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A Sense of PLACE

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A sense of



PLACE

It was the ragged shirt of a little boy that spoke most clearly to Beth Turner '13.

A political science class helped Turner understand the politics surrounding the

Vietnam War. But it took an English class – and a young boy's garment – to show

her the humanity.

A senior at Linfield College, Turner did not set out to study war, but she ended up considering it from a variety of perspectives – taking a combined political science and English class, attending lectures and a panel, and finally traveling to Southeast Asia for a January Term course. Her layered experience was more than chance. Over the course of a year, a common thread connected Linfield events, speakers, exhibits, classes and conversations that led to her understanding of war and citizenship. Now in its second year, PLACE (Program for Liberal Arts and Civic Engagement) continues to provide a framework for meaningful conversation and exploration of issues across the disciplines.

“While the political aspects of my classes gave me the tools to analyze foreign policy, the literature portion ensured that my classmates and I did not lose sight of soldiers’ and civilians’ individual experiences,” said Turner, now an English teacher in Japan.

The January Term course deepened her connection to the human experience of war, as she and eight other students listened to North Vietnamese veterans recount their lives as soldiers, and visited the Killing Fields of Cambodia and the S-21 Prison Museum, legacies of the Khmer Rouge genocide.

Eyeing memorial displays of photographs, bones and scraps of clothing, Turner finally saw the victims as people.

“The small, ragged, striped shirt in the glass case was worn by a little boy who loved to run around and play sports with his friends before the Khmer Rouge shattered his life,” said Turner. “I realized that countless individuals, people like you or me, were massacred. This realization of the true human cost of war and conflict is something that I’m still struggling to process.”

PLACE, often described as a coral reef for intellectual life or a power strip that faculty and students can plug in to, is a campus-wide program that takes a singular issue and examines it from multiple disciplines. This year’s theme, Legacies of War, which is continuing from the kickoff year, promotes discussion about the causes, consequences and legacies of war from a variety of perspectives and disciplines – science, art, theatre, music, literature, poetry, sociology, history, politics and others. Because classes and events reinforce and build upon each other, students make richer connections than they could through the lens of only one discipline.

Targeting multidisciplinary discussion and civic engagement, PLACE is at the heart of a liberal arts education, say faculty advocates including Patrick Cottrell, assistant professor of political science, who directs the pilot phase of the program.

David Sumner, associate professor of English, pictured here with students in Angkor Wat, Cambodia, and Patrick Cottrell, assistant professor of political science, taught their courses, focused on war, together in the fall then collaborated on a January Term course to Southeast Asia. The integrated class structure benefitted students and faculty alike, as scholars and citizens. “That was one of the most integrated teaching-learning experiences I’ve had in my college career,” said Sumner.



“While the political aspects of my classes gave me the tools to analyze foreign policy, the literature portion ensured that my classmates and I did not lose sight of soldiers’ and civilians’ individual experiences.” – *Beth Turner '13*

He is part of a core group of faculty and student fellows who collaborate to bring discussions and events to campus, explore new ways to promote integrative learning and civic engagement, and serve as ambassadors for the program.

“I believe PLACE has the potential to position Linfield on the cutting edge of 21st century education,” Cottrell said. “PLACE is above all designed to promote innovation and experimentation in liberal education. It brings together faculty and students from different disciplines to learn from one another as teachers, scholars and citizens. As we learn collectively from these experiences, our goal is to share best practices and ideas for others to use, while continuing to seek out new ones. Indeed, one of the distinguishing features of PLACE is its role as sort of a learning laboratory.”

Although physics Professor Joelle Murray collaborates regularly with science colleagues, she is now talking with peers in the social sciences and working with them on events and projects. These interactions, such as a lecture by an anthropologist who studied physicists, spark enthusiasm for faculty and students alike.

“We’re designing creative ways to get our students to engage more meaningfully not just in their courses but in their development of intellectual pursuits,” said Murray, who plans to incorporate the anthropologist’s book in future classes.

Professors Barbara Seidman and Dawn Nowacki (English and political science, respectively) have collaborated to take a year-long look at gender and war in their classes, breaking from more traditional topics associated with the male military or political experience. Nowacki focused a course on gender and war, while Seidman designed a new Inquiry Seminar for first-year students, *Women Writing War*. A wide array of speakers, from scholars to novelists, boosted the classroom discussion.

