

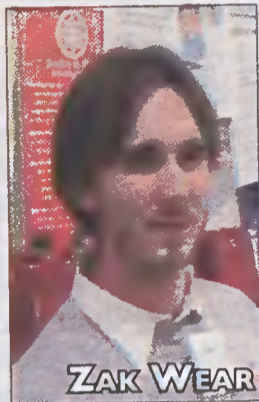
## COMMUNITY

## Exploring community at Guilford

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## Issues

"In the over 21 years I've been here, I've seen a variety of changes that have negatively impacted the possibility and practice of community at Guilford. When people didn't get someone by phone, they used to get out of their office and go across campus to talk to that person. That doesn't happen anymore." – Max Carter, director of the Friends Center and campus ministry coordinator



"There are definitely splits within the faculty. We try to model good, honest dialogue, but I don't think we always do that. But the majority does try to listen with charity and empathy." – Maria Rosales, assistant professor of political science

"(I'm a) CCE student — who has time to think about community?!" – Survey Respondent 25

"We're all too busy. We have to think about what we have permission to spend our time on. Those things are credits, work study, and jobs. Then we get to engagement and community-building." – Zak Wear, senior and Community Senate outreach co-chair



## Division?

"There are several small circles or sub-communities. Those groups create their own common good, but it can become isolating and doesn't provide broader benefits. In our worst moments, we promote that isolation." – Carter

"I feel like there is much more of a sense of integrated school-wide community than at other colleges, but the internal divides and cliques are still very present — athletes, Greenleaf workers, even racial division." – Survey Respondent 58



"Looking at the campus in general, there are a lot of different friend groups, but I see diversity within those groups. People here are generally accepting and even celebrating of minority groups." – Taylor Seitz, sophomore and religion and spirituality outreach coordinator for Pride

"At Guilford we've taken differences and turned them into 'divides.' That's unhealthy and counter-productive. It leads to false dichotomies and dualism." – Aaron Fetrow, vice president for student affairs and dean of students

"There are certainly rifts in the community. There are divides ... that fragment the community. However, these divides exist in every community and Guilford, unlike most, acts to bridge these gaps." – Survey Respondent 26

"I think those divides are perceptions. I can see them, but I don't buy into them. I think the minute I give acknowledgment, I make those perceived divides stronger." – Tammy Alt, associate dean for campus life

## Getting Active

Some students have started rebuilding community on their own. Levi's Coffin, a "dead poets society," was started recently by juniors Hadley Davis and Jamie Sisk.



"Essentially we all just come together, people read poetry, they sing songs, and it's quite emotional," Davis said. "Our first meeting lasted for about three hours, and about 40 kids came."

"We actually had a poem read by a student talking about how you meet someone your first year ... and by the time you graduate, you don't even acknowledge each other," Davis said. "That's the kind of distancing of people we're trying to fight back against."

"(At Levi's Coffin), Guilford College didn't exist," Sisk said. "It was a weird conglomeration of us. It was bursting the bubble within the bubble."

This is just one example of students actively reestablishing community.

## Involvement and Improvement

"Statistically speaking, there should be about 50 to 100 'queer' people at Guilford, but we usually get about 10 at Pride meetings. There are more people here that we haven't been successful in reaching out to yet, and we're not sure why." – Seitz

"I believe that community starts with involvement. If more people came out to sports games, OSLE activities, and Residence Life programs, then people that don't normally hang out could get to know each other." – Survey Respondent 28

"I think it's important not to dwell on having community just for the hell of it. If we attain community, it's possible to push that even farther so we can explore ourselves." – Sisk

"Don't tell me there's a problem (with community at Guilford) unless we're talking solutions. Otherwise, we're just perpetuating that problem. If there's a problem, let's do something about it." – Alt



## Life before Guilford: Eric Mortensen

By Liz Farquhar  
WEB EDITOR

"I'm one of those people that believes in learning for the sake of learning," Assistant Professor of



A young Eric Mortensen and his older sister, Kathy, pose for a picture.

Religious Studies Eric Mortensen said.

This philosophy of "learning for the sake of learning" has led Mortensen to a life full of unique and tremendous experiences. Very few people can say that they have visited 47 countries, lived with nomads in Asia, met the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, and had a life-long love for Dungeons and Dragons. Mortensen is one of those people.

Mortensen grew up in the quiet town of Winchester, Mass. From a young age traveling was a major part of his life. By the time Mortensen was 16, he was farming coffee in the fields of Malaysia. During his undergraduate career at Carlton College, he studied abroad in Beijing, Nepal, India, and Bhutan.

"That kind of changed my world," Mortensen said. "I started studying things like Tibetan Buddhism academically. When I got out of college I was either going to

go into theater or go into Tibetan studies, so I flipped a coin and it came up tails. So, I went to grad school."

Mortensen attended Harvard for his graduate education and spent 10 years studying languages, anthropology, religion, folklore, and history. During this time he found his love of teaching, and his love of Asia.

"Asia has always been a major part of my academic life, probably the most defining part of my life besides now being married and having a kid," Mortensen said. "I spent months on Buddhist pilgrimages, camping, walking out and living with nomads, and being outside. I guess I didn't realize how beautiful Tibet would be as a place. I think I've gone on academically to be a Tibetologist because of the friendships I've gained there and just how much I care about that area of the world."

During one trip to Asia, Mortensen wandered out and lived with the nomadic people. He quietly described their lives as hard, beautiful, and somewhat lonely. His experience with the nomads in Tibet has stuck with him since.

"The hospitality of Tibetan nomadic culture is something I have never experienced as deeply elsewhere," Mortensen said.

His love of Tibetology brought Mortensen to Guilford to teach religious studies. Mortensen does not have a degree in religious studies, but his intensive research into Buddhist culture has made religion his specialty.

"I was methodologically trained in multiple disciplines," Mortensen said. "A liberal arts college is sort of the dream place for me to be."

Mortensen's days used to be filled with excursions through places like Burma, France, and Kyrgyzstan; now he spends his time with his wife



Søren Mortensen perches on the shoulders of his father, Assistant Professor of Religious Studies Eric Mortensen.

Dasa and his son Søren, two people that he considers his best friends.

"Life trumps school," Mortensen said. "My job is my love, it's a passion, it has to be a labor of love to be an academic, but family is worth more than anything else."