Film Studies Professor and Pioneer Constantly Recreates Passion

by Dresden Romero

For over thirty years, film studies associate professor Diane Waldman has been an integral part of the University of Denver community, and a true pioneer of the film studies and production program. Throughout her tenure, she’s explored different passions, and constantly reinvented the way she teaches, and learns, from students.

Waldman began by teaching film classes within the former communications program, and was a key player in developing the Department of Media, Film & Journalism Studies’ (MFJS) Film Studies & Production undergraduate degree program in fall of 2009.

“I’ve seen the development and growth of the area of study, as well as the addition of a talented team of faculty. It’s been enormously rewarding to see the program come to fruition,” she said.

Waldman currently teaches many courses that she helped to develop, including the Advanced Seminar Rough Draft of History: Film and Video Documentary, as well as film history courses focused on silent cinema, sound cinema, and contemporary cinema. The Documentary Film/Video Production class that she team-teaches is an unexpected pleasure. “I learn from the filmmaking perspective of the professor I’m teaching with, and I get to expand the idea of what documentary film has been, what it is, and what it can be for students,” said Waldman.

She is also passionate about helping students learn to write well, and said she considers writing to be a form of critical thinking in all fields.

As a graduate teaching assistant, Waldman developed a skill and passion for the profession. She said she loved every stage of teaching – the preparation, presentation, and mostly, being in the classroom and engaging students in discussion. “For me, it was a combination of a love for the material and wanting to turn students on to new films.
they may not have considered, yet found fascinating through collective viewing and discussion,” Waldman said.

If she had to choose a favorite genre, it would currently be documentary films, as she appreciates how they evolve and satisfy her interests in both aesthetics and issues of social justice.

As chair from 2006 to 2009, Waldman is proud to have overseen the hiring of four new professors to help grow the department, and she is also proud of having served on the university committee that secured paid parental leave for faculty in 1994.

Waldman’s research has centered on film and social history, documentary film, and women and film. From 1998 to 1999, she was a Liberal Arts Fellow at Harvard Law School, and explored the incorporation of law into her film studies work. This sparked an interest, and while on sabbatical during the 2013—2014 academic year, Waldman researched the intersections of film, popular culture, and law, including the study of legal issues within film.

She noted that there is an emerging field of professionals contributing to bridging the disciplinary divide between film studies and legal issues, and she’s committed to supporting this work.

Waldman is interested in the way law either constrains or enables certain cultural practices. “I’ve looked at different areas where documentary filmmakers have confronted different kinds of issues and problems – from defamation to misrepresentation, to issues around negligence,” said Waldman.

How does Waldman stay inspired, and continue to recreate her passion for teaching? Waldman said she’s driven by student interactions and how she’s able to learn from them as well. “Just when I feel as if I’ve taught a course a million times, they inspire me to see something in a completely different way.”