

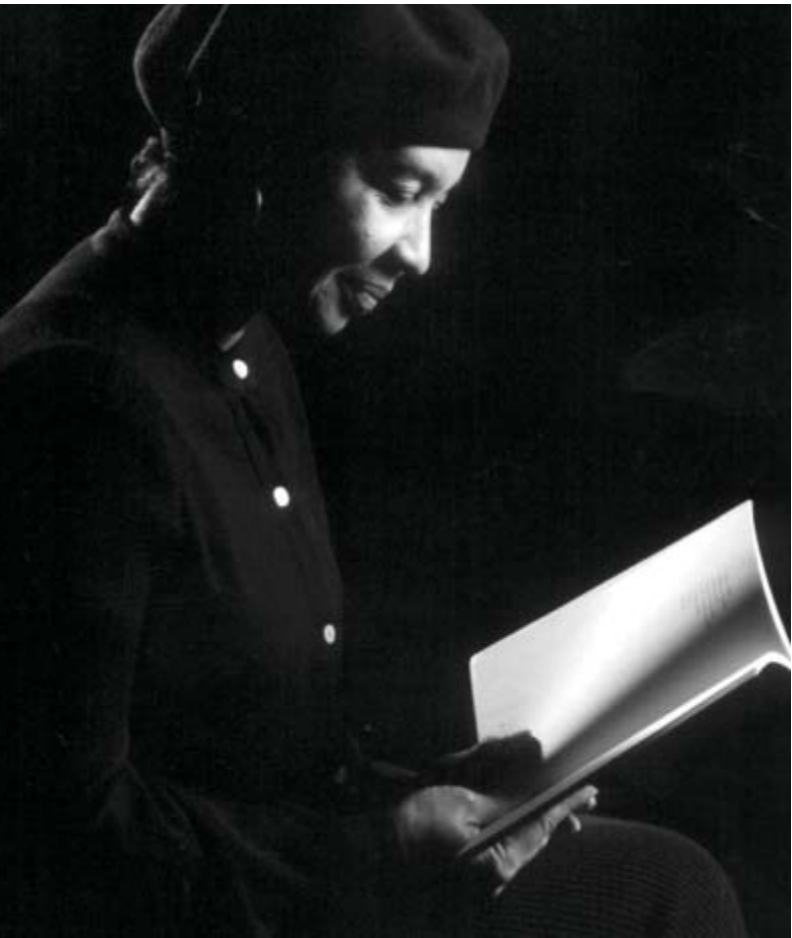
# CLAS Notes

a publication of the WAYNE STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES

www.clas.wayne.edu

WINTER 2006

## New Distinguished Professor Melba Boyd



Distinguished Professor Melba Boyd

Though she is a biographer, a literary critic, a film critic, an editor, and a documentary filmmaker, Dr. Melba Boyd, the chair of the Africana Studies Department, still considers herself, first and foremost, a poet. "It's part of how I see the world," she said. "I see things in terms of symbols and metaphors."

This worldview was reinforced recently when she learned of her being named a Distinguished Professor, one of the university's highest honors for a faculty member. "When I got an e-mail from President Reid last spring," Boyd said, "I was in Paris, and he said he wanted to meet with me. We met around the end of April, when I returned to Detroit." This was when she first found out that the president thought she should be considered for the honor. She tried to hold her elation in check. "My first reaction was, 'Wow!' But I didn't want to get too excited. After that," she continued, "it had to go through the appropriate channels. And then, after a Board of Governors meeting in September, I got a call from the president's secretary confirming the esteemed position. The next evening, the president himself called me."

The coincidences surrounding her notification fit into her worldview. "As a poet, I see everything as connecting in some way," Boyd said. "I was in Paris in the spring, when I was first contacted about the Distinguished Professorship. The same day I found out that the Distinguished Professorship had actually been approved, I got a letter from the Sorbonne"—the University of Paris—"inviting me to a symposium around my work. Things have a way of working out like that." She smiled. "That was a good day."

