Interest in Debate, History Earn Cross-Border Prize

Kasey Richter '09
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 fascination with 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 so many different 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, everything excites him, from philosophy to international relations, gender studies and feminism.

“Of all my classes are opening new doors, new levels of analysis and new perspectives that enrich my understanding of the language. I hadn’t realized all the things that can be hidden in language.”

Even a severe case of dyslexia, which prevented him from reading until the fourth grade, has not hindered Webber. He knows he needs extra time and extra effort to succeed.

“It’s a lot of repetition and a lot of time, but I think that’s the case with any language,” he 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 studies and can earn the high grades he needs to reach his dream graduate program — Harvard Divinity School.

“Webber is the recipient of the Gabrielle Hartrich Endowed Scholarship, established to assist students who are majoring or minoring in religion.

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“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.

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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.

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