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Exploring January Term

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Exploring January Term

As a student, you don't have to leave McMinnville to have a life-changing experience during January. Although January Term's international study classes have long been considered the highlight of the program, we can tell you from first-hand knowledge that cultural experiences and transformative moments can also be found on campus. You can learn screenwriting from a Hollywood scriptwriter, explore the world of monks and mystics, or discover how physics is an integral part of theatre and music. Since 1975, Linfield College has held a four-week January Term between the fall and spring semesters. Linfield is one of the few colleges that continues this innovative educational approach to intensive teaching and learning about a single subject.

Courses are lively, stimulating, exciting, demanding, engaging and sometimes overwhelming. We know. We spent this January in three different classes, soaking up the knowledge and, in some cases, realizing how long it had been since we were in the classroom. The following pages give you a taste of our experience, and an inside look at what students are doing during that month-long period called January Term.



The lessons of January Term



For more than three decades, I have had the privilege of teaching during January Term. What a pleasure and challenge to have a class of students for three hours, four or five days a week. For an entire month, students give one class their undivided attention. Most often I have taught

“Monks and Mystics” with classes meeting on the McMinnville Campus and at the nearby Trappist Abbey. The monastery, Our Lady of Guadalupe, is a Catholic cloistered community of men dedicated to the contemplative life. Brother Mark and I lead the students in exploring the writings of Thomas Merton, 20th century monk and writer. We not only learn about the monastic life but also participate in practices of meditation and prayer. Together, we explore a nonviolent way of life, experiencing the monks’ practice of hospitality and commitment to peace.

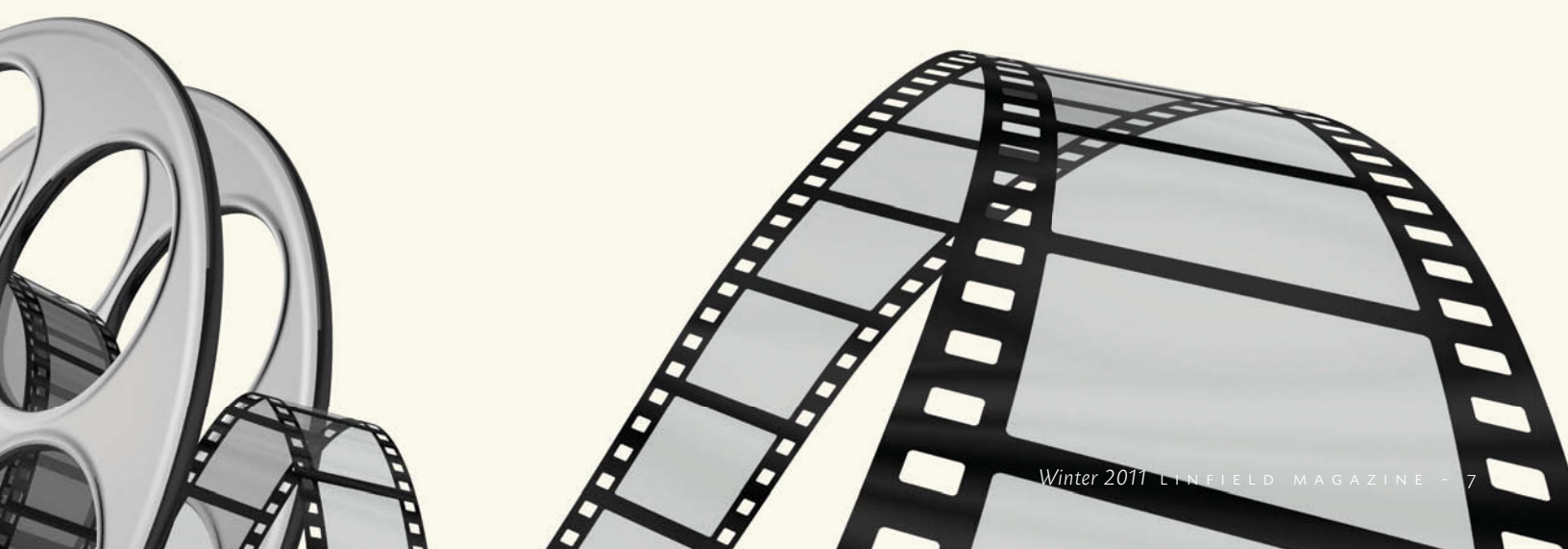
During January Term, many of my faculty colleagues and I are able to teach our “passion” within the humanities and arts and sciences, unencumbered by the many other responsibilities we have during the fall and spring semesters. Often, we have the time to write and conduct research that is close to the topics we choose to teach in January because, like our students,

we are focused on the subject at hand. January Term has given me some of my finest teaching experiences and personal relationships with students. The more relaxed atmosphere has provided opportunities to get to know students and that has resulted in wonderful friendships that I might not otherwise have had.

We faculty, of course, also lead January courses to sites around the world. There we do “on-the-ground” exploration and study in our fields of academic inquiry in exciting ways not available to us on campus. My study of Celtic spirituality in Ireland with students and my co-professor, Joel Marrant, was an educational experience beyond words! The same can be said of my pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi with my co-Professor/Chaplain David Massey and our cadre of students.

However, it is my Monks and Mystics course that I cherish most – to teach on campus and at the Abbey is the best of what January Term has to offer. I hope I have done it justice. As I sometimes tell students, the Abbey itself is a world away and yet only 10 miles from the front entrance to our McMinnville Campus. There are worlds about us to discover and experience near and far. The campus, the Abbey, Ireland, Rome and Assisi are so different but so much the same. In all of these places, and more, our students, as well as our faculty, learn lessons of a lifetime. January Term, I think that is why I love you so much.

– William Apel
Professor of Religion



Seeking a contemplative life



We remove our shoes and walk up the few steps into the meditation room, lined with pillows and low prayer benches. A cathedral window looks out onto the wooded hillside. A deer wanders aimlessly by.

Brother Mark shows us how to kneel, using the pillow to cushion our knees, and the prayer bench to carry most of our body weight. He suggests we focus on one word or phrase and if

other thoughts enter our minds, let them pass through and gently shift back to our chosen phrase. We are, as Br. Mark says, “Hanging out with God.”

A soft gong marks the beginning of our session and we must quiet internal thoughts:

“What if my legs cramp?”

“What do I do with my hands?”

“Close your eyes.”

“Focus.”

We sense others in the room, but they are not a distraction and we enter our own quiet, reflective space. Surprisingly, the bell gently rings after what seems like five minutes. Our 20 minutes have ended. A gentle peacefulness pervades the room, as we slowly rise.

Stepping onto the grounds of Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Trappist Abbey near Lafayette, is like stepping into a different culture. While just 10 miles from Linfield College, it could be half a world away.

Here, students get a glimpse of life in a cloistered society. They are surprised by the openness, the hospitality, the serenity. They learn you don’t have to be a monk to lead a contemplative life. Monks, like so many of us, seek a closer relationship with God. Choosing to live the life of a monk isn’t for everyone, but as each student searches for his or her calling, the lessons can be applied anywhere.

The January Term course *Monks and Mystics* conjures up images of something magical and mysterious. And while there is nothing supernatural, there is an aura of spirituality, of peace for those who use the many trails, sacred sites, church or meditation room at the abbey. Time slows down, leaving behind the frenetic pace of daily life.

Bill Apel, professor of religion at Linfield College for 35 years, developed this January Term course as a way to explore the lessons of Thomas Merton, 20th century Trappist monk and writer, and as a way to explore his own life and spirituality. His relationship with the abbey stretches back two decades. Several years ago he spent a month living with

the monks, seeking to find balance in his own life. Now, he teaches alongside Br. Mark, a Trappist monk for some 30 years and one of Apel’s closest friends.

“I hope the students take away a better sense of themselves, that they are more aware of their inner self,” Apel says of the class. “I hope they slow down and take time to reflect. And I hope they learn there are many different ways to talk and experience the reality of God.”

The course includes readings from Merton; Howard Thurman, theologian and scholar; and Rabbi Lawrence Kushner. Each day begins with the *Lectio Divina* – divine reading – followed by a period of silent contemplation.

Lectures, videos and discussions explore the journeys of Merton and Thurman as they sought to become more open, more aware of God. Students learn that contemplation requires being fully awake and fully aware. They explore what Merton calls “le point vierge,” the place deep within us that is the point of our encounter with God.

Br. Mark’s face crinkles in a smile as he greets us on our first visit to the abbey. He is warm, personable and funny, a surprise for many of the students. He explains that the Trappists’ calling is prayer. In addition to vows of chastity, poverty and obedience, the Trappists observe the spirit of silence, with large periods of each day devoted to quiet.

