

When I was 26 years old, I had a promising, well-paying profession as an operating room nurse, was financially independent, and had been living on my own for nearly a decade. So, why did I jump at the chance to be interviewed by one of Hood's sponsoring committees?

As I re-visit the place and person I was a quarter century ago, the answer is obvious. One of the alumnae, also a nurse, knew I wanted to attend college to grow intellectually, to strive for and achieve more. I also wanted to carve out a fulfilling and challenging career. The United Church of Christ provided financial sponsorship of women, enabling them to attend Hood.

I still recall clearly the day of my interview: what I wore, what the room looked like, and how I felt in that room with the committee members. After parrying several perceptive questions, one man asked, "Why should we give you money to go to college? You already have a profession. You're 26 years old. You're on your way already." Without the smallest hesitation or doubt, I blurted out, "Because I'll finish."

Apparently, the committee was sold! I began at Hood College in the fall of 1969. I was filled with enormous anxiety: My sponsor, the United Church of Christ, took a chance on me. Would I fail them? Born and raised in Harlem, I found Hood was a totally foreign place. The women were of a different culture and class. I was 26, yet they, at 18, had experiences I never had: ski trips to Switzerland, summers in Italy, country homes, and private clubs.

Having limited exposure to middle- and upper-middle class whites, I carried excess baggage, namely, my assumptions. I assumed that whites would be rejecting, unsupportive, and racist. However, I found that I couldn't make assumptions. Some were as I feared, but most were gracious, respectful, and friendly. Indeed, I formed friendships that I still treasure today. Terry, a senior when I was a freshman, is one such friend.

About three months into my first semester, the Admissions Office held a rap session for the seven or eight black and Hispanic students. When asked,

"What impressed you the most," I answered, "The cows!" I'd never been near farms before and it was the most peaceful and serene experience I'd ever had. Without fear of censure or concern for public posturing, I spoke freely. At Hood, I felt free.

As I forged ties with professors, I felt the same sense of continuity. I was a psychology major, but one of my favorite professors was a political science instruc-

tor who was truly superb. When she spoke she held her students enthralled. I recall her extensive research on the Kennedy presidential campaign, which earned her great respect across the country. When I recall her death, I feel a deep sense of loss.

Hood attracted professors of stature. But, it championed more than excellence in scholarship. Hood promoted a strong sense of community, high standards, and solid values. Only a small place can provide these character-building elements.

In my senior year, I took a course in statistics for admission to graduate school. I knew the course would be difficult so I decided to take it at Hood, and not at graduate school

where I'd be distracted with life's many pressures. At exam time, I went to see my professor and asked him, "Is it more important to show you what I've really learned, or to show you what I can do in one hour?"

I asked him if I could use his office to take the exam, explaining that I would be too anxious when I noticed other students finishing the exam before me. He agreed. In his office, I turned on the radio softly and hunkered down to the task at hand. I am very proud of the "B" that I earned. To this day I am grateful to that professor and to Hood for having created an environment that responds to the needs of its students and that functions with its honor intact. I not only learned about people from other cultures and classes, I learned life skills that only a small liberal arts women's college could teach me: how to think critically, solve problems, find the right questions to ask, and to be resilient in the face of adversity. I also learned how to drive a stick shift in the Hood parking lot!

I loved living in the dorms. I lived in Coblenz Hall, the Spanish House, and finally, off campus. Living in a dorm after being on my own was a unique experience for me. It was the first time I'd shared space with a group of people. I interacted informally with other women who were very different from me. Some were afraid of me and didn't understand my style of humor. Some were in awe not only because of my color or Hispanic heritage but because of my age.

Life in a dorm, I soon learned, had its

Taking Chances is the Only Way

By CESSIE ALFONSO '73

My experience as a person of color at Hood did prepare me for the world. As a minority on campus, I developed coping skills that help me today in my work and impact my professional success. Just as Hood took a risk on me, I took a risk on it. Risk-taking, apparently, is integral to who I am.

heart of the enterprise." A renowned art scholar and superb teacher, Dr. Derbes has written a book, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant*, which examines the art of thirteenth and early fourteenth century painting.

