



Lindsey Borgna/Index

Art history professor Sara Orel sits under a pair of traditional Egyptian eyes in her office. Orel has visited Egypt at least 14 times and has excavated numerous tombs and royal burial sites.

All eyes on: Sara Orel

Orel transports her passion for archaeology from Egypt to her class

BY BETHANY COURY
Staff Reporter

As art history professor Sara Orel sits in her office, eyes of Horus — eyes traditionally painted on ancient Egyptian coffins — stare at her. A faux mummy sits in the corner, accompanied by two equally fake mummy cases.

Orel, an archaeologist who has excavated in Egypt eight times, had not always planned to immerse herself in Egyptian culture, she said. However, her experiences at college changed that.

Hoping to become a disc jockey at a radio station, Orel said she did not even plan to attend college. However, she made a deal with her father: She would go to college for a year, and if she didn't like it, then they could talk. After seeing a brochure from Bryn Mawr College for archaeology, Orel, who had gone on a family vacation to Egypt when she was 11, became excited about college for the first time, she said.

"So I went for a year, and the first week, I decided I wanted to do a bachelor's degree," Orel said. "By the end of the first semester, I wanted to major in archaeology, and by the end of the

first year, I wanted to do a Ph.D. in archaeology."

One of the reasons Bryn Mawr College had such a dynamic impact on her was its museum, which was only a short train ride away from campus. She said the first time she went to the museum, it displayed excavations of a mass burial of people of Ur, Egypt, who drank poisoned wine to accompany their king into the afterlife.

She said she was fascinated by the skulls, crushed from dirt, still adorned by jewelry.

"I had no question that this was what I wanted to do," Orel said.

Orel, who earned her Ph.D. in Egyptian archaeology at the University of Toronto, helped build Truman's art history major, where she teaches ancient non-Western art history. Orel said she decided to become a professor, because it would allow her to research and talk about her passion and, best of all, travel around the world, especially to Egypt.

Classics major Sarah Spradling, who took Orel's Egyptian Art class during Spring 2011, said Orel's experiences made her lectures the best Spradling has attended at Truman.

Spradling said that every once in a while, Orel would throw in a story about people she knew and things she's seen, drawing from her large network of Egyptologists.

"I think it's so much better to learn about Egypt from someone who was actually there," Spradling said. "She has a lot of stories to tell and I think it just adds a whole other dimension."

Cole Woodcox, English and Linguistics department head, went as a tourist to Egypt twice with Orel on her excavation trips. He said Orel's knowledge about ancient and contemporary Egyptian culture enhanced his experiences.

"[She's] very passionate about being there, and that made the experience very rewarding," Woodcox said.

Orel said she's gone to Egypt at least 14 times, excavating tombs and royal burials along the way. One of the most exciting objects she's found was a sculpted lion named "Snuffy," about 3 feet tall, outside a temple. However, her favorite location to excavate is houses. Tomb remnants are what people considered ideal and expose what the people aspired to be, Orel said. However, their houses, with items such as mud-brick benches for sleeping on, show how the people lived, and who they really were.

Investigating Egyptian people, both its ancient and modern cultures, is both fascinating and natural for Orel.

"Egypt is central to my life and my research," Orel said. "Egypt is comfortable for me."

What does it mean to you to be a woman?



"It means I can wear tights."
— Maddie Chambers, freshman



"Being independent and able to take care of yourself."
— Amanda Odle, freshman



"To quote the movie Aristocats, 'Not starting fights, but finishing them.'"
— Paige Hackworth, junior



"I think it's about being smart and sophisticated."
— Sarah Harford, senior



"It's about owning all the parts of your personality."
— Laura Kemper, junior



"How would I know? I've never been anything else."
— Linda Seidel, English professor

Lindsey Borgna/Index

Students, faculty try to define 'woman'

BY KATHLEEN BARBOSA
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Communication professor Kristi Scholten began her Rhetoric of Women's Rights class with one question: What is a woman?

Scholten and her three students have spent the rest of the semester struggling with this question and they, along with several Truman State faculty members, have come up with the same conclusion — there is no definition.

As scholars, students and faculty at Truman try to define womanhood both personally and academically, and many find the best definition is not to have one. Tossing out the traditional conventions of womanhood might start with throwing out the old definition and refusing to replace it.

Scholten said her class has fo-

cused on the exploration of what a woman is. By examining historical evidence, modern examples and personal experiences, they have found there is no single definition of woman that can be applied to everyone, she said.

"Everyday we grapple with that question and what we have found is that there isn't an easy answer," Scholten said. "We don't think there has to be one. We feel like we should be able to be any number of things and we shouldn't have to pick one."

One of the most basic distinctions drawn between women and men are physical characteristics, she said.

Biologically, women and men differ, and to ignore that, Scholten said, is almost as ignorant as making that the definition's sole element.

Without an universal defini-

tion, Scholten has formed her own identity as a woman.

One way Scholten lives out her personal definition of woman is through her career, she said. She purposely waited until she was 29 to get married because she wanted to establish her career first.

Scholten said she also has waited until now to start trying to have children. This was intentional, she said, and part of her personal identity as the woman she wanted to be.

"I didn't want that to define me," Scholten said. "I didn't want to just become a mother and nothing else."

For senior Yabrell Newman, Scholten's class has given him a chance to discuss the two main females in his life — his mom and Xena the warrior princess.

Newman said he comes from a single parent household and this class has highlighted women, like

his mother, a single mom, and their struggles.

He also got the chance to examine women like Xena the warrior princess, who portray strong female roles.

Despite the new perspectives, Newman said it is sometimes hard to shed already established perceptions of the women in his life.

"It's hard to break something you've learned, but when you learn something new it also gives you a new perspective," Newman said. "But who knows if you can apply that to your life?"

English professor Linda Seidel has made women and gender studies a focus of her life and academic career.

She said she has worked with the women and gender studies minor since it began more than 20 years ago, and currently is the chair of the minor committee. She

said trying to define gender roles by limiting what is a woman or what actions a woman does, puts women in a box.

"I would resist the notion that a woman is supposed to behave in any particular way or that she is supposed to do any particular thing," Seidel said.

Seidel said having a concept of women has limited them in the past, and opening up the label to include everything gives women more possibilities.

The best way to do this, Seidel said, is to stop thinking about women as a definable group. She said she admits that biologically there are definite distinctions between men and women, but there should not be restrictions on what actions or activities they can do.

This story is part two of a series about gender at Truman.

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