology.