A View from Melrose

Marvin Henberg
Linfield College

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Cultivating the restless yet disciplined intellect

We all know and relish the stereotype: a fuzzy, aging professor poring over yellowing note cards from which he delivers the same dreary lectures year after year. When the note cards were first composed is a mystery. Where the yellowing comes from is not, for time has bypassed this stereotypical professor. The only thing current about him is the mirth of his students.

Happily, in 11 years as dean reviewing and evaluating the work of every faculty member at Linfield College, I never encountered yellowing note cards. Linfield faculty members are always changing something: their selection of readings, their delivery of material, their use of information technology; their selection of class projects, their deployment of small group discussions, their laboratory assignments, their field trips and even their course venues — visiting hospitals, factories, explorer clubs and exotic cities throughout the world.

Faculty members arriving at Linfield today, in the 21st century, face a greater challenge than that faced by their predecessors. At the normal age of hiring, they can contemplate a teaching career of some 35 years. Yet the half-life of information compiled in their Ph.D. dissertations is less than seven years. That is, half of what they took in mastering and wielding into a disciplined thesis will be superseded in seven years or fewer. Simultaneously, faculty members must tap into the restless idealism and energy of each rising generation of students. To maintain standing with their intellectual peers as well as their students, today’s faculty members have no choice but to be restless themselves; they must continuously learn as much as they ever did in graduate school.

A faculty of the caliber of Linfield’s craves continuous learning and intellectual renewal, and the instruction strives to provide the support that makes it possible. Each year the college provides funds for projects such as that of a young faculty member in the Department of Mathematics. Prof. Charles Dunn will travel to Europe this summer to make contacts with mathematicians in Basel, Switzerland; Berlin, Germany; and St. Petersburg, Russia, in preparation for a January Term course centered on the renowned 18th century Swiss mathematician Leonhard Euler. It will be the first January Term travel course that the mathematics department has offered.

A further example is a recent trip of Prof. Robert Gardner, a new member of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, spent this January in New Orleans and vicinity as part of a study of the sociological effects of the forced migration of Gulf Coast residents in the wake of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. This project will lay the groundwork for continuing research and for a January Term course that Prof. Gardner plans to teach on location next year. Beyond that, he notes, “I will be able to integrate my research and field experiences into every class that I teach and bring real-world experiences of disaster, stories of human suffering and conflict, and victories of community and solidarity directly to my students.”

Unfortunately, there are many more applications from faculty for such activities than there are funds to support them. To narrow the funding gap, Linfield is engaged in an effort to secure grants and to build a $1 million endowment that will support faculty development efforts of all kinds. In a complementary effort, the college has launched a program to assist faculty in obtaining outside grant funds for research, fellowships and other development projects.

Yellowing note cards would be a far greater travesty today than for our stereotypical professor of yesteryear. Without faculty restoration and renewal, students will suffer. This is why it has been truly said that “faculty development is student development.” Most important of all, faculty restoration and renewal are key to keeping the college itself vibrant and youthful, even as it approaches the venerable age of 150.

– Marvin Henberg
Interim President

Finding balance in her life

Miranda Miller’s life is like a puzzle she fits together seamlessly each day. Miller ’06 darts around town and campus in her red Ford Focus, pausing only to refuel at a drive-through coffee stand. She wears go-anywhere, no-non- sense slacks and a button-down blouse, her shoulder-length chestnut hair tied back in a ponytail.

Waiting for a class to begin, she addresses envelopes to her peer advisors, then flips open her laptop to type a note. A reminder is scrawled on her hand in ink; she has run out of room in her planner.

From the time her alarm rings at 6 a.m. until she logs off at midnight, Miller balances a 3.9 GPA in three majors — elementary education, business and mass communication — plus a part-time law office job, student teaching and more. On weekends she gets ahead on assignments between chores on her family’s Tillamook dairy farm.

Miller had planned to study agricultural marketing at Oregon State University. Her plans changed in 2000, when she served as Oregon Dairy Princess, promoting milk and the dairy industry throughout the state. Her responsibilities included speaking to school children.

“I loved working with kids, but I had never thought about a teaching degree,” Miller said. Interacting with hundreds of children during her reign led her to consider a career in education.

She applied to Linfield after meeting Dave Haugeberg, a McMinnville attorney and a Linfield College trustee, at an agricultural event in McMinnville where she spoke.

“She was very articulate, persuasive and overall a charming young woman,” said Haugeberg, who gave Miller a part-time job at his law office. "I thought to myself, ‘She has to go to Linfield.’"

Miller has an annual pass to Disneyland, visiting regularly with her parents and younger sister.

This fall, Miller taught in the third-grade class of Wendy (Levig) Autencio ’88 at Memorial Elementary School in McMinnville.

“I see Miranda being so excited about teaching, and it inspires me,” Autencio said. “She brings a high energy to the classroom that works well with the kids.”

Although she loves teaching, Miller has not ruled out a job promoting the dairy industry when she graduates in May. "The industry has given me so much,” she said. “It has shaped who I am and who I am today, and I would just like to give back.”

– Laura Graham ’07

Miranda Miller needs a story to a third-grade class at Memorial Elementary School, where she student taught in the fall with Wendy (Levig) Autencio ’88.

“Miranda has a great focus and motivation to achieve certain academic goals at Linfield,” said Edward Guns, assistant professor of mass communication. “We have been able to work with her to integrate her interests into the curriculum and the classroom, and hopefully, to help her realize her goals.”

As secretary of Kappa Delta Phi educational honor society, a former producer of Wildcat Productions, a Linfield Colloquium peer advisor, a 4-H leader and a member of the Linfield Bowling Club, Miller seems to have more energy than a roomful of kindergarteners on a rainy day. But she credits her success to organization and discipline.

“By the fifth grade I had learned about the work ethic, doing things right the first time and multitasking,” Miller said.

She’s no grind, however: Miller has an annual pass to Disneyland, visiting regularly with her parents and younger sister.

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