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Tenacity Key to Success

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Tenacity key to success

When Andrew Webber ’10 gets excited, words tumble from his mouth so rapidly that it’s hard to keep up.

His enthusiasm is as contagious as his passion for learning, his intensity tempered by a self-deprecating humor and eagerness to share. He admits that he has had to learn some restraint—every time he takes a new course, he wants another major or minor.

Webber enrolled at Linfield College as a political science major, with emphasis on the Middle East. But after one religious studies course taught by Professor Bill Millar ’60, he switched to religion.

“I just fell in love with the discipline,” he said. “I love political science, but religious studies encompasses so much more of what I’m interested in.”

To gain an even deeper understanding, Webber joined a handful of students studying Hebrew with Millar this year. He plans to combine his interest in the language and his passion for the Middle East during an immersion program at Hebrew University in Jerusalem this summer.

“Religious studies comes from a lot of disciplines—politics, gender, sociology and psychology,” Webber said. “There are a lot of ways to look at religion. Islam, Judaism and Christianity all can be traced to Abraham. When we realize that we do have a connection, that we have an identity with Jews and Muslims, maybe we can work together to make the world a little more peaceful.”

His desire to read the Old Testament in its original language was the impetus to study Hebrew. He especially would like to attain a deeper understanding of the Torah, the first five books of the Hebrew scriptures.

“If you read the Torah in Hebrew, each word has its own weight and could have a different meaning in different settings,” Webber said. “I have to practice every day. You can never master a language or understand everything about it because it’s always moving and ambiguous. That’s why we still study English.”

It’s not only Webber’s passion for the subject, but also his tenacity that make him a joy to teach, said Millar, who selected Webber to serve as his teaching assistant.

“He is tenacious,” Millar said. “When others give up, he goes the extra mile and he never feels that the extra work is a burden. He outperforms his peers because he hangs in there.”

Webber, a native of Vancouver, Wash., gave up his dream of playing college football to achieve his long-term goal—becoming a college professor. He devotes extra effort to his academic work, even when he needs to reach his dream graduate program—Harvard Divinity School.

“He’s been a tremendous influence in class, Millar said, because the students pick up on his enthusiasm. “He’s not afraid to fail and he steps up where others hold back,” Millar said. “He brings an energy and optimism to the class. When helping teach freshmen, he recognizes if they are having problems. He’s approachable, interested and excited about college.”

Webber’s passion for learning isn’t limited to religion. Everything excites him, from philosophy to international relations, gender studies and feminism.

“All of my classes are opening new doors, new levels of analysis and new perspectives that enrich what I am learning,” he said. “There are so many different perspectives and ways of looking at things, it brings it to life for me and that’s really exciting.”

— Mani Milham

Interest in debate, history earn cross-border prize

When Morgan St. Jean ’09 checked her email one day in January, she expected the usual spam and Facebook updates.

But instead, a message from Jackson Miller, her forensics advisor, caught her eye.

It was a notice to his students about a competition, “Crossing Borders: Issues and Resolutions” hosted by the Consulate General of Canada. The event paired American and Canadian college students to argue their countries’ positions on international political issues.

St. Jean, a communication arts and history double major and an avid debater, thought this fit her interests exactly. She was right, and ultimately won Best Speaker at the conference along with a $1,000 prize.

“I was really interested in the topics, and I liked the idea of working with someone from Canada and getting their perspective of the issue,” said St. Jean, one of only eight American students selected to participate.

She will use the prize money to attend a three-week debate institute, hosted by the International Debate Education Association, in Turkey this summer.

She and her partner, Thomas Kearns, a University of Alberta student, debated the topic of United Nations multilateral diplomacy. Through research over the next month, the two studied the differences and similarities of opinions between the United States and Canada about the U.N., especially post-Sept. 11.

“I learned that the Canadians have always been much more committed to the U.N. and use it as a mediator between countries,” St. Jean said. “Whereas the United States has always seen the U.N. as one option of foreign policy, yet they will use others if it is more to their advantage.”

Through their research, St. Jean and Kearns proposed the solution of United Nations reform.

“The U.N. needs to come into the 21st century,” St. Jean said. “It is very much based on country-to-country conflict. Warfare has changed to terrorist organizations within countries, and the U.N. is not equipped to handle that.”

St. Jean and Kearns presented the American and Canadian sides, along with their joint solution, to a panel of three judges and four moderators who were then allowed to ask questions.

Learning about different government systems spurred St. Jean’s latest goal of studying abroad. In January, she will travel to Brussels, Limerick and Luxembourg to study the European Union, and she also hopes to study abroad after graduation, perhaps in Canada.

“I realized through this experience that Canada has a much different culture than we do,” said St. Jean. “They are not a mirror of the United States.”

A natural leader, St. Jean has mentored new members of the Linfield forensics team, served as assistant coach for the McMinnville High School forensics team and will serve as the student coordinator of the Linfield Speaking Center next year. She is curious and hard working and has a keen sense of intellectual inquiry, according to Brenda DeVore Marshall, professor of theatre arts.

“One of the goals of a liberal arts institution is to guide students to become good citizens of the world,” said Marshall, “and Morgan is one who will make a difference.”

— Kasey Richter ’09

When Morgan St. Jean ’09 talked with Jeff Pieniazek ’09 in the Linfield Speaking Center, she earned the top speaker award in a competition, “Crossing Borders: Issues and Resolutions,” hosted by the Consulate General of Canada.

Bill Millar ’60, left, professor of religion, consults with Andrew Webber ’10, one of a handful of students studying Hebrew this year. Webber is the recipient of the Gabrielle Hirtich Endowed Scholarship, established to assist students who are majoring or minoring in religion.