

HONORARY DEGREE

Margaret A. Steinbeiser

Former Professor of English, Mount Aloysius College

Plato wrote, “Do not train students to learn by force or harshness; but direct them to it by what amuses their minds, so that you may be better able to discover with accuracy the peculiar bent of the genius of each.”

Today, we continue our celebration of a woman whose own particular genius was to discover that of others. Professor Margaret A. Steinbeiser, teacher and scholar, devoted forty-four years of her professional life to Mount Aloysius College and the many thousands of students and colleagues who were touched by her learning, her wisdom, and her compassion.

Maggy was born in Falls Church, VA and attended Sullins Junior College in Bristol, VA. She was a graduate of East Tennessee State University, earning bachelor and master of arts degrees in English and history.

Arriving on the Mount Aloysius campus in 1971, she connected immediately with the people of western Pennsylvania and dedicated her efforts to enriching the minds and lives of students and, by extension, the entire College community. There was no area—teaching, service, or professional development—in which she did not excel, and Maggy quickly became the face of the faculty, amazing everyone with the energy and creativity she displayed every day—in the classroom, in committee meetings, in one-on-one encounters, and in her interactive jaunts across the campus.

To students, peers, staff, and administrators, Maggy was—and remains—an emblem of quality, dependability, and breadth of accomplishment; a walking encyclopedia, conversant with any significant book published in the past five hundred years or so; able to cite phylum, class, order, family, genus, and species of any animal, plant, or fungus encountered or mentioned. And she could provide the Latin terminology as well without missing a beat.

In the early days, as a member of the faculty of what was then known as Mount Aloysius Junior College, Maggy was always ready to accept a new challenge in providing students with whatever support they needed. Not only did she teach English—and sometimes history—courses, but she also served at various times as chairperson of the General Studies program, of the Liberal Arts program, of the Pre-Mortuary Studies program, and even—briefly—as the director of the Mount Aloysius Junior College Reserve Officer Training Corps.

Over the years, she also participated in just about every standing or ad hoc committee on campus, including key ones, such as Academic Council, Curriculum, Faculty Affairs, Promotion, and Service Learning. At one point or another, she chaired most of them.

For Maggy Steinbeiser, research was something done to fulfill a student or College need rather than something to enhance her vita. For example, Maggy supported the College’s evolving theatre program by developing and teaching courses in theatre history, working with directors to help students research and rehearse roles, scouring antique shops for historically appropriate props, and repairing and painting those props.

On one typical occasion, she consulted with playwright Arthur Giron when the College was preparing to present his play *Edith Stein*. She then worked with the local community of the Carmelite Sisters to ensure that the nuns’ habits for the play were accurate, right down to textures and materials. Consequently, Maggy and the late Doris Etienne put in hundreds of hours in designing, making, and fitting all of the outfits used in the play. Of course, they both kept low profiles when the critical kudos started to pour in.

As the institution prepared to shift from junior college to senior college, Maggy actively engaged in conceptualizing many of the new two-plus-two and four-year curricula; she also played a key role in course design—for art, history, and music as well as English. It was as result of one of her suggestions that the College came to develop what was eventually called the “Capstone Seminar” which required students to integrate their life experiences and formal learning in addressing a problem facing humankind. Over the years, the Capstone Seminar has been widely praised and emulated by other colleges and universities.

It was Maggy’s idea, as well, to provide a course or series of courses to introduce students to the “great conversation” in which they would come to participate as college students and lifelong learners. Over the past decade and a half, this idea has manifested itself as the “First-Year Experience,” the “Cultural Literacy Seminar,” and the “Connections” series of courses. Maggy agreed to serve as director of the program for its initial two years and ended up directing it for ten years. That was our Maggy, always leading the way when there was a need.

There are probably no better words to sum up Maggy’s life and contributions than these from the Altoona Mirror at the time of her passing:

Maggy was a teacher, a brilliant teacher. The breadth and depth of her knowledge, insight and intellectual curiosity was nothing short of astonishing. Her legacy will always be the thousands of students that she inspired to love learning and be awake to all aspects of life. For herself, she lived life by a rigorous code of honesty and truth that was always tempered by a compassionate understanding for others. The clarity of her vision, her patience and sense of loyalty challenged us to always be better. The loss of her warmth, her laughter, her strength is almost unendurable, but her spirit is in all who knew and loved her and will never be diminished.

Mount Aloysius College is proud to confer upon Professor Margaret Andrina Steinbeiser the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters, *honoris causa*, this ninth day of May two thousand and fifteen.

***Awarded on the Ninth Day of May in the Year Two Thousand and Fifteen
at the
Commencement Ceremony***

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