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Engaging Students Subtly

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Engaging students subtly

It was one of those moments that make all the others worthwhile.

During a class critique, Linfield College Art Professor Ron Mills and his students admired an inspired series of paintings by a particularly shy student. The work stunned the class, and surprised even the student, but her eyes sparkled with pride and self-confidence that Mills knew would stay with her for years to come.

The moment, along with others throughout his career, confirmed Mills’ commitment to teaching. For his dedication, Mills received the Edith Green Distinguished Professor Award for excellence in teaching and research last spring. The award is made annually to a Linfield faculty member who has demonstrated outstanding performance in teaching and related faculty roles.

“The teaching of art provides opportunities to engage the deepest levels of human development, including my own,” said Mills, the son of a painter who also began painting at an early age.

With a bachelor’s degree from the University of California and a master of fine art from Claremont Graduate School, Mills considered studying Jungian psychology and art therapy, but after coming to Linfield Graduate School, Mills considered studying Jungian psychology; and Mike Roberts, professor of biology.

It was the right choice for me,” said Mills. “I not only got plenty of chances to counsel students through emotional issues related to their art, but I am also able to participate in their intellectual formation.”

Surrounded by art and the curiosity of his students, Mills has nurtured a successful career as an artist. “We need to practice what we do in order to mentor, to establish credibility, to manifest who we say we are to our students,” Mills explained. “Curiously, while I work in my studio, ways of making teaching more vivid frequently come to me. Like so much else in life, the best comes unbidden.”

Mills began showing his art professionally while in graduate school, and has since been featured in dozens of solo and collective exhibits in several countries. He has also painted four murals, one of them in Walker Hall, the other three in Latin America. He’s working on a new body of paintings for solo exhibitions at Linfield and in Oaxaca, Mexico, next year.

And like any good teacher, Mills continues to grow. “What I learned as a rookie I am still learning: that teaching art, beyond simple technical instructions, is really about setting up conditions in which it can happen in a thoughtful and supportive context; that listening is at least as important as eloquent oration; and that good students often have disarmingly creative ways of forcing even seemingly simple matters to be rethought.”

Barbara May, left, looks over a chart with Jen (Ausen) Goodrich ‘04, an RN in the Trauma Recovery and Acute Care Unit at Emanuel Hospital. May is working to better educate students on how to deal with people who are in abusive situations. She is developing a proposal for the Curriculum Committee at Linfield that will outline a specific number of hours students will need to be competent in the area.

It’s about making a difference

Barbara May’s life has been about making a difference.

In the slums of New Jersey, in battered women’s shelters in Montana and Oregon, and in the classroom, May’s life has been defined by reaching out to the dis-advantaged and disenfranchised.

She’s taken her three great loves—nursing, research and teaching—and combined them into the perfect pro-fession. In recognition of her accomplishments, she received the Samuel I. Geof Faculty Achieve-ment Award last spring, given each year to a faculty member who has performed some outstanding achievement beyond his or her reg-u lar duties.

The nursing profession is about making a difference, May said, and she’s been able to do that in a variety of ways. She’s worked in hospi-tals and in the community, serving people of different cultures, ages and economic levels. At Montana State University, where she com-pleted her master’s degree, she began her work with battered women, raising grant funds to establish a women’s shelter and col-lecting data to begin a fledgling research project that has burgeoned into one that is garnering national and international recognition.

“My interest in working with abused women came out of trying to make a difference,” said May, a professor of nursing at the Linfield-Good Samaritan School of Nursing. “How could I help reduce the violence in the world in my own way? I was a child of the ’60s and did a lot of volunteer service as a teen. That carried over as an adult. I just feel it’s a value in mine.”

She brought her passion into the classroom when she first started teaching at MSU and found it was a perfect fit.

“I loved it from the beginning,” she said. “I like to get my fingers in a lot of pies and saw that I could do a lot of things—the teaching, the research, the service—it could all fold into one job.”

Her work with abused women continued in Portland at Raphael House and later in Albany at the Linn County Child Victim Assessment Center. She’s now on call with Legacy Health System, and many of the psychiatric consulta-tions she does are with abused women.

Sharing what she has learned, sharing the stories of what these women have gone through, helps prepare her students for what they will face on the job. Studies show that health care providers are not prepared to deal comfortably or confidently with people who are in abusive situations.

“It’s not a matter of ‘if’ they will encounter someone in an abusive situation, it’s ‘when,’” May said. “I love working with the stu-dents,” she added. “They teach me just like I teach them. I don’t have to teach, but for me it very much goes together. I enjoy being able to share my stories. As long as I have more to share, I want to work with students.”

She and her research partner, Barbara Limandri, a visiting associate professor of nursing at Linfield, continue to model intervention strategies for abused women’s self-efficacy. Their work, funded by a grant from the National Institute of Mental Health, is getting noticed nationally and they have even had one inquiry from Iran. Her passion is contagious and bubbles up as she talks about her work.

“I have some kind of internal motivation that propels me for-ward,” she said. “I love working with my colleagues, I love the stu-dents. For me, it’s been more about working with people and in some-thing I feel engaged in and passionate about. I love the college’s philoso-phy of life-long learning, something I deeply believe in. I keep thinking one of these days I’m not going to have any more ideas, I’m not going to have anything more to give. It hasn’t been true so far.”

– Laura Davis

Ron Mills, Edith Green Distinguished Professor, with Erin Gorringe ’04, leads drawing, painting, print-making and alternative media classes.