When Dr. John Cox ’67 teaches a course on Shakespeare at Hope, he doesn’t rely solely on what others have written about the English playwright.

Dr. Cox, the DuMez Professor of English at Hope, draws upon his own research that he has conducted over the years. He believes strongly there’s a connection between his study of Shakespeare and his effectiveness in front of the classroom.

“I can be a better teacher because of my scholarship,” said Dr. Cox, who has taught at Hope since 1979. “I can only help students understand what the scholarly conversation is if I know it myself.”

Dr. Cox is one of the nation’s leading authorities on Shakespeare, having written three books and edited two others. “I have not only a national reputation, but an international reputation,” said Dr. William Reynolds, Hope’s dean for arts and the humanities. “He is very visible in faculty meetings. When he speaks, people listen to him with respect.”

Dr. Reynolds considers Dr. Cox a “triple threat” – effectively combining his academic research with his passion for teaching, as well as a gift for encouraging learning across disciplines. As Dr. Cox demonstrated in his 20-year tenure as director of interdisciplinary studies at Hope.

“His greatest strength is his willingness to consider new ideas as he conducts his academic research,” said Dr. Reynolds. “He’s never met a good idea that he didn’t think was worthy of being explored further,” he said.

During his address at the 2008 Opening Convocation, Dr. Cox told incoming students that Hope’s emphasis on education in the context of the historic Christian faith will provide them with a source of hope and confidence.

“It means, for one thing, that though the truth is in pieces, and though human beings can never know it all, or even know any piece of it with absolute certainty; it nonetheless exists entire in God’s view of things,” Dr. Cox said during the address. “Knowing that, we provide them a source of hope and confidence.”

Dr. Cox’s scholarship informs his teaching. Students benefit not only from his insights as one of the world’s preeminent Shakespeare scholars, but from the way that he models active engagement with and enthusiasm for his disciplines.

One of Dr. Cox’s primary areas of study about Shakespeare over the years has been how faith influenced his works, an area that until recently had not been studied much in the academic arena.

In his most recent book, Knowing Shakespeare: Knowledge and Skeptical Faith, published last year as the first book in a series on Christianity and literature by Baylor University Press, Dr. Cox explores Shakespeare’s works in the context of 16th century thought. At that time, such leading thinkers of the day as Thomas More and Erasmus wrote about the weakness of Christians, without casting doubt on the truth of Christianity.

A colleague of Dr. Cox’s, Dr. Debra Shuger at the University of California, Los Angeles, says the book “makes apparent how fully the faith informing Shakespeare’s plays registers the duplicities of false consciousness and the opacity of mortal suffering.”

“I think Shakespeare was much more strongly shaped by his culture’s religious assumptions than other academic models have suggested,” Dr. Cox said.

While Dr. Cox is known in the academic community for his study of Shakespeare, he has certainly not limited his teaching to that topic. He has taught a full range of courses in his nearly 30 years at the college, ranging from freshman composition to Cultural Heritage.

“Students at Hope who are going to major in the humanities have to take a natural science course,” he said. “Meanwhile, students who are going to major in the sciences, even if they’re pre-med, have to take classes in the humanities.”

Dr. Cox joined the Hope faculty as an assistant professor in 1979, after having taught at Westminster (Calif.) College and the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada. He was promoted to associate professor in 1982 and became a full professor in 1989, then was named the first recipient of the DuMez Endowed Professorship in 1996. He says a great deal has changed in the academic environment during his career. For example, he has appreciated seeing greater emphasis placed by the academy on gender equality.

“When I started teaching, feminism was unknown,” said Dr. Cox, who also served as director of interdisciplinary studies at Hope from 1984 to 2004. “There isn’t a young person out there today that is not aware of some of the issues related to feminism.”

Dr. Reynolds believes one of Dr. Cox’s greatest strengths is his willingness to consider new ideas as he conducts his academic research. “He’s never met a good idea that he didn’t think was worthy of being explored further,” he said.

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“It means, for one thing, that though the truth is in pieces, and though human beings can know it all, or even know any piece of it with absolute certainty; it nonetheless exists entire in God’s view of things,” Dr. Cox said during the address. “Knowing that, we undertake the quest for truth with respect and humility.”

Dr. Cox’s scholarship informs his teaching. Students benefit not only from his insights as one of the world’s foremost Shakespeare scholars, but from the way that he models active engagement with and enthusiasm for his disciplines.

“I can be a better teacher because of my scholarship. I can only help (students) understand what the scholarly conversation is if I know it myself.” – Dr. John Cox ’67, the DuMez Professor of English

Dr. John Cox ’67 is respected internationally as a leading authority on William Shakespeare and for connecting faith with scholarship. Reflecting his passion for helping students making connections of their own, he directed the college’s Interdisciplinary Studies program for two decades.

In addition to the role of religious faith, Shakespeare was also influenced greatly by the change in English society from medieval to modern, he said.

“Knowing knowledge — the title comes from Shakespeare’s play AEd’l Vel That End Vel — was written with support from a National Endowment for the Humanities fellowship,” Dr. Cox received during the 2004-05 academic year. It was the third NEH award he has received, with other awards being used to study and write his other two books — Shakespeare and the Dramaturgy of Power (Princeton University Press, 1989) and The Devil and the Sacred in Early English Drama (Cambridge University Press, 2000). His other books, which he co-edited, are the Third Arden Shakespeare Editions of Henry VI, Part II with Dr. Eric Rasmussen (Thomson Learning, 2001) and A New History of Early English Drama (Cambridge University Press, 1997) with Dr. David Kastan.

Dr. Cox has carried his reputation for connecting faith with scholarship into his position as president of the Conference on Christianity and Literature, to which he was recently elected for an unprecedented third two-year term. “He’s stayed on because of his commitment to the organization and to its growth,” Dr. Reynolds said.