This Humane Man of Letters

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Business is booming for seniors in Sandie Kiehl’s Strategic Management class. Teams of Linfield College business students are finding success running companies in an online computer simulation of an athletic shoe industry. Kiehl, associate professor of business, guides students through the capstone course, which integrates concepts from every Linfield business class.

Students are scored on profitability measures such as earnings per share, credit ratings and stock price, said Kiehl, who has taught the course since 1988, leading four sections each semester including one for the Adult Degree Program.

“They are held accountable in the same way they would be if they were running a company,” Kiehl explained. “They get annual results back and it’s black and white.”

Throughout the semester, students make hundreds of decisions, each with the potential to make or break their company. Should they sell wholesale or retail? Branded or private label? And in what regions of the world? Other decisions follow relating to production, distribution, marketing, compensation and finance.

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One of Kiehl’s former students, Ted Reimers ’99, recently participated in the simulation again, this time at the graduate level while earning an MBA from California State University Stanislaus. Reimers, assistant vice president with American AgCredit in Turlock, Calif., placed first in his industry worldwide and attributes much of his success to his participation at Linfield.

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— Laura Davis

Remember it vividly. During my first conversation with Dr. Marvin Henberg, candidate to become Linfield’s new dean of faculty, I found myself talking about the philosophic bonafides of 19th century British novelist George Eliot (nee Mary Ann Evans). As a longtime member of the English Department, I hardly regarded such a foray into literature in the midst of a job interview digressive, but what I didn’t know at the time was that I was thus being initiated into a defining characteristic of Marv’s subsequent deanship: the breadth and depth of his passion for the life of the mind, in all its variousness. Over the 12 years since, I have never stopped learning from Marv Henberg — most recently through his eloquent reflections on the interplay between author and audience that served as prelude to a talk by his longtime friend and nationally distinguished writer — David Quammen. That conversation about George Eliot in May of 1994 was clear enough to the past.

I am by no means the only beneficiary of Marv’s generous mentorship in his tenure as senior college administrator. In six years as associate dean for academic affairs, and now again as interim dean of the college, I have relied on him ceaselessly for guidance. His philosopher’s training has equipped him to take the long view in the face of problems that seem impossible of resolution. More than once he has advised me to accept the humbling fact that perfect justice is out of our limited human reach, so we should at least strive to do as little harm as possible as we wrestle with conflicting needs. And while a confessed skeptic, he has also conceded an essentially optimistic view of human nature — if reason itself does not always win the day, then he draws comfort from believing that at least defensible motives propel all sides in a disagreement and are worthy of engagement. This does not surprise me in a man who has spent his life immersed in great literature, whose primary lesson may indeed be the cultivation of such capacity for empathy.

In partnership with President Emerita Vivian Bell, Marv has achieved great things for the college during his academic vice presidency, and they need only a brief glossing here: the opening of a long-awaited new library; the flowering of the Keck Campus into a vibrant new hub for the arts; the hiring of some 60 faculty members on both campuses; the inauguration of collaborative research opportunities that enrich the professional aspirations of students and faculty alike; the launching of an environmental studies program that models the integrative thinking that will be essential to solving the problems of the 21st century both regionally and globally. In each of these ways Marv’s efforts have fostered the cooperative synergies that have made the Linfield College of 2006 a center of vision-ary education in the Northwest. It was only fitting, then, that the Board of Trustees asked him to assume the mantle of interim president at a crucial moment of transition in the life of the institution.

But my thoughts about Dean and President Henberg’s contributions to Linfield keep returning to the humane man of letters I am now watching re-immerse himself in his faculty roots. As he resumes the mantle of full-time professor of philosophy (once so keen to be on a well-deserved sabbatical), he is enthusiastically spending hours in the college archives preparing to write about Linfield’s past as prologue to its future as part of the college’s 2008 sesquicentennial celebration. After a dozen years doing Linfield’s business, Marv sees his future in terms of the sheer delight of inquiry and synthesis that define the life of the mind I saw on display in that 1994 interview when our association began. His example in these weeks and months to come may prove to be the most long-lasting of all the powerful influences he has had on my own life.

— Barbara Seidman

Interim Dean of Faculty