Br. Mark shares the journey that brought him to Our Lady of Guadalupe. His stories are touching and poignant. A lifelong storyteller, he describes how to keep a journal of life’s stories, and how, as we grow, our lives naturally break into chapters, with stepping stones marking significant events. Students apply his lesson as they write the first chapter of their own life story.

While devoted to the Catholic religion, the monks are not limited by it. They feel a connection to other religions. “You have to stay open to other concepts of God,” Br. Mark says. “God makes sense to people in other traditions, be it Baptist or Buddhist. We are searching for the same God, it’s just a different concept.”

That idea impressed Rebecca Coffelt ’12, who gained a better perspective on Christians in general. “I’ve had some experiences with Christians who are not open or accepting of other faiths,” she said. “It was refreshing to meet people so accepting and willing to learn from other traditions.”

Barrett Dahl ’11 and Nolan Taylor ’12 grasped the importance of contemplation and reflection. “You can choose to live a contemplative life and take time out of your day to reflect on what happened and how you react to it,” Dahl said. Taylor learned to explore his inner life. “I like the silence and I need that 20 minutes a day to just sit and think,” he said. “It’s good for the soul.” 🍄

– *Mardi Mileham*



Brother Mark, a monk at the Trappist Abbey, Our Lady of Guadalupe for more than 30 years, said life at the monastery is about a balance of a healthy mind and healthy body. He told students he didn't think he had missed much by choosing to live in a cloistered society. "Knowing myself, finding myself, I've been rewarded," he said.

Bringing characters

FADE IN:

INT. 208 MELROSE HALL – DAY

An older classroom with chairs arranged around a large square table. The instructor, MIGUEL, 50s, leads 11 STUDENTS in a Linfield scriptwriting course.

MIGUEL
Okay people, today's the day. Table read. Group one, are you ready?

STUDENT 1
(shuffling through papers)

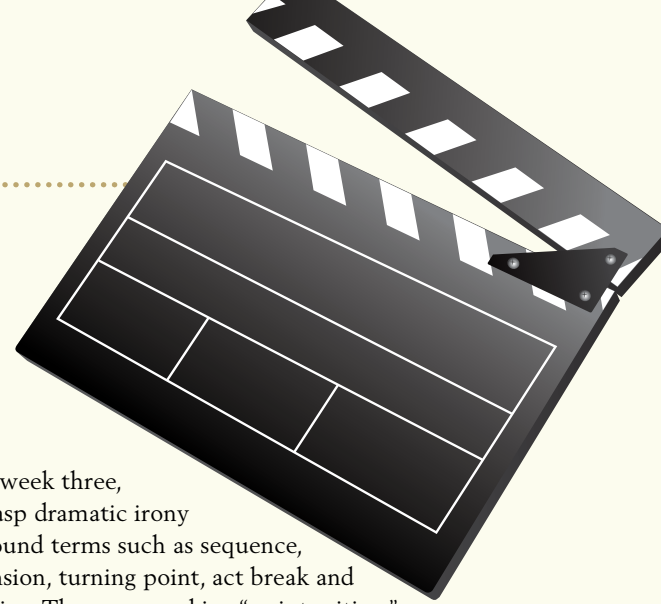
I was up half the night rewriting scene three. I'm still not sure it works.

MIGUEL
(grinning)
Well, we're about to find out.
Slight groan from students. Papers rustle. Sound of a backpack being zipped.

MIGUEL
We've been meeting every day this month and you have a 30-page script to show for it. As writers, our goal is to create unforgettable moments, in scenes so intense that great actors will salivate like Pavlov's dogs because they want to do the script so much. Okay, make us salivate.
Who's first?

Welcome to ENG 318 Scripts, a January Term course in which students learn the fundamentals of writing for stage and screen, all squeezed into a four-week period. Students are immersed in film – reading scripts, watching movies, analyzing writing techniques and ultimately crafting a 30-page script of their own.

to life



The course is led by Miguel Tejada-Flores, whose screenwriting credits include *Revenge of the Nerds*, an adaptation of Philip K. Dick's sci-fi classic *Screamers* and the vampire-infested *Fright Night II*.

Dressed casually in a baseball cap and khakis, Tejada-Flores shares his expertise with an enthusiasm worthy of the big screen, weaving stories from the mundane – a simple introduction becomes a lesson in character development.

"This is Laura. She will be sitting in on our class to write a story," he says blandly, and then pauses, raising an eyebrow. "But Laura isn't really writing a story about the class. She's actually doing a much different story and she's here to spy on all of you. She appears very normal, but actually, Laura is a very dark and twisted character and we should all be very afraid."