Brian Winkenweder, associate professor of art history, weaves the war theme into a number of his classes. After teaching at the large University of North Texas campus, Winkenweder

appreciates the cross-disciplinary and handcrafted education Linfield provides through PLACE.

“At my previous institution, I hung out with art historians and it would be considered cross discipline if I worked with an art educator or studio artist,” he said. “Now, I’m talking to colleagues across the spectrum. I get to move out beyond my discipline’s space at Linfield.”

Students are challenged to explore beyond their majors as well, according to Tyler Schiewe '16, a math major.

“With the variety of disciplines we have on campus, it’s easy to get into a clique atmosphere where you don’t spread out beyond your academic area,” he said. “But PLACE brings us together, creating deep connections between disciplines. It’s turned my education into what I want it to be.”

As a PLACE student fellow who helps administer the program, Schiewe has gained experience in strategic planning, budgeting, publicity, advertising and management, practical skills that employers value. Coupled with a liberal arts perspective, those skills make students more innovative and adaptable in the workplace, regardless of the field.

“The combination of this increased academic challenge and civic engagement is something the job market really wants,” Schiewe said. “In order to be a good candidate for a career position, you need both qualities and the experiences associated with those.”

It’s not only the type of learning that’s evolving, it’s the type of opportunities available for students. A PLACE archive containing related research, papers, transcripts and other material will soon be available online. But perhaps more importantly, students have direct access to prominent scholars and leading experts.

Megan Schwab '15, also a PLACE scholar along with Schiewe and Breanna Ribeiro '14, hopes students will see the speakers, events and exhibits as tools to augment their class work. For example, when Andrew Bacevich, a leading international

A Linfield Gallery exhibit by photographer Suzanne Opton used large-format photography to explore the complex emotions of veterans who served in military operations overseas. The PLACE subject has been woven into a number of art classes, for example discussing surrealism in the context of World War II.

relations scholar from Boston University, visits campus in March, Schwab and others will have already read his book in class and participated in interdisciplinary discussions.

"I will be able to talk with him face to face, perhaps about aspects of my research," she said. "This opportunity is amazing. It takes it all to the next level."

PLACE has also been integrated into the common read for first-year students. Last fall, students read *Thieves of Baghdad* by Matthew Bogdanos before arriving on campus and were then greeted by Bogdanos who spoke at opening convocation. This fall's common read, *Ignorance: How It Drives Science* by Stuart Firestein, reflects the 2014-15 PLACE theme, "How Do We Know?"

Over the course of the year, Jenny Layton '14, a theatre major and peer advisor, has discussed the impact of war on the environment in her ecology class, attended a photography exhibit focusing on veterans and listened to Hiroshima survivors. But the concepts of war took a more personal toll as she prepared for her role as Rebo in the Linfield production of *Ajax in Iraq*, a play inspired by interviews with Iraq war veterans and their families. Layton experienced intense and violent dreams as she confronted complex issues while in character.

"The playwright interviewed veterans for this show, so these were real people's stories," Layton said. "That hit me pretty hard. For me, war is sort of 'out of sight, out of mind.' I don't have to worry about stepping on an IED while I'm walking to class. So these sorts of discussions are valuable and give us all a common landing ground."

The PLACE programming has affected more than just Linfield students. Community members engage as well. Phil Newman, a McMinnville resident and retired surgeon, was

personally opposed to the war in Vietnam. However, in 1970 at the age of 32, he found himself a major in the Army Medical Corps, triaging and treating casualties at a helipad staging area in Quang Tri Province in his role as chief of professional services at the 18th Surgical Hospital. Many of the wounds he treated were blast injuries from high explosive fragmentation devices.

Newman shared his experiences with a packed auditorium during a panel discussion, which featured a number of individuals from the Linfield and local communities who had been affected by war – veterans, protestors, family members and citizens.

"Most cases began with amputations," said Newman. "If every person in our country could rotate for a week's time through a busy military surgical hospital, I think we would, as a nation, soon be unwilling to include war as an option for conflict resolution."

Newman described what it was like to return from the war. "I was not the same person who left in 1970," he said. "I couldn't find a way to adequately communicate the depth of my outrage nor the degree to which I had changed, so I soon quit trying. This, of course, increased my sense of isolation from my family and friends."