It was a long time in coming. "I had to leave Detroit in 1982, because I was unemployed," she said, recalling days of less acclaim. She had been invited to be a visiting professor at the University of Iowa, an opportunity she seized in part because Professor Darwin T. Turner was then director of Iowa's African American Studies Program. "He was the major critic of African American literature for generations," she said. Though it was a good move for her career, it was personally challenging. "When I was in Iowa, it was culture shock. I'd traveled a lot by that point, and I learned that Detroit is actually more sophisticated than many places."

She continues: "When I came back to Detroit for the holidays, I explained to friends that racial interaction was very different in Iowa City and at the university. People were very reticent about engaging each other, reticent about the progressive possibilities there are for cultural and intellectual interactions." In Detroit, she said, poets are not segregated. "During the Coleman Young years, there really was a 50/50 policy in administration, and conversely in the arts community."

It was in that Detroit arts community, and the poetry community in particular, where Boyd got her start. "I began my publishing career with Dudley Randall," she said, referring to the legendary founder and publisher of Detroit's Broadside Press, the poet laureate of Detroit for many years, and an acclaimed

poet in his own right. This was in the early 1970s, when he was the first to publish Boyd's poetry. It was this association as Randall's assistant editor that would inform much of her later work, including her recent book *Wrestling with the Muse: Dudley Randall and the Broadside Press*, published by Columbia University Press and the recipient of the 2005 Book Honor in Nonfiction from the Black Caucus of the American Library Association. The book was based, in part, on a documentary film of Randall that she spent over a decade putting together, and which included extensive interviews of Randall himself. The film was released in 1996, and first screened in the theater at the Detroit Institute of Arts.

"It was the reverse of the usual process," Boyd said of her movie and book on Randall. "The book was based on the movie, rather than the movie being based on the book." She went on: "The film is very different from other films that have been done on poets and writers. My doctoral thesis at the University of Michigan was on visual perception and the teaching of English (1979). My interest was in the way in which the two sides of the brain communicate, and how teaching certain films can help students to see more in imagery in literature and language. If audiences read more creative literature and viewed more intellectually challenging films, it would enhance their perception and their imagination. At this point, most Americans are visually illiterate and verbally blind."

*"When I was in Iowa, it was culture shock. I'd traveled a lot by that point, and I learned that Detroit is actually more sophisticated than many places."*

Boyd has published many essays on literature, writing, and pedagogy, along with several on film's treatment of the black experience. "I'm thinking of collecting them in a book," she said. "The most recently published essay was 'The Resolution of Race in the Matrix Trilogy' in *Renaissance Noire*, a journal published by the Department of Africana Studies at New York University." Another essay on black women in science fiction films will soon appear in the book *The Blackness of Space*. She was the guest editor for a special issue of *The Black Scholar* on the anti-affirmative action lawsuits against the University of Michigan. She and Dr. Robert Chrisman, publisher and editor of *The Black Scholar*, are extending that issue with additional essays and a revised introduction for a book project.

On top of all this, she has published six books of poetry—the most recent is *The Province of Literary* continued on page 3

### inside

- 2 Computer Model Predicts Evolution of Human Society
- 3 NSF Career Grant for Computer Science Professor
- 4 Geology Professor Hunts for Precious Resources
- 5 The Physics Open House
- 6 Fairy Tales Fascinate Professor of German
- 7 Influx of New Professors for Political Science
- 8 Study Tackles Cell-phone Usage on the Road
- 9 Philosophy Professor Takes on Public Role
- 10 White House Visit for Physics Professor

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CLAS Notes is published by the Wayne State University  
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences.  
Dean: Robert Thomas  
Writer: Paul Clemens (except where noted)  
Editor: Paul Clemens  
Photographers: MJ Murawka, Rick Bielaczyc, Paul Clemens  
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# Computer Model Predicts Evolution of Human Society

by **LESLIE MERTZ**

"My fun has been working with other people. I have tools, I have models, I have frameworks, and I go out looking for people who have interesting projects," said Robert Reynolds, professor of computer science.

