

# 'Dream Team' scores big among students

Husband and wife college instructors motivate students with team teaching and scholarship program

Among higher education circles, Paula Clarke and Ted Hamilton might easily be labeled as the "Dream Team." Not only are they a husband and wife team at home, they've also teamed up in the classroom to successfully teach interdisciplinary courses at Columbia College in Sonora, Calif.

Interdisciplinary methods of teaching are relatively new and while used by private universities and graduate schools across the country, the technique is uncommon in community colleges, especially in rural settings.

The concept is this: Combine the subject material from compatible courses into one class. The end result is establishing connections between two holistic academic disciplines to the benefit of students. Participants are required to enroll in both of the concurrent courses, which in turn, earn six units of university transfer credits.

Thus, Clarke, who teaches anthropology and sociology, and Hamilton, who is a history and social sciences instructor, share a classroom podium. This semester's interdisciplinary class combines cultural anthropology with cultural geography.

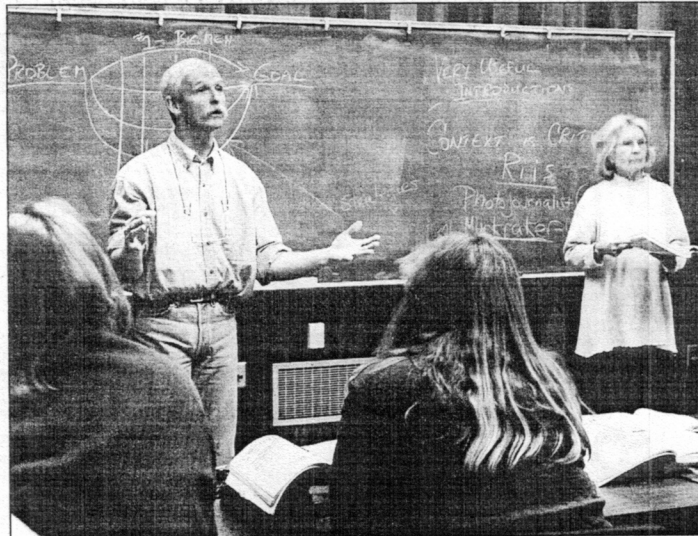
"This teaching method gives our students a much wider perspective of what was happening at that particular moment in history and reveals to them the surrounding social circumstances," Hamilton said.

Students report that the experience has enriched their education by helping them get the "bigger picture." Seeing the connections between courses creates a linkage that promotes a more thorough, more global understanding of both subject areas.

Another reason why the Hamilton-Clarke team might be called the "Dream Team" is that they've initiated a unique scholarship to help students of theirs fulfill a dream.

Initial meetings last year with Professor Maria Madruga, the college's Academic Achievement Center (AAC) coordinator, started the planning process in developing their Future Promise Scholarship. Along with tutoring, the AAC helps students develop critical thinking and study skills. At the center, many of Madruga's tutors were Hamilton-Clarke students themselves, who volunteered during their spare time to help other students. "We saw a lot of transformational behavior happening here," Madruga said. "These tutors had acquired some valuable learning skills, which they were eager to share with those around them who were struggling."

It was this transformational experience and potential that the trio felt should be rewarded. With that perspective, Hamilton and Clarke created and financed the Future Promise Scholarship. A cap of \$2,000 per recipient was established as an award amount for this nontraditional scholarship, which the recipient can choose to spend on anything that fulfills a passion or dream. Their scholarship was presented for the first time last year to Sara Keene, a



Paula Clarke and Ted Hamilton share the podium and the attention of their students.

Columbia College graduate, who is now attending the University of California, Santa Cruz.

Requirements for the scholarship were based on five areas. First, the trio had to jointly know the Columbia College student. Second, the student had to achieve a successful-track record in education. Third, the candidate had to demonstrate dramatic shifts in intellectual and academic skills, as well as other developmental skills. Fourth, the student must have good moral character, integrity and ethics. Finally, the student had to show potential in dealing with perceived demands of the future; hence the name, Future Promise Scholarship.

