Who Makes Millersville Special?

This Exchange edition features Dr. Carrie Smith. She is an assistant professor of sociology and is in her third year at Millersville.

Q: What sparked your interest to teach here?
A: Millersville is a teaching-oriented school, and takes seriously the value and importance of good teaching. I also like the fact that Millersville is a public institution with a comparatively small student population. On a personal level, several members of my husband’s family also live in the Lancaster area, which is fantastic. We haven’t had any “Everybody Loves Raymond” moments yet!

Q: Have you always enjoyed sociology?
A: Absolutely! Like many people, the first major course that I took was “Introduction to Sociology.” The professor had actually retired to Utah; however, he came back every fall to teach this course. He used many examples from his life in Utah to help explain the concepts we learned – I was immediately intrigued.

Q: What got you into this subject?
A: For one, I gained a whole new insight into Utah! But seriously, I realized that everything can be viewed sociologically, and that sociology has a good deal of relevance to everyday life. The main question I always seek to answer is, “How do people understand the world around them?” The discipline of sociology has been integral in helping me answer that question.

Q: What is your favorite class to teach?
A: I really enjoy all the classes I teach, but I have to admit that I particularly enjoy teaching “Social Problems” and “Sociology of Health.” We always have great discussions in both of those classes.

Q: What was your favorite subject in high school?
A: I spent my pre-college education under the British system, and had to prepare for my “O” level exams. For English literature, we had to read three books over the course of two years and know them inside out. I really enjoyed that level of intensity and depth. I also spent two years learning about the history of Southeast Asia and the Pacific Theater of World War II, and I enjoyed those history classes tremendously.

Q: What college(s) did you attend?
A: I got my bachelor’s at the University of California at Santa Cruz – home of the most unusual mascot in all of collegiate sports (the banana slug). I received my master’s and Ph.D. at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn. Most people probably also do not realize that I started out at a community college in San Jose, Calif. Like many of our students here, I was a transfer student.

Q: What is your favorite thing about Millersville’s campus?
A: I love the pond and its residents. I’m on the other side of campus, and don’t get to go past it very often. Whenever I have an opportunity, I try to include the pond on my route when I’m running around on campus.

Q: What are your comments on the MU Alert System and the new security measures placed around campus?
A: You can never anticipate what might happen. To that end, I’m pleased that Millersville is constantly working on the alert system and figuring out additional security measures. Sitting in my office last week, I heard the siren test loud and clear!

Q: What is your favorite pastime?
A: I’m going to sound like a dork, but honestly, I love nothing more than to curl up with a good book. While I have a particular weakness for murder mysteries, I like to read on a wide range of topics. Right now, I’m reading a biography of the Russian statesman Grigory Potemkin.

Q: Where is your favorite place to travel?
A: New York City – there is so much you can do there, and the food is fabulous. The first thing I do when I arrive in the city is to pay a visit to Patience and Fortitude – the lions guarding the New York Public Library. The Museum of Natural History is also a regular on my list, as are the many wonderful independent bookstores in the city.

Q: If you were given a year off to go anywhere or do anything, what would that be?
A: I’m a big baseball and ice hockey fan, so I would love to visit all the arenas and ballparks across North America, ending with an extended stay in the San Francisco Bay Area – where all my favorite teams are. I have never been able to attend the Maine Lobster Festival because it takes place right when the fall semester begins. A visit to the festival would be on my list as well.

Q: Who was your favorite teacher as a student, and why?
A: I have been blessed with several wonderful teachers! However, one person stands out in particular – my graduate school advisor, Karen Campbell. She’s not only a great teacher, but is also a good sociologist and mentor. She also has a wonderful sense of humor – which is very important in life! Not only does she continue to push me to do my best, she does so with much kindness. We still keep in touch with each other, and make sure to get together for meals at conferences.

Q: What would you say to a student who hasn’t decided on a major?
A: You need to do what you love and what you’re good at. However, you also need to keep an open mind and constantly challenge yourself. Many people end up majoring in what they think will be a “useful” major. Our world is constantly changing, and the skills that remain useful are critical thinking, reading and writing well and strong analytical powers. Not surprisingly, these are the skills that a liberal arts education offers. So, declare your major, but at the same time, keep in mind that you should continue to explore other perspectives and disciplines outside of your major.

Q: Do you believe that every student should take at least one sociology class, regardless of his or her major?
A: Yes, absolutely! In fact, I think everyone should take at least one class in each major. The whole point of college is to learn to think in different ways and to expand your horizons.

Q: What kind of food could you eat all day, every day?
A: I could probably subsist on sushi and sashimi for the rest of the life.

Q: What is your favorite candy?
A: On my office desk, I have a container of root beer barrels. I keep encouraging students to help themselves so that I won’t be tempted to eat them all myself.

*** Campus Mail ***

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