The thread that ties them together is a powerful, predictive model that can adapt to widely varying situations. "That's my little invention," he said. He calls the model a cultural algorithm, because it takes into account the beliefs or knowledge held by individuals and how that can affect the culture as a whole, whether that culture be in business, politics or any other segment of society.



Dr. Robert Reynolds

Reynolds has used the cultural algorithm and adaptations of it to paint a picture of the rise and fall of the Anasazi people (sometimes called puebloan Indians) through 1300 A.D. in the Four Corners region in what is now the southwestern United States. A recent article in *Scientific American* highlights some of that work. He also described how cultural algorithms have helped one of his students, Mike Sternberg at AAA Michigan, produce an easy-to-follow set of "rules" that its claims agents can employ to decide the likelihood that an accident report is fraudulent. In another application with Nestor Rychtychj at Ford Motor Company, Reynolds explained how the algorithm streamlined the enormously complex coordination between such areas as engineering design parameters, compatibility of the 14,000-plus parts between different automobile models, location of each of the parts in the assembly process for individual cars and trucks, and equipment requirements for separate assembly stages. As a result, the Ford system became easier to access and use.

The origin of the cultural algorithm showcases its value and potential application. When Reynolds was a graduate student in computer science at the University of Michigan in the late 1970s, one of his advisors, John Holland, was interested in a model of evolution and learning that he called genetic algorithms, Reynolds said. "In this model, you have a gene pool. Each chromosome in the gene pool corresponds to an individual, and each chromosome specifies information that the individual can use to solve a problem," Reynolds said. The individuals who are the best at solving problems were more likely to reproduce, and their chromosomes became more plentiful over time. He commented, "It is basically a computational version of Darwin's survival of the fittest in a genetic setting."

Reynolds felt that another level of adaptation needed to be added—something was missing, from this and similar population-only models. None considered that individual experiences and beliefs could also be passed down from generation to generation independent of the individual. He recalled, "And so I said, 'Well, that's good, but what about modeling social evolution? How would we do that?'" His answer was what he calls a belief space,

or an area to store symbolically the generalized experiences of individuals and make them available to other members of the population. "In other words, so that social adaptation becomes a two-level learning process: you can learn at the individual level, and you can learn at the cultural level. It's a framework that I call 'vote, inherit, promote.' For individuals who are successful, their votes count highly and their experiences are brought up into the belief space; the belief space inherits their information; and that information can be fed back to promote similar activities among individuals in the population space."

The expanse of applications was apparent to Reynolds, who as a graduate student was already developing a multidisciplinary approach to his academic career. Although he ultimately earned an MS and doctoral degree in computer science, he was originally enrolled in the geography department, but became attracted by the possibilities of evolutionary learning when he took a class from John Holland in the computer science program. It was disbanded before he had completed his thesis. While in the geography program, he worked with archaeologists, including Kent Flannery of the U of M Museum of Anthropology, and helped them map their spatial data. Once Reynolds joined the computer science department, Flannery agreed to be his second graduate advisor. "I worked with Dr. Flannery on the evolution of agriculture in Mexico, and on the origins of the state or how state organizations emerged."

During a presentation on the state-organization project, Reynolds heard another presenter, Timothy Kohler of Washington State University and the Santa Fe Institute, talk about ongoing research surrounding the Anasazi people. Reynolds asked

*"One of the things that I try to do in the models is to make them as open-ended as possible and provide the opportunity for things to emerge."*

whether their social lives might have had an impact on their eventual demise in 1300. "What I got for asking the question was the opportunity to test that out. And that's what we have been doing."

Reynolds, Kohler and George Gummerman, of the School of American Research in Santa Fe and the Santa Fe Institute, published an article describing their work in the July 2005 issue of *Scientific American*. The article, "Simulating Ancient Societies," describes how computer modeling is revealing past life in the American Southwest.