Academic, creative and practical reasoning, responsibility and resilience are the characteristics the instructors recognize as essentials in preparation for the challenges of the future.

"Recipients do not have to enter our academic disciplines as careers," Clarke said. "It is not tied to their GPAs, and it's not aimed at 'top students' as conventionally defined. Instead, these students show promise and we feel that they are worth investing in."

"In fact, our scholarship has been awarded to people with unconventional backgrounds. They pursue causes that really matter to them and feel very passionate about these causes," Hamilton added. "They defy categories and probably wouldn't be candidates for traditional scholarships. But they have great visionary potential through their actions and ideas, no matter how developed they may

be presently."

Take Sean McLeary, one of two of this year's Future Promise Scholarship recipients. McLeary, 24, is a second-year student at Columbia with his eye on getting a graduate degree eventually in primatology or the study of monkeys, apes and humans.

A native of Redwood City, Calif., he has had a lifelong fascination with monkeys and at one time, wanted to work as a youth volunteer in any capacity at the Koko Foundation. Things changed dramatically during McLeary's early years and at age 14, circumstances required him to work to help financially support his single parent household. Two years later, his mother was forced to sell her house and McLeary found himself living on the streets, first in Berkeley, Calif., and then in Philadelphia.

He later managed to save enough money to travel to Chiapas, Mexico, where he lived with the Zapatistas to witness their revolution. Following his return to the San Francisco

Bay Area, he earned enough money for brief trips to Ireland and Spain. In addition, he spent a month in Cuba to learn more firsthand about the people and their culture.

McLeary used his entire Future Vision Scholarship to attend a special course of study on howler monkeys on Ometepe Island in Lake Nicaragua this past summer. "We tracked down the monkeys in the tropical rain forest and spent 10 to 12 hours a day recording their behavior," he said. "Then, we graphed our statistics onto a chart and concluded with a research paper."

Was it worthwhile? According to McLeary, "It was fascinating to observe these primates in their own environment and study their hierarchical, social and political systems through their daily activities. Most of all, it gave me a platform to know what to expect in this field."

That's exactly what Clarke wanted McLeary to experience. She wanted him to get a practical understanding of field anthropology and by studying primates, open his eyes to the origins of humans. "Students like Sean need encouragement to follow their passion. Otherwise, they fall through the academic cracks. They're bright and will succeed in areas that have meaning for them but get hopelessly frustrated without meaningful challenges," Clarke said.

The other Future Promise Scholarship winner was Christine Miller, whose transformation was so remarkable that it caught the attention of all three college instructors.

Miller, 43, is a single parent of two teenage daughters, who earned a General Education Development (G.E.D.) diploma at age 31. She first attended Clarke's anthropology class two years ago with little exposure to academics and no expectations for earning a degree of any sort. Plagued by low self-esteem and a self-deprecating attitude, Miller later discovered an important life lesson about herself: With focus, she could succeed with educational challenges.

Miller's transformation took place after Clarke taught her valuable organizational skills, which were then applied to her coursework. This cleared her learning pathway and helped her succeed in school, which ultimately gave her more self-confidence.

Thus, she went on to become a role model for other re-entry students at the college. "Christine has been such an inspiration for others and I know of at least six or seven students who are here because of her," said Clarke.

Today, Miller is the social services director of a long-term care facility in Modesto and is working toward an associate degree in human services or social services from Columbia. Her Future Promise Scholarship is being used to support her educational efforts.

Miller holds her academic mentors in high regard, stating that "students, who have the opportunity to take their (Hamilton and Clarke) classes are lucky to get that educational foundation. They are always there to work with you and encourage you along the way."

The mark of a good instructor is the ability to inspire students to acquire the basic knowledge for graduation. However, the efforts of Paula Clarke, Ted Hamilton and Maria Madruga extend beyond classroom boundaries. Their enthusiasm for education and generosity exceed the academic basics and will forever remain in the minds of those whom they have taught and helped.

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— Ted Hamilton  
Instructor of history and social sciences  
Columbia College