

FORGING CONNECTIONS IN THE CLASSROOM

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For this behavioral science professor, it's all about connecting with students



PHOTO BY JODIE ANDRUSKEVICH

One day last fall, George Scollin arrived in class wearing a New England Patriots cap and asked his students what might have motivated him to wear the cap. “I used it as a way to jumpstart a discussion about motivation,” he explains.

Scollin, an adjunct professor in behavioral sciences, currently teaches introduction to psychology and lifespan development to undergraduate students. He doesn’t make any apologies for bringing his personal passions to class—football, golf, and travel feature prominently in his life—because he feels it helps him to connect with young people. “If I can establish rapport with my students first, then I can reach them,” says the Amherst resident.

Scollin’s ability to connect with young adults may have something to do with his own early professional journey, which took him down several paths. Fresh out of Merrimack College with a teaching degree in French in 1966, Scollin joined the National Security Agency in Fort Meade, Maryland. He had top secret security clearance and can only reveal all these years later that he was a “French linguist.”

Two years into his government job, however, he decided to change course and pursue an interest he had in high school to enter religious life. He enrolled in the Xavierian Brothers Novitiate in Newton, Mass. and while there was assigned to teach French at Keith Academy in Lowell, Mass.

“I decided the brotherhood was not for me, but working in education was...and I’ve never looked back,” says Scollin. His first teaching job after leaving the Xavierians was at Bishop Fenwick High School in Peabody, Mass. After just three years in the classroom, he made another career change, this time to guidance counseling. “My students would occasionally come to me with their problems and since there was only one counselor for about 700 students, I decided to switch to guidance,” he says.

Scollin began his counseling career at Whitefield Elementary School in New Hampshire’s North Country, recalling how he and his wife Maura were surprised to find snow on the ground when they arrived for an interview in May. “We wondered what the heck we were doing there,” he laughs.

During his 35 year career in guidance, Scollin served as a counselor at all levels and in several school districts, including Chelmsford, Mass. and Amherst, N.H., before retiring in 2004 after 17 years at Manchester’s Central High School. He has fond memories of his time at Central, where he coached the debate team and chaperoned student trips to Austria and France. The trips gave him an opportunity to share his firsthand knowledge of French and of a country he had grown to love during a semester abroad at the University of Dijon in the 1960s.

Scollin’s tireless work with young people made an impression on his fellow counselors, who named him New Hampshire Guidance Counselor of the Year in 1983. “I just hope I inspired a few kids and a few of my peers along the way,” he says of his long career in the field.

In fact, his early experience with one student sticks with him to this day. “He was a 17-year-old sophomore supporting a two-year-old daughter by washing dishes at night. He came to ‘turn in his books.’ I had never counseled a school dropout before and wasn’t prepared,” says Scollin, “But I told him that when he decided that earning \$200 a week wasn’t enough, he should get his GED because he had potential.” Years later, the young man returned to tell Scollin he had taken his advice.

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Today, Scollin teaches undergraduate students at Rivier College and at Daniel Webster College, and during the summer, he teaches international students in the hospitality program at Southern New Hampshire University. He and his wife have hosted summer barbecues and other events for students from all over the world, including France, India, Canada, Jamaica, and Spain.

Although he’s only in his fourth semester teaching at Rivier, Scollin has already made a difference in student recruitment, says Dr. Paul Cunningham, chairperson for the Division of Science. Through his knowledge of New Hampshire’s School-to-Careers network, Scollin connected members of Rivier’s behavioral sciences faculty with a career development advisor at Nashua High School North.

The result has been a series of three admissions programs designed to expose high school students to all that Rivier has to offer. The first panel, “A Day in the Life of a College Student,” held last fall, was an unqualified success. Jennifer DiMara, career development advisor at Nashua High School North, says Rivier students on the panel were “enthusiastic, inspiring, and well spoken. Our students made a connection.”

No surprise, given that Scollin was involved. It doesn’t matter if he’s in a Rivier classroom, counseling high school students, or teaching at another area college or university—for George Scollin, it’s always been about connecting with students. ■

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