Remembering past professor
Hans Hage

I wasn’t a columnist for the Student Voice last year, but if I had been, I would have written an column on the ways that deceased professor Ed Peterson affected my life. This column is therefore dedicated to his memory, as well as to all of the people still feeling loss now a year later.

It was one year ago today when I finally heard about the passing of Peterson. The memory is still quite vivid.

I had just gotten home from a relaxing spring break in sunny Florida, and was about to head over to my sister’s house for a birthday party. Before heading out, I figured I should check my e-mail because I had been out of contact for an entire week.

I still remember opening the letter that rocked my world.

Growing up, I had always had an image of the perfect teacher in my mind that somewhat resembled Robin Williams in the Dead Poets Society. I believed that someday, someone would come along and help me figure out what I really wanted to do in life, thereby providing me the inspiration to follow my dreams.

To me, Peterson was that teacher.

I still remember my first lecture with Peterson. He dove right into the lecture material, stating that he wanted us to get the full value out of our education, and therefore would not waste a single minute of time.

I remember being upset that we weren’t going to be let out early, but now I appreciate the extra time we got to spend with him that afternoon.

I also remember leaving class the first day, my hand cramped and in pain from so much writing, absolutely amazed at the life he had lived and the knowledge he had gained.

To make a long story short, I eventually began corresponding with Peterson quite regularly through e-mail. He asked about my life, how things were going with my other classes, what I wanted to do when I graduated, and also offered advice on a broad range of topics from living in the residence halls to knowing when you've found the right girl.
He impressed upon me the importance of following your dreams, even if they seem out of reach. If he could learn German in a bombed-out schoolhouse and then marry a woman whom he met while serving in Germany, anything was possible.

After learning that I aspired to be a writer, he encouraged me to pursue it.

Here I am, a year later, writing about the way he impacted me. I’ve also begun writing the book I had been planning since I was 15.

Although I feel my work lacks eloquence, I’m still out here every week trying my best. Learning doesn’t have a set formula; it is a process that continues throughout an entire lifetime.

In the end, what Peterson taught me is that it doesn’t really matter what the rest of the world is doing, so long as you approach every task with an open mind and leave with a clear conscience. Being a good person can go a long way toward being successful in this world.

Peterson was one of those people you only meet once in a lifetime, and although his life ended abruptly, the legacy he leaves behind stands as a testament to what can be accomplished when you live life to its fullest.

I only hope that when it comes time for me to leave this world, I can look back at my life without any regrets, knowing that I gave it my all.

I think that would make Dr. Peterson happy.