A View from Melrose

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Engaging students in education

In education there are no short-cuts. Virtual reality may provide asynchronous access to learning, but real learning itself takes place in real time according to tried-and-true methods of inquiry, dialogue, practice, mistake and correction. In short, quality education engages students directly and intensively. Because Linfield recently participated for the first time in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), allow me to share some early reflections on our results.

The 2004-05 NSSE was administered to over 660,000 students at 520 colleges and universities nationwide. It was targeted at first-year and seniors. In Linfield’s sample, 289 first-year students and 151 seniors responded. All data were collected and processed by independent survey administrators, then compared to national norms.

The report must be read with caution, for effect size differences were small to moderate. With this reservation in mind, Linfield students appear to be more engaged in tutoring or voluntarily teaching others than were respondents at our selected private peer colleges and at other bachelor-level colleges nationwide. In addition, Linfield students communicated with their teachers more by e-mail and talked more intensively about their courses. The report found that students are less likely than students at selected peer private colleges to attend an art exhibit, dance or theatre performance.

I relish the challenge of addressing this result. The creation of the Arts Quadrangle on the Keck Campus is helping us elevate the intellectual life of the campus. The Nicholson Library, coupled with the Marshall Theatre, the James F. Miller Fine Arts Center and the new music facility now under construction, are helping to bring the college together to fully appreciate our outstanding music, theatre and art programs, as well as the wonderful readings sponsored by the library.

A liberal arts education prepares people to be flexible in mind, heart and soul, and become lifelong learners in order to meet the challenges they will face in the future. The arts and the library are at the center of education. With our outstanding faculty members and quality student performers in the arts, improving student attendance at such events begins with spreading the word. I know from firsthand experience that the arts are as lively at Linfield as our better-attended programs in international study. We will promote both opportunities with equal vigor.

—— Mardi Mileham

Taking hospice inside the walls

Pamela Campbell, Tamara Sanden-Maurer and Melanie Schmid have three things in common. They believe that no one deserves to die alone. They all want to be trained as hospice volunteers. And they are all inmates in the medium security unit at the Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville.

Jan Selliken, associate professor of nursing at the Linfield-Good Samaritan School of Nursing, has something in common with each of them — her goal to establish a hospice program in the Oregon prison system.

“I could not believe that there were people dying in prison and there was no outside community support to assist with that,” said Selliken, who is a nurse educator, midwife, naturopathic physician and hospice nurse. “How can we think that anyone in prison is less deserving of hospice than someone on the outside? Hospice is common today, but up until 20 years ago there was little to help people prepare for dying.

“We had plenty to help people prepare for the birth process, but there was nothing to help people prepare for death,” she said. “As a society we deny death until it hits.”

Selliken already arranges clinical experiences for Linfield nursing students at Coffee Creek Correctional Facility and the Oregon State Penitentiary in Salem. She wants to go one step further. If she can secure grant funding, she plans to train inmates to serve as hospice volunteers in a program at Coffee Creek.

“The prison system needs a service for another human being and give something back to society,” Selliken said. “Regardless of whether it’s in prison or on the outside, you sit at the bedside of a dying person, you get a perspective of what’s really important,” she said.

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Jan Selliken, left, and Kim Kaplin ’07, center, talk with, from left, Tamara Sanden-Maurer, Melanie Schmid and Pam Campbell, inmates at the Coffee Creek Correctional Facility in Wilsonville. Selliken, associate professor of nursing at the Linfield-Good Samaritan School of Nursing, plans to secure grant funding to train inmates to serve as hospice volunteers in the prison.

—with Mardi Mileham

Involving students through clinicals and training can remove the stereotype of prison inmate. “The students find out we have the same needs,” Campbell said. “We are mothers, daughters, sisters, aunts and grandmothers. All of that is really important for people to understand. We’ve made mistakes and we can’t go back and change things, but we can make changes from this point forward.”

Selliken has produced a 16-minute video that illustrates the need for a hospice program in the Oregon prison system. If she secures funding, she and Linfield nursing students will train inmates and medical personnel on end-of-life care. The inmates will have the rare opportunity to perform a service for another human being and give something back to society, Selliken said.

“Regardless of where it’s in prison or on the outside, when you sit at the bedside of a dying person, you get a perspective of what’s really important,” she said.