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Faculty Excellence: Orr, Bourassa Earn Linfield Distinctions

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Faculty excellence

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Samuel I. Graf Faculty Achievement Award
Personal interests spur research for Orr

Amy Orr is a problem solver with a knack for multitasking.
A quantitative sociologist who routinely works with
statistics and surveys, Orr relishes a good project — or 10.
Since coming to Linfield in 2001, Orr, associate
professor of sociology, has put her skills to work as a
dynamic teacher, committed faculty member and
respected researcher. For her efforts, she earned the
Samuel I. Graf Faculty Achievement Award, given each year to a faculty member who has made an outstanding
contribution that extends beyond his or her regular
duties to the life of the college.
Her secret? Lots of sleep, organization and a big black
book... a planner in which she chronicles to-do lists,
appointments, student schedules and family activities.
“My husband refers to it as ‘my life,’” she said with
a smile. “But I sleep well at night because I have every-
thing written down on a daily basis.”

By her own admission, Orr has little downtime,
either at work or at home. But that’s fine by her.
“This is who I am,” said Orr, who earned a bachelor’s
degree at Nebraska Wesleyan and a master’s and Ph.D.
at the University of Notre Dame before coming to
Linfield. “I’m involved with things that really
intrigue and matter to me. I’m interested in the
educational environment and I see the
things I do as important and needing to be done.”
Orr’s research and personal interests are often one
and the same. For example, her interest in gender and
education provides a backdrop for conversations with
Linfield colleagues discussing a gender gap developing
in education as more women than men graduate from
college. Orr calls the trend “complex and intriguing”
and teaches about it in her classes, but she has a person-
al stake as well, as the parent of an elementary-aged son.
On campus, Orr has immersed herself in college
life. She chairs the Faculty Executive Council, co-chairs the
Student Success Team and co-chairs a subcommittee
on the accreditation steering committee. In addition, she is a faculty advisor for two international honor societies.
Last year, she also served as a mentor in the New Faculty
Mentor Program and as vice-chair of the January Term
Ad Hoc Committee.
Her involvement extends beyond Linfield and into
the community, where she is a regular volunteer in her
son’s school and has spoken at Henderson House, a local
women’s shelter. She is an active member of the Council
of Undergraduate Research and chairs the Membership
Committee of the Pacific Sociological Association. She
has published extensively, most recently an article on
wealth and the black-white test score gap and other
issues dealing with education.
Orr’s favorite role is that of teacher and mentor. As
the department thesis coordinator, she works closely
with students as they progress through individual
research projects. Strong student evaluations are a testa-
ment to her passion and excitement, according to
Barbara Seidman, interim dean of faculty.
“Amy knows her field intimately,” Seidman said.
“She inspires others with her passion for its nuances,
challenges them to engage its complexities, and does so
all with an approachability that fosters confidence —
what more could one ask of a teacher?”
— Lisa Davis

Edith Green Distinguished Teaching Award
Teaching and music compose a harmonious blend

Richard Bourassa is a teacher who composes music,
rather than a composer who teaches music.
For Bourassa, that distinction is paramount. And it’s
obvious his students agree.
“It’s clear to me that Dr. Bourassa is more than a
professor who brings life to the Music Department; this is
an individual who has selflessly devoted his entire
being to serving others,” wrote Christine Bronson ’09,
one of 19 students and faculty who nominated him for
the Edith Green Distinguished Teaching Award.
Bourassa, who served as department chair for 10 of
his 14 years here, received the award last spring for his
contributions to the intellectual growth and academic
success of his students. He will describe the art of music
composition in a special lecture to members of the
President’s Club on Oct. 26.
Bourassa has been called an inspiring educator,
thoughtful mentor, gifted composer and strong leader. He
hears music theory and composition, guiding budding
young musicians as they develop their own musical style.
He was instrumental in the planning of the new Vivian A.
Bull Music Center. He has composed over 100 pieces,
including setting to music two poems by poet and English
Professor Lex Runciman. He was commissioned to
compose two very different works, one that premiered in
honor of Vivian Bull’s service as president and a second
performed by the Northwest Symphony Orchestra in
Seattle last winter. The second piece will be performed by
the Linfield Chamber Orchestra Nov. 3 for the
dedication of the Richard and Lucille Ice Auditorium,
formerly Melrose Auditorium.
Bourassa isn’t quite sure if he picked music or
music chose him. At the age of 8 and with
some monetary support from his parents, he
bought his first piano. By the age of 9, his
first composition premiered when the
Whitefish (Mont.) High School choir
performed his song, “Going Fishing.”

Although he played the trumpet in junior high and
high school and the euphonium in college, the piano
remains his favorite instrument.
“When I sit down to play piano, the things I don’t know
how to explain verbally I can express musically,” he said.
His teaching follows him everywhere. It’s a chance
encounter with a freshman he has yet to have in class. It’s
sitting side-by-side with a student at the piano or at the
computer in the music studio, offering suggestions on a
new composition or working through a piece, line by line or
movement by movement. It’s attending dozens of concerts,
recitals and rehearsals throughout the year — because in one
way or another, each of those students is special to him.
A kind and thoughtful man who is quick to smile,
Bourassa’s compassion for his students is evident when
he talks about what motivates him as a teacher.
“The intense value I feel is from the students
entrusting themselves to me,” he said. “I want to do all I
can to return that trust positively. I think what I get and
what I give is an opportunity to get to know students in
an in-depth way and to let them know me in an in-
depth way. I hope that what I give them will help them
to make their world a better place, just like I hope I’m
making the world a little bit better because I am here.”
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Amy Orr, associate professor of sociology, talks
with, from left, Marie Rode ’08 and Erika
Rosenfeld ’10.

Professor Richard Bourassa works with Casey
Frankum ’07 in his new studio office in the
Vivian A. Bull Music Center.

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