Reynolds' work on the Anasazi produced a number of unforeseen findings. One of the most surprising was that a limited number of cheaters were actually beneficial to the population. The researchers had already found that resource sharing among kin and fair trading among others would increase the overall size of the population, but then asked what would happen if they allowed so-called defectors to take resources but not repay them, or to hoard resources. "It turned out that we ended up

with a population estimate that was more consistent with the archaeological record and, to a point, made the system more stable," Reynolds said. "This was interesting, because there was a time that people thought of Anasazi as the so-called 'happy peoples,' but it appears there was more a sense of stress in their society." The defectors proved advantageous, he said, because they kept the population number in check. Without that element, the continual redistribution of resources would promote the maximum number of individuals that the environment could support. When a widespread drought or other resource depletion happened, the population would have plummeted, he said. "In our model, the defectors did not distribute what they had in surplus, and this made them more resilient during difficult times."

An unanticipated outcome like this is just what Reynolds likes to see from his research. "One of the things that I try to do in the models is to make them as open-ended as possible and provide the opportunity for things to emerge."

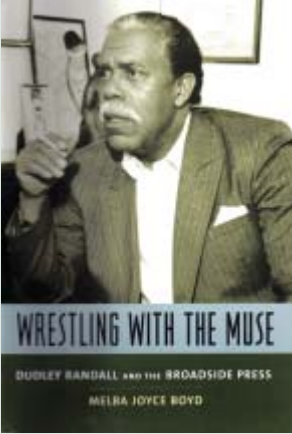
Since he developed the cultural algorithm model almost three decades ago, he and his students have shaped and reshaped it for a variety of uses. Many of his students have worked full time in area industries and often a given model is developed to a certain level by one student and passed on to the next student to extend. An example is a model dealing with the emergence of culture in pre-hominids with Bob Whallon at the University of Michigan. "For that model my first student in the chain was Steve Goodhall, who worked at Compuware at the time and is currently on the supervising board for our department. He did a business-related version of the model. He then passed it on to another student, Howard Scheer, who works at Visteon. He added to

the model," Reynolds said. Current students Dawit Yifter, who is employed at Blue Cross Blue Shield, and Benoosh Zadegan, who works at Ford Motor Company, are continuing the model's evolution. At the same time, student Bin Peng is considering a concept called knowledge swarms, in which people form groups based on shared ideas.

Reynolds remarked, "That's what is interesting about this model. There's nothing to get in the way of tying it to the modern world. In fact, I've begun looking into the homeland defense idea: If there is some sort of disruption – natural or otherwise – how do groups basically re-form? What would be a good, resilient society structure, a sort of 'smart' social material, that would bend but not break?"

What's next for the cultural algorithm? Reynolds is thinking about accepting an invitation to travel to the Amazon to meet with other researchers and investigate the impact of humans on the region. Like so many other applications of the algorithm, he said, "It could be very interesting." ■

Melba Boyd *continued from front page*



*Cats*—with two of her poems achieving a permanence that transcends mere words on the page. One of them, the official poem of the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, is inscribed in the museum, while lines from another, “We Want Our City Back,” are chiseled into a downtown sculpture entitled “Transcending: Michigan’s Tribute to Labor.” She is also an active editor, having coedited the recent collection *Abandon Automobile: Detroit City Poetry 2001* with M.L. Liebler, and serving as the editor of the African American Life Series for the Wayne State University Press.

She is currently doing extensive work as the executor of Dudley Randall’s literary estate. “He identified me as his literary executor back in 1980,” Boyd said, “when he was putting his will together. I was also named his official biographer. The first thing that came

out of this was the film project. As fate would have it, he died before the book came out. I wanted it to come out before [his death].” Randall did, however, read the draft of the biography that Boyd submitted to Columbia University Press.

