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Learning Beyond the Classroom

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Learning beyond the classroom

When Keston Obendorf ’08 and Nathan Oliver ’09 spent an afternoon playing rock, paper, scissors last fall, it was more than just casual fun.

Hunched over a computer in an auditorium full of competitors, the two computer science majors collaborated on code directing a computer to play the age-old children’s game at the Pacific Northwest Regional Intercollegiate Programming Competition (ICPC) at the University of Washington. Once that was accomplished, they tackled 10 other problems during the intense five-hour contest, successfully solving three and finishing in the top half of the regional competition.

“It’s like taking 11 consecutive final exams,” said Dan Ford, assistant professor of computer science, who accompanied eight Linfield students to the competition. “They did exceptionally well.”

Obendorf and Oliver are part of a growing segment of Linfield students taking part in academic endeavors off campus. Each year, an average of 250 students, representing half of the academic departments on campus, travel to professional conferences and competitions, according to Elizabeth Atkinson, associate dean of faculty and associate professor of chemistry.

Students represent academic departments spanning the curriculum, including humanities and the social and physical sciences. Some students present scholarly research developed with faculty mentors at professional meetings. Others perform creative works at music and theatrical competitions. Still others, like Obendorf and Oliver, enter academic competitions.

“Linfield is committed to giving students opportunities for hands-on learning so they achieve success in graduate school or in the workplace,” said Atkinson, who has accompanied chemistry students to regional and national conferences. Linfield students have also competed internationally. “These types of experiences enhance students’ eligibility for future internship opportunities.”

What’s more, academic travel exposes students to cutting-edge work from other institutions and notable experts from around the world. Students interact with CEOs, administrators, graduate school representatives and student peers.

“They find soul mates, others who are passionate with similar interests,” Atkinson added. “It gives them insight into what they can do beyond their undergrad careers. It’s eye opening.”

That interaction with students and faculty from other institutions is crucial, Ford said. The ICPC is the largest programming contest in the world with more than 21,000 students taking part worldwide.

“It helps to boost their confidence knowing they can compete,” Ford said. “It also shows us what we can improve on. We realized a lot of math is required for this computer competition.”

As a result, Oliver enrolled in a mathematical graph theory class and plans to be better prepared for next year’s competition. Obendorf is contemplating graduate school and said the competition advanced his computer science skills.

— Laura Davis

Karen Shaw ’08, left, and Chris Braden ’08, along with Jennifer Johnson ’09 (not pictured) presented their research on cancer cell motility at the American Society of Biochemistry and Molecular Biology in San Diego, Calif., in April.

Heard around the Linfield campus

“Reflections on Leadership: Liberal Education and the Global Economy,” a panel discussion featuring three distinguished business leaders, was attended by more than 200 students, faculty and community members April 9.

“We’ve talked about liberal arts education and work, but for me you are not just producing workers at this college. Your liberal arts education helps you enjoy your personal life throughout your career and during your retirement. It opens your eyes to a lot of different things, and an appreciation for other things you may decide to pursue in your personal life for your own enjoyment. You may not otherwise have that opportunity.”

Curtis Baker ’82
Retired managing director of Merrill Lynch & Co.
A history major who ended up on Wall Street

“The ability to communicate well is essential for corporate or any type of business environment. I also think you should do what you say you are going to do and do the right thing. Live with ethics, live with integrity. Those are critical to your success in any position. Those are all very important in addition to having the skills necessary for a job.”

Raichelle Glover
Retired senior vice president with Bank of America
A communications major who ended up in banking

“Globalization is not just the business fad of the decade. It’s a very big deal and is here to stay. Two-thirds of the world economy is outside the U.S. Not only are American companies going to be challenged with far more competition...but you in your individual careers will have a considerably more competitive time...because you’re not just competing against your colleagues in America, you’re competing with people around the world. That will make for a more interesting business life, but it will not be as stable or comfortable as it has been in the past.”

Peter Hamilton
Retired president of Brunswick Corporation’s Boat Group
An English major who ended up running a boating company

“Reflections on Leadership: Liberal Education and the Global Economy,” a wide-ranging discussion on topics such as why liberal arts students should consider careers in business and why business students should take liberal arts courses, was described as “a political novel.” She does not want to be labeled as a political writer, but longs to be a part of the world community of artists who share their cultures with the rest of the world.

Diana Abu-Jaber
Award-winning author of Arabian Jazz and Crescent

— Diana Abu-Jaber

From left, Curtis Baker ’82, retired from Merrill Lynch & Co.; Raichelle Glover, retired from Bank of America; and Peter Hamilton, retired from Brunswick Corporation’s Boat Group, presented “Reflections on Leadership: Liberal Education and the Global Economy,” a wide-ranging discussion on topics such as why liberal arts students should consider careers in business and why business students should take liberal arts courses.

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