

## Dr. (Dr.) Verena Bonitz: Polymeric Materials Engineer Turned Psychologist

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This fall, Hotchkiss Hall welcomed two new residents to a basement office in the Psychology Department at Lake Forest College, Dr. Verena Bonitz and the bison skull that resides on the top of her filing cabinet. During the second semester of my Psychology Research Methods and Statistics course, the Psychology Department held



Dr. Bonitz joined the Psychology faculty this year, teaching Research Methods and Statistics.

Bonitz found the major questions and empirical methods of the field to be extremely fascinating and decided to enroll in a course on the history of psychology.

Dr. Bonitz said that the professor of the course actually thought that she had enrolled in the course by mistake but quickly saw how committed she was to the coursework. During this time, Dr. Bonitz says, "everything just fell into place." Dr. Bonitz met a multitude of scientists in the psychology field who were just as open-minded to her as she was to learning about the field of psychology.

She describes this time of her career as both stressful and crazy. For about two years, her routine involved setting up samples in her corrosion lab for her dissertation research, running over to the Psychology building to run participants on the eye tracker, and running back to take off the samples in the corrosion lab. She did all of this on top of studying for the GRE and filling out applications to Psychology graduate schools. Although it sounds like all of this would be completely overwhelming, Dr. Bonitz explained that she was "just so interested since I had never taken a traditional introduction to psychology course."

Dr. Bonitz describes herself as a generalist who particularly enjoys the questions of psychology that are not so black and white and found that a general psychology doctorate was perfect for her interests in research methodology and psychological measurement. She started out in the field of cognitive research and also found the interactive aspect of counseling to be interesting but always knew that she wanted to end up in academia. Dr. Bonitz's current research has to do with psychological measurements regarding student evaluation of teaching and the validity behind those assessments.

When I listened to Dr. Bonitz's lecture during her interview process, I could tell how much she enjoyed teaching empirical methodologies, and during our interview her passion for the subject became even more obvious. I

interviews for a new faculty member, and Dr. Bonitz came to my class as a guest lecturer. A native of Germany, Dr. Bonitz not only has her PhD in Psychology from Iowa State University but also has a PhD in Coatings and Polymeric Materials from North Dakota State University. That's right—not one but two PhDs! After listening to her lecture, I knew right away that she was the perfect fit for the Psychology Department and for Lake Forest. Having never had taken a psychology class during her undergraduate career, Dr. was so excited to hear that she was teaching a Research Methods and Statistics course and a laboratory section for Introduction to Psychology, and I remembered the lecture that she gave to my statistics class during her interview process. Dr. Bonitz has a great way of explaining methodology in such a concise way and relating it to real world applications. In fact, Dr. Bonitz makes it a point to "try to find new ways, new demonstrations, and new examples to present the material." From her enthusiasm when describing her courses, I could tell just how much she really loves teaching statistics and the introductory labs. In the semesters to come, Dr. Bonitz hopes to teach the course that she first started her career with, the History of Psychology as well as Psychological Testing, and hopefully a first-year studies course in the future. In the spring of 2012, Dr. Bonitz will be teaching a course on the Psychology of Career Development.

From Germany to North Dakota to Iowa to Lake Forest College may seem like a coincidental path, but Dr. Bonitz truly exemplifies what the college strives to achieve through a liberal arts education. Dr. Bonitz values the education you receive at a liberal arts school and "values the background, the knowledge in different areas that help to connect with the big picture." Dr. Bonitz also emphasizes how wonderful the personalized education students can receive at Lake Forest College is.

Her biggest piece of advice for students is "to take the time to explore the options...because it is okay to be unsure," and Dr. Bonitz is the greatest example that it is perfectly okay to end up in a different niche than where you begin your career. What is important is that you take advantage of all of the opportunities that present themselves to you and approach them in a proactive manner in order to achieve the best possible education.

Dr. Bonitz modestly says that the path that led her to her current career was mostly by coincidence and "that opportunity, that window, that person" may have been the catalyst for all her success, but it quickly became clear from our interview that her passion and motivation were the true driving forces behind her successes in both careers. Dr. Bonitz is the recipient of Iowa State University's Graduate Teaching Excellence Award and the Graduate Research Excellence Award, which are just two of the many awards that can attest to her passion and motivation for learning and teaching.

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