Firsthand accounts such as this have given Schwab and her peers a new perspective on a war she's only read about in textbooks.

"It's easy to demonize the Vietnam War," she said. "But when you're talking to the people who were put in these situations, it's hard to look at the war the same way. For something that seems so far back in history for our generation, we were able to gain a greater understanding."

Citizenship, central to the liberal arts mission, is also a cornerstone of the PLACE program as students and community members are prompted to consider their responsibilities locally,

"The playwright interviewed veterans for this show, so these were real people's stories. That hit me pretty hard. For me, war is sort of 'out of sight, out of mind.' I don't have to worry about stepping on an IED while I'm walking to class." – Jenny Layton '14

Linfield College theatre students including Jenny Layton '14, foreground, explored the timeless struggle of soldiers and war during Ajax in Iraq, inspired by interviews with Iraq war veterans and their families. The play followed the parallel narratives of Ajax, an ancient Greek military hero, and A.J., a modern female soldier.





Jan 1942
Arthur D. Dupre Photograph
2013

Kohl Calhoun '14, a mass communication major, interviewed World War II Veteran Homer Farley for a collaborative project that culminated in a public exhibit. Art students photographed veterans while mass communication students wrote a profile story. See the stories at linfield.edu/art/legacies-of-war.

Opposite page: Becky Creswell '13 talks with Hmong vendors in Sapa, Vietnam, during the January Term course to Southeast Asia last year.

“These sorts of classes and events make us better citizens because they teach us to understand other people.” – *Tim Singer '15*

nationally and globally. One critical aspect of citizenship is to apply the skills and knowledge gained through PLACE to the public domain through service, conversations and raising awareness.

“These sorts of classes and events make us better citizens because they teach us to understand other people,” notes Tim Singer '15, a math major. He said the PLACE topic has moved beyond classes, events and exhibits to permeate social discussions. His viewpoint has been challenged, specifically during the panel discussion during which Vietnam War objectors and supporters alike favored reinstating the draft so that all Americans would be equally affected – and equally motivated to find another solution.

“I’d never thought of the draft as having benefits,” Singer added. “You take something like that where your viewpoint is just blown away and you want to talk with other people about it. Since then, I’ve been talking with my friends and family about the draft and the larger issues of war.”

And this is just the sort of dialog that David Sumner, associate professor of English, values most about the PLACE program. “To see a conscientious objector sit next to a full bird colonel and have civil conversation is the exact thing I want my students to experience,” he said. “This is the very thing liberal arts education is about.” 🌿

– *Laura Davis*

How Do We Know?

The 2014-15 PLACE theme asks this most basic of human questions from a variety of disciplinary perspectives, exploring the methods used to acquire knowledge. Questions to consider may include: What are the powers and limits of science? How do the humanities factor into this equation? What are the underlying assumptions of the scientific method and how do we know they are correct? How do statistics, pure mathematics or computational models inform views on the human experience? Can philosophy, religious studies, the arts or literature still reveal deep truths that make a difference? In the end we should always ask as a rejoinder to any answer... how do we know?

Faculty fellows

Patrick Cottrell, *political science*

Jesús Ilundáin-Agurriza, *philosophy*

David Fiordalis, *religious studies*

Joelle Murray, *physics*

Joan Paddock, *music*

Eric Schuck, *economics*

Barbara Seidman, *English*

Scott Smith, *history*

Jeremy Weisz, *biology*

Brian Winkenweder, *art*

Student fellows

Breanna Ribeiro '14

Megan Schwab '15

Tyler Schiewe '16



Upcoming PLACE events

Feb. 20: Mark Juergensmeyer, “Religion and Violence in a Globalized World,”
7 p.m., Ice Auditorium

March 13: Andrew Bacevich, “The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism,”
7 p.m., Ice Auditorium

March 18: Elaine Scarry, “Thinking in an Emergency,” 7:30 p.m., Nicholson Library

April 1-30: Wafaa Bilal art exhibit,
Linfield Art Gallery

April 15: Herb Maschner, “Pre-contact Warfare in Alaska,” 7 p.m., Jonasson Hall

May 5: Aimee Phan reading, *The Reeducation of Cherry Truong*, 7:30 p.m., Nicholson Library

linfield.edu/PLACE