It is the second week of class, and Tejada-Flores has read each student's five-minute script with painstaking detail, offering notes to challenge the students and help them find their voice. Ten-minute scripts are due Monday.

"You all have a lot of work to do," he says. "I've got news for you. In the real world, if people aren't engrossed and sucked into your pages from the beginning, forget it."

As the days go on, Tejada-Flores fires question after question at his students about their characters.

What's their problem? Who are they? How will they need to change? The clock ticks as students consider his questions. What does the character want? What will happen if they don't get it?

"To be a good writer, you have to know," he says, popping in a DVD of *School of Rock* as an example of outstanding character introduction. "Those details make the character become real. If it's too easy for the protagonist, then it's boring and your movie is over."

By week three, students grasp dramatic irony and toss around terms such as sequence, catalyst, tension, turning point, act break and foreshadowing. They are speaking "scriptwriting."

Movie screenings are an integral part of the class. Tejada-Flores, who has written nearly 30 films over the past quarter century, screens critically acclaimed current releases for the class, including films such as *The Fighter*, *True Grit*, *Get Low*, *The Town* and others. After screenings, homework includes reading and structural analysis on the scripts of the films the class has just seen.

"It's an interesting dynamic to see what's written and what's actually filmed," says Kaity Seitz '11, an English literature and creative writing double major. "I pointed out dramatic irony to my friends the other night while watching a movie. I'm thinking in that mode all the time now."

Seitz has been writing stories since age 10, but this was her first exposure to scriptwriting.

"You have to get straight to the point and literally show what you're trying to convey," she says.

In addition to the three-hour daily class, Seitz often spent another six hours rewriting at night and may continue work on her script for her senior thesis project this spring. She appreciates the inside perspective on the film industry. And an added bonus from taking the class: Seitz learned *Revenge of the Nerds* is her mom's favorite movie.

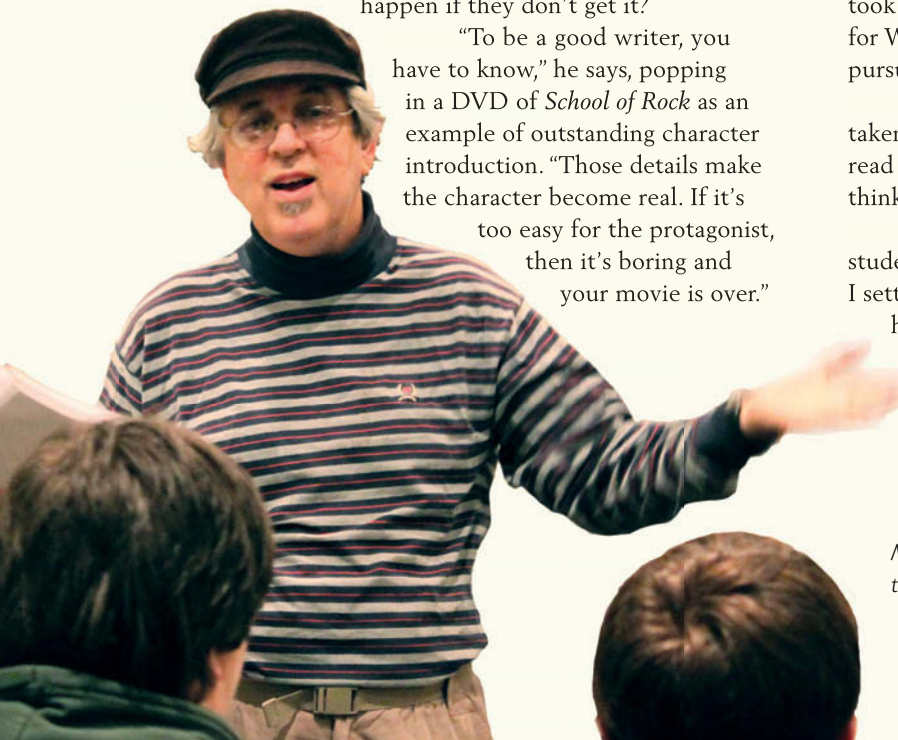
Sean Lemme '11, a mass communication major, took the scriptwriting class last year and has written scripts for Wildcat Productions, Linfield's video club. He hopes to pursue a career in scriptwriting after graduation.

"I'll spend hours writing a script and feel like I've taken it as far as it can go," says Lemme. "Then Miguel will read it and make a comment that totally changes the way I think about what I wrote and how I want to revise it."

