

## Real life lessons

When playwright Liza Lentini '94 was a student at Wheaton College, she often wondered what the "real world" would be like. Sometimes the verbal picture painted for her wasn't pretty.

"Many people—even those I respected—told me that becoming a successful writer was a near impossibility. And they weren't altogether wrong. It's tough, but it can be done," she said. That's the message Lentini—living proof of the possible—planned to tell students during the First-Year Seminar "Women Dramatists in America Today," which is taught by Assistant Professor of English and Playwright-in-Residence Charlotte Meehan.

The collaboration between Lentini and Meehan is part of a new initiative by the Alumnae/i Association that brings the real life experiences of alumnae/i into the classroom.

Seven alumnae/i have been paired with FYS professors: law student Scott Hesser '01 with Professor of Astronomy Timothy Barker in "The Search for Life in the Universe"; Harvard College Fund associate director Kate Malone Hesser '01 with Prentice Associate Professor of English Michael Drout and Professor of Mathematics and Associate Provost Bill Goldbloom Bloch in "The Edge of Reason"; schoolteacher Laura Yorkis Mullen '00 with Associate Professor of Art History Evelyn Staudinger Lane in "Cracking the Codes: Imagery and Mysteries"; freelance writer Jennifer Chase Esposito '97 with Associate Professor of Religion Jonathan Brumberg-Kraus in "Rituals of Dinner"; professional



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tennis player Payum Payman '07 and Assistant Professor of History Yuen-Gen Liang in "How the Middle East Views the West"; and Duke University graduate student Jonah Cool '04 and Professor of Biology Betsey Dyer in "The Complete Amateur Naturalist."

Student Alumnae/i Association member Laura Blanchard '08 initially suggested the FYS collaboration. "We're constantly looking for ways to bring alums and students together in new and creative ways," she said. "I think too often Wheaton students do not understand the importance of alumnae/i until after they graduate."

The program, an expansion of some of the faculty-alumnae/i

collaborations that already have been occurring, underscores the association's commitment to widen and deepen its circle of alumnae/i engagement, said Sharon Howard '87, executive director of alumnae/i relations and annual giving.

"It illustrates to students the lifelong connection to the college that is possible and desirable once you graduate, as well as the ongoing relationship you can have with the college through your former teachers," Howard said. "It also provides the students with a resource off campus in a possible area of their own interest."

That's important, said Lentini, whose most recent play, *Roxy Font*, had a five-night run

in New York City last summer. Meehan invited her to talk about the current state of theater, as well as the profession of being a playwright. "Beyond representing the realistic side for Wheaton's current students," said Lentini, "I hope I can offer students some hope that their dreams really can become a reality—with hard work and persistence."

Said Scott Hesser: "I remember that as a student I had a limited understanding of the careers and opportunities that would be available to me... When I had the opportunity to meet an alum and learn their story, I was able to get a real understanding of career or life experiences." 