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PERSPECTIVES

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When professors answer questions

Emerald columnist Hannah Dillon asked instructors what they look for in a good student

I asked professors and instructors in romance languages, art history, sociology, music, anthropology, medieval studies and English what they most responded to and appreciated in a student. All of them thought the question was an important one and were glad for the opportunity to share their thoughtful reflections.

Intellectual curiosity and an openness and willingness to learn and become engaged was a unanimous response.

A student who takes the class seriously and takes responsibility for his or her learning is at the top of the list as well.

"I most prize a student who asks for additional reading, one who goes beyond the syllabus. It shows a willingness to further explore the ideas introduced in class."

"If a student shows excitement about the material in the course, I get excited about that student. Also, I get excited about a student who goes above and beyond the formal expectations of the class. I

don't want people to go through the motions and only do the minimum of what's expected. Ninety percent of success in school is just doing the work instead of finding excuses why one can't."

"There are two ends of the spectrum. There are those students who are very active participants in class and those who are actively listening but silent. Students have different styles of being actively engaged, which I respect. I also appreciate a student who can respectfully disagree with his or her classmates and professor as opposed to one who disrespectfully disagrees in a way that is muting to everyone."



Hannah Dillon

"It is clear when a student is in the class and participates out of a real motivation to learn rather than sitting there for secondary or ulterior reasons."

A professor of music said that she appreciates a student who takes the initiative in the learning process and who is demonstratively excited about the work. "Teaching is a two-way avenue, and I respond to a student who

has a positive attitude, who joyfully completes the work agreed upon. We both agree to do our part; we both have obligations through the syllabus. A student who understands collaborative efforts with other students in the learning environment is very much appreciated."

I asked if they had a natural preference for A-type students. All agreed that the essence of teaching and its primary reward are exemplified by a student who demonstrates progress over the course of the class. All offered examples of those who were not necessarily "A" students, but who worked hard, came to office hours, asked questions or further explanations about the course content, requested additional reading and resources and took an active role in their own learning. Such students are indelibly imprinted in the minds of each teacher and are highly esteemed.

"The student who always wins my heart is one who sincerely does all the work, who manages a genuine interest in what he or she is doing, and who does anything extra like reading from the recommended reading list. I love a student who shows any initiative to indicate some good-faith effort."

"I love students with questions

and interests — who have their own reasons for being here, because I have my own reasons for being here, my own excitements and curiosities, which create a wonderful meeting place with stimulating exchanges. I really like the students here. The thing I love about them is that a great many are willing to get excited about things, willing to be led into something they might not know much about but are willing to jump aboard my magical mystery tour. I've taught at UCLA, Harvard, etc., but the students here are willing to work hard. They seem more teachable here. They are willing to be changed by their education as opposed to those whose attitude is, 'What can you possibly tell me? After all, I'm 20.' Anyway, if you fail my course, you have truly earned it."

"Anybody can show up and have done the work, but a student who is willing to be affected by the course, to become passionate about its content and think something at the end that he or she didn't know at the beginning, is so rewarding. I throw myself into my classes and I'm always glad that there are students who are willing to catch what I have to offer."

"If I can help to make a student excited about what I'm teaching

... if a student enjoys the material even if it seems obscure or esoteric, because what I teach is a hard sell, then I am happy. I feel a responsibility to my discipline and hope to impart it well. When a student comes to office hours, does the reading, raises questions about the material, becomes comfortable participating in class, I feel that somehow I am having an effect. I spend a lot of time reading and commenting on a student's written work. I like to see if students read through my comments, consider them and make improvements in their future papers. Incremental improvement is exciting. I also appreciate students who tell me when they like or love the class. I need to know that I'm an effective teacher."

One of the professors suggested that I reverse the subject and object in my next column and ask students what they most respond to and appreciate in a professor. Others echoed the fact that they would very much like to know. So think about it. I'll be around to ask you.

Hannah Dillon is a columnist for the Emerald. Her work appears on alternate Fridays. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.

DRAWING BOARD



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Protest park expansion

The issue of the development of the Riverfront Research Park established by the citizens of Eugene and the University in 1994 has been a long and arduous struggle for University students and Eugene residents concerned with the preservation of the Willamette scenic corridor for open green space and University playing fields. These students and residents have fought against the vested interests of the City Council and the University administration for urban growth, economic diversification and the enhancement of "the University of Oregon and its well-respected research capabilities" (RRP Master Plan, 1988) placed in the hands of corporate dominance.

"To date, the city, UO and state have spent about \$12 million on the research park and subsidies, but according to UO

documents, only 6 percent of the 1 million square feet of building space has been constructed. And the number of people who work in the park — 220 — is only 7 percent of the 3,000-worker goal" (Eugene Weekly, July 11, 1996). Out of the 220 jobs within the park, 113 are Dynamix employees. "Those ... employees [moved] to the park in 1992 from offices in Eugene's downtown ... The UO also donated the land, which at one point had been set aside for athletic fields and open spaces, for the development."

Students expressed their concern by voting on whether to preserve the riverfront green space from development and overwhelmingly voted yes — 1,452 to 394 (ODE, April 28, 1989). Again, the question arises: "Should the UO and the city of Eugene halt the planned expansion of the Riverfront Research Park? Yes, 45; no, 22" (The Register-Guard, Nov. 29, 1997). And

yet again, on Nov. 25, a petition was signed by 111 faculty members and 550 students regarding a re-evaluation of the park to halt its failing development and confine construction to the area south of the tracks (ODE, Nov. 26, 1997). Efforts continued at the City Council public hearing April 13 to stop the subsidization of the Riverfront Park. An overwhelming majority of students, faculty and citizens spoke against the park, but private corporate voices won again, with the city voting to continue the funding. These long-term planning, preservation-oriented voices of the majority have had no impact on our elected and appointed city officials and University administration.

Time and time again, the voices of the people have not and are not being heard. Special corporate interests dominate the decision-making floor — interests that will inevitably cause further environmen-

tal degradation to an already injured river, further reduction in a student populous that enjoys the University particularly for its precious green space, and further detriment to a city losing its beautiful parks to the heavy impacts of rapid urban growth. When will the truth of the matter come onto the playing field? This Sunday, April 26, in conjunction with the Earth Week Concert, there will be a March to Preserve the Land beginning at 3 p.m. on the EMU East Lawn. I strongly urge you all to come and attend the rally. March to save your campus land from private development and from the corporatization of your university. "Never doubt that a small group of citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has" (M. Meade).

W. Douglas Serrill
 Environmental Studies