In her role as literary executor, Boyd installed Randall’s personal library at Wayne State as a special African American Literature collection. “He was also a librarian,” Boyd said, referring to his work as a reference librarian at the University of Detroit’s library, a site that was deemed a National Literary Landmark upon his death in 2000 by the Friends of the Library of Congress. His personal library is extremely wide-ranging, Boyd says, containing many volumes of African American literature and books of poetry in languages from which he translated, including Italian, German and Russian. In conversation with the attorney for the Randall Estate, Susan West, Boyd suggested: “Why don’t we donate the books to Dudley Randall’s alma mater, Wayne State?” There are approximately 2,500 volumes in the collection, which will stand as a fitting monument to both Randall and Boyd, who collectively did so much to shape the arts and poetry scene in Detroit over the last three decades. ■

## NSF Career Grant for Computer Science Professor

Under the auspices of the Computing Research Association’s Distributed Mentor Project, Monica Brockmeyer, Assistant Professor in the Department of Computer Science, mentored Alison Flynn of Bucknell University in a project to improve both the level of realism and the scalability of a simulator of overlay networks and peer-to-peer systems. The Distributed Mentor Project is highly competitive, matching top female undergraduates in computer science with women faculty to encourage the student researchers to consider graduate school. This project is part of an effort to increase the representation of underrepresented students in computer science, and forms a part of the educational component of Dr. Brockmeyer’s 2004 National Science Foundation (NSF) CAREER award, “Monitoring and Assertion-Checking for Internet-Scale Applications.”

The NSF grant was for \$422,000. “I was the first in the department to receive an NSF Career award,” Brockmeyer says with evident pride. “What’s hard about writing the proposal is that it’s really a career plan, and not just a proposal to do x, y, and z.” Brockmeyer’s career is still in its early stages, having begun at Wayne State in 1999. She did both her undergraduate and graduate work at the University of Michigan, and part of the allure of coming to Wayne State—particularly for a young, married professor with two children—was the opportunity it provided to remain in the area while working at a Research I university. She is now in her sixth year as an assistant professor.

The research objective of this CAREER award is the development of an Internet-scale, on-line predicate-evaluation mechanism. “Basically,” Brockmeyer says, “it can be understood as a massively distributed debugger. The underlying challenge of such work is that it’s hard to tell what’s going on in a massively distributed system like the Internet. Parts are always broken, it’s always changing. By the time we figure out what’s going wrong, things have changed. There’s a great deal of imprecision.”

One of the reasons for this, according to Brockmeyer, is that the Internet is not a real-time



Dr. Monica Brockmeyer

system, but it does have some timed behaviors that are not exploited by current approaches. “If you go to a webpage, it either comes up or it doesn’t—it’s not going to take a year.” Her previous research was in the area of formal methods, particularly real-time systems such as control systems for airplanes. Her relatively recent academic interest in the Internet is part of what Brockmeyer calls “a large-scale shift in my research” away from formal methods. “Due to the rapid growth of the Internet,” she says, “monitoring and assessment is essential to next generation applications beyond the web. I felt that these Internet systems were a more compelling area. I like research areas with real world applications, ones that respond to a human need.” This research is expected to provide a fundamental ability to understand the behavior of a distributed system using techniques that are formally correct and practical, suitable for Grid computing, large-scale collabora-

tion systems, and replicated servers.

All NSF Career Grants have to have an educational component in addition to the research objective, and Brockmeyer’s educational goal for the project was to increase the participation among underrepresented students in computer science. Brockmeyer says that women tend to be woefully underrepresented in Computer Science, to the extent that the New York Times recently called Computer Science, “the ‘new’ math.” Brockmeyer continues: “In computer science, the participation of women is actually falling. Despite the fact that the Internet bubble broke, information technology fields will be the fastest growing component of the American economy, and there will be a continued demand for workers in computer science.” The goal is to teach educational success skills through participation in research, through a broad-spectrum introduction to computer science. It is expected that such participation will lead to greater retention and success for the students participating.