The final exam is a "table read," during which students enlist classmates to perform their final scripts. I settle in as the stories unfold. There is a murder, a heroine, a Morgan Freeman-like voice. There is no movie popcorn or cushy theatre seat, and yet the characters take shape and the classroom is transformed. And it all started with a script. 🍿

– Laura Davis

Miguel Tejada-Flores encourages students to "show, don't tell" to create a compelling script.





Michael Crosser, right, assistant professor of physics, listening to the speaker that Tian Tang '14 built using a magnet, wires and a Dixie cup in the class, Physics of Art and Music.

Artistic expression through physics

My palms began to sweat.

For the first time in more years than I will admit, I was standing in a physics lab, expected to do something. An experiment. One that would yield an answer, or at least a graph.

Josef Komarek '14 was unlucky enough to get me as a partner. He became my teacher and patiently showed me how to set up my graph – which axis for time, which axis for distance.

It is the first day of Physics of Art and Music, a course exploring light, color, sound and artistic expression through physical mechanisms. Michael Crosser, assistant professor of physics, created this January Term class for non-majors to explain complex physics concepts in a practical manner.

The first thing you learn is that there is no “back of the classroom” in Crosser’s class. The second is that he has the energy of a rapidly moving wave – dashing from one end of the classroom to the other, using both boards to scrawl equations, draw graphs and ask questions in a rapid-fire voice.

Crosser is funny and animated, and his energy is contagious. He uses Slinkys, musical instruments, amplifiers, and even “the wave” of stadium fame to help students understand how sound and light waves work. Because students will be writing three papers over the course of the month, Crosser gives tips on writing scientifically, and encourages students to plan and outline their papers, just like J.K. Rowling outlined the Harry Potter series before she started writing.

The class is comprised of a cross section of majors – English, music, mass communication, business, education and psychology. Students write essays, develop equations and graph waves. There is a “celebration of knowledge” – aka quiz – at least once a week.

Workshops on topics such as simple harmonic motion and standing waves make learning a group effort, with students huddling together in twos and threes to work through the problems. Concentration becomes intense as Jenaveve Linabary '13 hunches so far over her pencil that her head nearly rests on the table. Page Keith '13 ponders a worksheet and a particularly vexing problem, unconsciously nibbling on the lid of her water bottle. They, along with Komarek, are studying an equation that doesn't quite make sense. They have an answer, but it doesn't seem logical. They debate, discuss, draw on the whiteboard, but still cannot resolve the problem. They snag Crosser as he walks by, and explain their dilemma. Soon, talking through the equation, they

discover their error and it's high fives all around.

In addition to lectures and workshops, labs are held almost daily. One demonstrates how different objects have different resonance. Using a speaker, an amplifier and a generator, students determine the highest and lowest frequencies they can hear. Then, by holding both paper and metal tubes to their ear, students describe how resonant frequencies change in the different materials. On another day, Crosser demonstrates how a sound can explode a wine glass by using a speaker that is playing at the resonant frequency of the glass.

An Oregon Symphony concert at Portland's Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall shows the importance of design and architecture to create a space in which sound is focused and clear. A field trip to a theatre and a production of *Superior Donuts* at the Artists' Repertory Theatre provide an understanding of how different combinations of light are used to create a mood on stage.

But the pièce de résistance is building speakers using a few basic items from the hardware store – a magnet, some wire and a Dixie cup – all connected to a cell phone or mp3 player. Students wrap wire around a magnet, attach it to a cup and are surprised to find they can listen to music.

Greg Larson '12, an English major, was so enthralled with the experiment, he later invited a friend over to continue experimenting with different materials.

“I love that kind of hands-on activity,” he said. “Starting with a few materials and ending up with a final product is nice, especially if you can demonstrate how to play songs through a Dixie cup to people beyond the lab.”

Larson, Linabary and Komarek agreed on the value of the course. Komarek, a music composition major, noted that understanding acoustics will be helpful as he pursues a career in musical performance. Linabary, an elementary education and vocal performance double major, said the class helped her understanding of how instruments function and produce sound.

As for Larson, being able to grasp how sound and light waves work opens up a whole new realm of writing by enhancing his understanding of science.

As for me, I grasped the concepts, loved the laboratory experiments that brought the concepts to life, but failed miserably at the math. Thankfully, my boss didn't require that I take this for a grade. 🍷

– Mardi Mileham