

PSU Mont Alto staff profile: Dr. Lauraine Hawkins

BY JOSHUA ENRIQUEZ
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Dr. Hawkins, an assistant professor in biology, is the kind of person someone would have to talk to personally to know her. Just having her in class for biology is insufficient knowledge of her personality outside of the classroom.

During her army brat years, she's lived and moved in more than half of the U.S. and has never lived anywhere for more than two years due to the fact that her father was in the military. Moving was a natural thing in the young life of Hawkins and her experiences has led to this conclusion, "People may look different and may sound different, but people are still people and the same personal and non-personal issues are found everywhere."

Her high school days were spent in northern Virginia and for college, she went to Virginia Tech for an undergraduate degree in biology. She then proceeded to go to graduate school for a PhD at the University of Arizona and that led her to the career she is in now. On her spare time, she gardens, bird watches, reads science fiction and mysteries, and listens to music.

People such as herself intrigue Hawkins because it allows to, "connect with a couple of professors who do interesting research. You know the saying, 'To pay it forward?' I hope to pass some of my experiences forward to my students if possible because science is not an abstract thing. Science is something you might do for a living and it's not something where you can look up an answer out of a book. You need to make sense of what you do," says Hawkins.

As students first enter FTCAP at Penn State University, Hawkins says this, "I enjoy interacting with students during the time before college because it allows me to see what they

think and expect of college. And sometimes their opinions change when they're finally in college." Hawkins states, "Yes, I do enjoy teaching. There's nothing that's more fun than seeing somebody struggle with an idea and then get it. It's like a light bulb lighting in someone's head. You can see the joy in people that understand something for the first time." It's apparent that Hawkins really enjoys spending time and helping students in her classes. She proves this even more by mentioning, "There have been times that I have regretted not cloning myself to get things done because I wanted to do other things such as help a student in one of my classes."

College itself is really hard to have due to the expenses one has to pay to attend and receive an education and a degree. This is what Hawkins had to say, "College is tremendously expensive. At the same time, loans are much more available than it used to be and the terms for repayment are some of the most favorable you are ever going to meet. It's too bad it has not nearly as much growth in scholarship aid."

When first seeing Hawkins go about campus, one wouldn't necessarily think that she was in a terrible accident until she told you about it. "The single moment of great joy occurred a year after I started working at Penn State. I ended up in a car accident and had to go to a hospital in York. I had serious brain damage, broken bones, and was in a wheelchair for a while. The joy was the first day the doctor asked me to walk down a hallway by myself, and then actually do it. It was as if it was riding a bicycle for the first time you know? Now the worst thing I experienced was probably 9/11. It was a class day for me and I was in my biology class when the planes hit. When rumors started going around, people started talking and soon the TV was turned on. That was a

hard day for a lot of people and it was horrible and they kept showing over and over on TV, but there was a personal connection for me because my dad worked at the Pentagon. I knew those places that the planes were going to hit and I had students with families in New York City. It wasn't something that happened to somebody else but I felt more personal towards that. I'll never forget going to anatomy class that day asking the class whether they wanted to have class or not. And the group wanted to have class and maintain some normalcy."

Considering this, Hawkins has undergone some unique experiences in her lifetime and she practically has an opinion on almost everything especially politics. "Recently, I've been getting tired of the recent campaigning because of the attacks on one another. I'm only interested in knowing what they can provide and not who or what they hate. I've met some politicians who clearly were good hearted and clear thinking that wanted the best for their people and I believe it. And there are others who are hungry for power over people. In Pennsylvania, you need to be registered with a party in order to vote in the primaries and because of that, I'm registered as a Democrat so that I could vote but that doesn't necessarily mean I'll vote for any Democrat. I'm really independent."

Hawkins has been with the Mont Alto campus since 1992 and since then, she's seen changes about the people's mindset about certain things. "When I started on this campus in 1992, the student population and the faculty and staff population was very strongly white males and females. It was very uniform but there were a few exceptions. Coming from the southwestern U.S. where there is more of a mix of



Submitted by Joshua Enriquez

people and cultures, which are interesting, seeing some of the tensions among groups of people here was a little disheartening. Over the last 15 years, the campus has made an effort to recruit over a wide area and I think we're a much richer place for those interactions. I'm sure that there are individuals who

have a difficulty interacting with other people but I've never seen systematic behavior in an authority person to hold another group down."


If Hawkins were provided a magic wand, she "would take a bunch of steps forward with some of the folks on campus about going green."

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