

Lewis and Clark assistant sociology professor pays it forward

by Louise Jett

March 31 2017 4:44 PM



GODFREY – L&C Assistant Sociology Professor Jen Cline has a passion for teaching and helping students achieve their educational and life goals.

Cline was a first-generation college student and remembers the impact her teachers and advisors had on her when she started junior college.

“I never considered myself an academic, and I didn’t like school,” Cline said. “Thankfully, while I was working on my associate degree, my advisor saw something in me and put me in the college’s honors program. It was the best thing for me. I did a complete turnaround, fell in love with learning and eventually teaching.”

Cline is now paying it forward. She is helping to launch and will coordinate the new Lewis and Clark Community College Honors College this fall.

L&C Honors College is a selective admissions program designed to give students an enhanced college experience and prepare them for transferring to a four-year university.

“Jen has been the chief architect of the Lewis and Clark’s Honors College,” said Jill Lane, L&C Dean of Transfer Programs. “Her research and her own positive experiences as an honors student have influenced the design of the new program. The Honors College will offer students who have outstanding potential an opportunity to enhance their two-year college experience.”

The L&C Honors College, affiliated with the Mannie Jackson Center for the Humanities (MJCH), will include honors courses, service/social opportunities and will culminate with a MJCH undergrad research project and symposium.

“This is one of the proudest moments of my career,” Cline said. “It feels good to develop and coordinate an honors program similar to the one that changed my life. I believe our program will change our students’ lives too.”

Cline said it was her community college English teacher who sparked her desire to teach.

“Professor Pedro San Antonio loved teaching, and I fell in love with learning,” Cline said. “He made learning something far more meaningful than memorization. We learned to understand power dynamics in society, democracy, globalization, war and peace. He made me realize how much teaching can be a form of activism. I chose to teach because of Professor San Antonio.”

Cline credits many women with helping her get to where she is today, but at the top of the list is her mom.

“My mom isn’t a perfect mom, and there have been times when our relationship has struggled,” Cline said. “However, my mom has taught me to never stop learning, to not live in fear, and to be self-sufficient.”

“She is a fierce woman who has always fought for herself. She grew up in deep poverty, but she does everything for herself. Now she owns and operates her own taxi cab. Her self-reliance is impressive.”

Other women Cline admires include a long list of women from all cultures and walks of life including poet Maya Angelou, authors Jamaica Kincaid and Chimimanda Ngozi Adichie, musicians Nina Simone, Aimee Mann and Lucinda Williams, and women who have influenced the field of sociology like social activist bell hooks, existentialist Simone de Beauvoir and professor Patricia Hill Collins.

After earning her Associate of Arts in Liberal Arts from Henry Ford College, Cline worked as a teaching assistant while earning a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Women’s Studies from Cornell College and her Master of Science in Sociology from the Universiteit van Amsterdam.

Cline has been teaching at Lewis and Clark for five years. Her courses include Introduction to Sociology, Racial and Ethnic Relations, Social Problems and Marriage and the Family.

She said her philosophy on teaching can best be summed up as author Antoine de Saint-Exupery said, “If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.”

Cline said all of her educational experiences, from community college to her graduate studies in Europe, have helped her grow as a person and therefore as a teacher.

“I learned so much about my own culture and self while studying in Amsterdam,” Cline said. “I had to confront my biases, prejudices, shortcomings and knowledge of the world and fears in the process. What I learned was humility, hope, and a complete passion for understanding the impact of society on our lives—a lot of the same topics we cover in my classes.”

The lessons she learns from her students, however, are the most important.

“My favorite part of working at Lewis and Clark is our students,” she said. “They challenge my thinking, my own assumptions and prejudices. I am really looking forward to working with students in the new honors program.

Visit www.lc.edu/honors college for more information about L&C Honors College. For more information on summer/fall courses call (618) 468-2222 or (800) YES-LCCC.