

New school year raises questions for professors and students alike

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It's the unexpected question that excites them. Tulane University professors Ronna Burger and Michael Cunningham agree on this point.



For professors Ronna Burger and Michael Cunningham, each semester presents its own set of surprises. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

As a philosophy professor, [Ronna Burger](#) thinks deeply about the fundamental questions of life. Her lively seminars delve into the traditional great books of Aristotle and Plato.

“Plato and Aristotle are completely relevant today,” says Burger. These Greek philosophers are the roots of the Western tradition. They address matters such as justice and law, or religion and politics, which people have considered for centuries and are still debating.

This semester Burger is teaching a seminar on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. “Students think about the text and form their own questions, which I can't predict. It's why I'm excited about the beginning of the new semester.”

Professor of psychology [Michael Cunningham](#) also says that it's exciting to start the school year because students “come up with new ideas. And they come in with experience doing public service outside of a traditional classroom. They make more interconnections.”

In his seminar on adolescent psychology, Cunningham includes research on the resilience of high school students. He's exploring why some young people are successful in spite of coming from challenging family and neighborhood backgrounds.

A factor involved in the success of these young people is that they have a supportive adult in their lives, Cunningham says. Boys, for example, learn from these supportive adults that a tough-guy persona that works in their neighborhood is counterproductive at school or on a job.

Her own teachers, Burger says, helped her understand how to continue learning from the great thinkers.

“I certainly wouldn't have figured it all out myself,” she says. “I know that. What was passed on to me is what I'm passing on now. The richness of what I'm teaching is inexhaustible. ”