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# Not Your Traditional Boot Camp

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# Not your traditional



## Mike Jones File

At Linfield since 1977

Harold C. Elkinton Professor of  
Accounting, CPA

BA, MBA, University of Oregon

The 2013 Edith Green Distinguished  
Professor

*"I hope what they take away is that they went through a first-class program in a first-class school and they can do anything."*

– Professor Mike Jones

The first thing you notice when you approach Mike Jones' office in T.J. Day Hall is a small sign emblazoned with "CPA Boot Camp."

This former Marine understands the punishing demands of boot camp. And while the CPA version can be grueling, it comes with more encouragement and compassion than most Marine recruits receive.

Jones, the Harold C. Elkinton professor of accounting at Linfield, has inspired and encouraged hundreds of students for 36 years. He has earned their devotion and respect and at the President's Circle dinner in November, Robin (Burmeister) Nichols '82 spoke poignantly about Jones' influence on her education and accounting career. (See story on page 18)

Accounting is a rigorous curriculum and Jones calls intermediate accounting the boot camp of the major.

It is the toughest year they face on the road to an accounting degree. "I know it's a struggle," Jones said. "If you are going to graduate and become a professional accountant you are expected to have the skills that come with some struggle."

And sometimes tears. While the sign may seem a bit ominous, there's no shortage of empathy and support in Jones' office and in the classroom. His bookshelf features a box of tissues, labeled "Intermediate Accounting Only."

## Inspired by students

Jones draws energy and inspiration from the hundreds of students he has taught at Linfield.

He believes those deep relationships are the result of small intimate classes where he and his students work side-by-side.

"I have to do the homework problems just like the students," he said. "And sometimes we work them together. By the end of their coursework, even if we are not good friends, we have struggled through

some difficult problems and that makes for an appreciation for each other."

They also astonish and challenge him. In one recent class, a student asked a question far beyond anything they had studied.

"I got so excited because I could talk about something that is really interesting to me, that I would not have addressed," he said. "I knew his brain was working far beyond anything I expected. That inspires me to get the whole class asking those kinds of questions."

Jones constantly looks for teaching methods that will break down complex accounting problems.

During a recent class, he and his students were wrestling with a dense array of numbers, dates and other information. They had covered about a third of the information, when Jones said, "We can't go any further. Can you remember anything of what we just read? Let's draw a picture." He diagrammed the data on the board, then he and the students sat back, looked at the material and began to figure out what to do.

"Picking it apart and getting the details out there so they didn't forget them helped us to see all the elements," he said. "We could dispense with the irrelevant. That's what we do in accounting."

Thomas Bryan '13 said Jones will go the extra step to make sure his students understand the material. "He's a hard teacher, but you really learn the material," he added.

In both intermediate and advanced accounting, Jones encourages students to ask questions as he goes through the material.

"He will spend the hour really making sure you know what you need to know," Bryan said. "The steps in accounting are very detailed and he will spend whatever time you need to make sure you understand it."

Jones believes Linfield accounting graduates are better because of the broad liberal arts education they receive.

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# boot camp



"I'm stunned at how worldly they are after they graduate," he said. "I can't help but believe that it emanates from their broader background. It's not necessarily the background that I give them. I am a great fan of the liberal arts and I believe our accounting students are outstanding, in part, because of their broad, non-accounting coursework. I have many colleagues in other departments to thank for that."

## Branding

About 10 years ago, a student walked in and asked Jones for permission to miss a class. He needed to go home to eastern Oregon and help with branding.

Jones granted permission with the understanding that the next year he would get an invitation to join him. The following spring Jones accompanied Jacob Collier '03 and four other students and spent a weekend on the ranch helping with spring branding.

"He jumped right in, wrestling the

calves and working the cows through the chute," Collier said. "He was up for anything and everything and willing to try."

Collier, now a CPA with Guyer & Associates in Baker City, switched his major to accounting after taking only one class from Jones.

"He is one of the big reasons I am in accounting," he said. "He was engaging, took personal interest in his students and you could ask him any question. He loved what he was doing."

## Using social media

Jones knows the value of establishing networks and connections. He is well known in the accounting profession and has been instrumental in connecting Linfield students with professional opportunities. He's taken to social media and has created a Facebook group made up solely of Linfield accounting graduates.

"If you get a degree in accounting, you can do just about anything," he

said. "I hope what they take away is that they went through a first-class program in a first-class school and they can do anything. That's the kind of thing we need to think about as teachers."

"A teacher has to really like and be excited about the material," he said. "That excitement can rub off. I think that's the key thing for effective teaching, regardless of the discipline." 🍷

– Mardi Mileham

*Mike Jones is the Harold C. Elkinton Professor of Accounting and the longest-serving full-time faculty member at Linfield, with 35 years of distinguished service. He was named The Edith Green Distinguished Professor in May, given to a senior faculty member who demonstrates sustained excellence in the classroom and has worked to enhance Linfield's commitment to academic excellence.*