Dr. Derbes values the camaraderie, support and mutual respect that undergirds the humanities faculty. "We are all interconnected and that's why the Center for the Humanities functions so well."

This interconnection extends into the classroom where students benefit from faculty integration. For example, Dr. Derbes served as a guest lecturer in Mark Sandona's Renaissance Amphibium class, integrating the art and literature of the Renaissance.

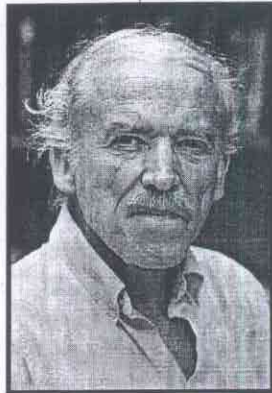
The interconnections of the humanities disciplines are especially appreciated by Hoda Zaki, associate professor of political science. "Most people don't think of political science as part of the humanities, but political science is closely aligned with the humanities."

For instance, Dr. Zaki integrates literature in her African Political Thought class, including the study of a thirteenth century Mali epic poem and a classic slave narrative. As the director of the African American Studies Program, Dr. Zaki established an interdisciplinary African American studies minor in 1994, which calls for coordinating course offerings among five departments.

Dr. Sandona, associate professor of English, defines the intrinsic value of the humanities: "What the Humanities offers is the opportunity to speculate on the 'why.'" Dr. Sandona, a research scholar who was awarded a study grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to study possible connections between Shakespeare and the classical Greek dramatist Euripides, worked closely with Dr. Bohrer to orga-

nize the center's first symposium.

Dr. Sandona values the distinct disciplines within the humanities. "We (the humanities faculty) come together with our distinctive points of view and we contribute from those vantage points." Dr. Sandona hopes that students, as they acquire a foundation in the different humanities disciplines, will realize the "interesting intersections among the disciplines."



Gerald McKnight

The humanities faculty challenges students to ask, why?

Speculating on the "why" as well as the "who, what, when, and how," Gerald McKnight, professor of history, occupies a firm position among the humanities faculty at Hood. Dr. McKnight's research into the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., has been cited nationally, and he

has appeared on ABC's "Nightline." Honored as an Outstanding Teacher at the 1989 National Conference on Higher Education, Dr. McKnight encourages his students to grow intellectually and academically.

Given his expertise, it is not surprising that Dr. McKnight is enthusiastic about Hood's recent acquisition of research materials on the assassination of Kennedy: a complete set of Warren Commission documents and the materials used in the 1970s by the House Select Committee on Assassinations; the largest public collection of government documents on

the JFK murder, amassed and donated by Harold Weisberg; and the extensive collection of the late Sylvia Meagher, considered a premier assassination researcher.

Questioning and developing critical thinking are equally important to Verna Gehring, assistant professor of philosophy. A proficient researcher and lecturer, Dr. Gehring teaches a wide range of topics in philosophy, including feminist thought, biomedical ethics, logic, and topics in modern philosophy. She helped organize this year's College-wide Colloquium on "Justice."

Dr. Gehring is developing a course in professional ethics that addresses contemporary ethical issues of attorneys, journalists, and business people, among others.

Dr. Gehring is quick to point out the professional commitment of the humanities faculty as they "clearly stretch to offer their students as much as they can." As an active member of the center's board and a judge of the essays for the writing prize

sponsored by the center, Dr. Gehring observes that there have been "more submissions than ever before."

The strong humanities program at Hood, undergirded by committed and energetic faculty, provides the opportunity for student academic and personal growth. Appreciation of the humanities sometimes lags in our con-



Verna Gehring

temporary technological society.

Courtney Carter, associate professor of English, maintains an optimistic view, however, as she reflects, "In an age that has rediscovered Jane Austen..." ■

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