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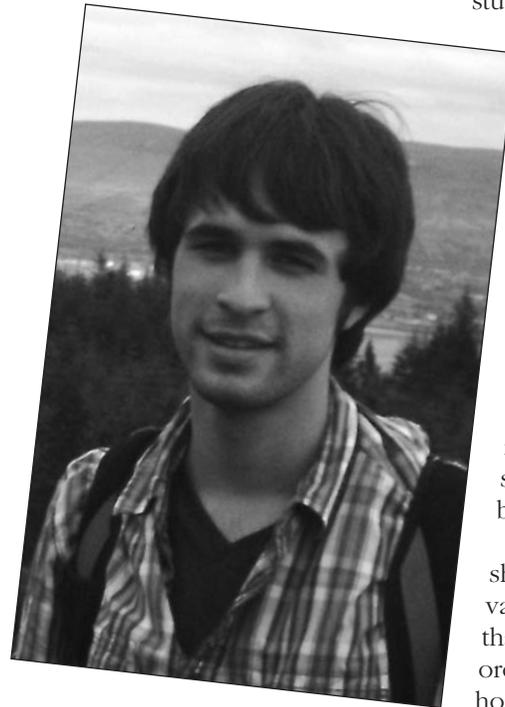
Dear Faculty, Ask for More

By Ryan Wolf

It is no secret that many students approach college solely as a means to a career, caring little for the knowledge they obtain and more for the end result of gaining the degree they need to compete with in a global economy. There is, however, a significant segment of the student population interested in more than the bottom line. Genuinely engrossed by the ideas, opportunities, and experiences that come with academic life, they are able to appreciate the fullness of higher education. Not all may be naturally confident, forward, or expressive. Nonetheless, if faculty are able to identify their potential and encourage their intellectual endeavors, these students would benefit immensely through faculty-student relationships.

Some professors may observe participation in in-class discussions as a way of determining how engaged a student is. This may not, however, be the most accurate indicator. In fact, many of the quietest students in a classroom may have some of the most fascinating perceptions despite their hesitance to contribute. How then should a faculty member reach out to a student who may not openly display a passion for knowledge?

Often students will incorporate their intellectual preoccupations into their writing assignments. For example, asked to write an essay on a work of literature, he or she might mention another book as an appropriate reference. An astute professor



familiar with the student's interest might use this revelation as a way of connecting with the student in conversation. Professors I have personally found influential in my development as a human being have frequently reached out to me by recognizing my interests and inspiring me to expand my knowledge.

Though faculty may successfully interact with students through thoughtful feedback in papers or through e-mail correspondence, face-to-face communication remains the most meaningful manner in which students and professors can develop valuable and productive relationships. When a professor is welcoming during office hours, students already interested in learning more about a subject are able to find the expert mentor they seek.

Furthermore, the abstractions of academia become more human, less limited and arbitrary, when students and faculty are able to have face-to-face, one-on-one meetings. Engaged students who are quieter in a classroom setting may be more comfortable in less public situations.

Professors also should not be afraid of providing challenges for students who have made clear that they are motivated to go above and beyond simply meeting requirements for graduation. Perhaps the majority of students understandably would not appreciate additional pressure or responsibility in the face of their many obligations. Nonetheless, there is a notable minority of students who thrive on challenging and expanding themselves. By expecting or, at minimum, suggesting more from some students, a professor may be doing them a favor.

Faculty-student relationships are an important part of a valued, well-rounded education that can prove to be more than an ordeal that students undergo in hopes of an eventual career payoff. It is the responsibility of students to take hold of their education. It is the responsibility of faculty to foster the growth of active students and to inspire the less active students to join their ranks. Though it may not always be easy for professors and students to connect and establish personal relationships, they should try. Even those exclusively interested in their career life after college could benefit from developing professional connections with faculty, and the experience might even open their eyes. Effort on the part of both students and faculty is required to create a strong, intellectually satisfying campus environment. ■

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