Brockmeyer has already had success mentoring female students in the field. Recently, one of her students, Anne-Marie Bosneag, received the Best Paper Award at the Third IEEE International Workshop on Distributed and Mobile Collaborations for a collaborative paper “GRACE: Enabling Collaborations In Wide-Area Distributed Systems.” Bosneag just finished her PhD during Fall 2005. Another student of Brockmeyer’s, Xinjie Li, has had a paper accepted at PODC 2005, a very competitive conference.

In addition to her NSF-related outreach, Brockmeyer is also spearheading the Computer Science department’s relationship with Focus: HOPE, with which it has submitted a grant to the National Science Foundation’s “Broadening Participation in Computing” program. Focus Hope specializes in technical training, and the goal of the proposed program, Brockmeyer says, is “to bring technical training at Focus: HOPE up to the computer science-undergraduate degree level.” If the grant is successful, it will give Brockmeyer another opportunity to increase participation in computer science among underrepresented groups. ■

# Geology Professor Hunts for Precious Resources

“Geology is a hands-on thing,” says Dr. Ed van Hees of the Geology Department, naming some of the places—ore deposits, mines, mills, smelters, and sites of environmental remediation—to which he’s taken his geology classes. His own research—van Hees specializes in finding ore deposits—has taken him to some of the more remote spots on Earth. “I’ve worked throughout northern Quebec, northern Ontario, Manitoba—all over Canada, really, from the Arctic down to Southern Ontario,” van Hees says. He earned his PhD from the University of Michigan in 2000, and is at present an assistant professor. “I knew I wanted to do a PhD,” van Hees says of his return to school in his late 30s. “I wanted a deeper understanding of mineral deposits.”

His field experience studying ore deposits goes back decades, and the list of things he’s helped mining companies search for is extensive: gold, gravel, industrial silica, diamonds, copper, zinc. van Hees worked in industry for 15 years before moving to academia, including a stint as exploration manager for a medium-sized gold mining company in Canada. His specialty was finding gold deposits, some of which occur as quartz veins carrying free gold. Quartz veins form when hot (hydrothermal) fluids come to the surface through cracks in the Earth and deposit silicon dioxide (quartz). When these fluids have a high enough temperature, they can contain hydrogen sulfide that permits the transport of gold in solution. The presence of hydrogen sulfide in fluid inclusions (which are small quantities of the hydrothermal fluid trapped in the quartz) can sometimes lead one to gold deposits. “One of the things I have done is figure out a way to use the geochemistry of the fluid inclusions, as well as the oxygen isotope composition of the quartz itself, to identify gold bearing quartz veins,” van Hees says. The benefit of such a system to commercial mining companies is significant.

Quartz veins can occur throughout the world. “One common setting,” van Hees says, “is in rocks more than 2.6 billion years old that are exposed in the Canadian Shield. These are the basement rocks of the entire continent, the older rocks that underlie literally all of North America. Here in Michigan, we’d have to go down a couple of miles to get to those rocks.” van Hees’s responsibility as an Exploration Manager was to replace the gold that was mined by the company—“I had to replace a couple hundred thousand ounces of gold each year” as van Hees describes the difficult task. That company had six different mines and 1500 employees. Some of the mines were as much as 8000 feet deep. “It can get to be 115° Fahrenheit at the bottom of the deepest mines. They actually installed air conditioning in the mine so that the miners can work.” The contrast is startling when one considers that, back on the surface, it is typically as cold as 40° below zero during a northern Canadian winter.

With his experience as an Exploration Manager, van Hees “thought the time was right for going out and trying to consult on my own.” He started E.H. van Hees Geological Services Inc. in 1986. Such speculative mining work, he says, “attracts people willing to take risks, to think outside the box. It’s comparable to people willing to become venture capitalists—there’s big risks associated, and big rewards.” There was, of course, a downside. “Suddenly, I had no regular income anymore.” There were other concerns and lessons to learn, “such as not having enough working capital, growing too fast, and taking on too many jobs. But I was also living the American dream of owning one’s own company.”

Not that he began with nothing. “I started off with a little bit of work already under my belt,” van Hees says, “and within two weeks I was already overbur-

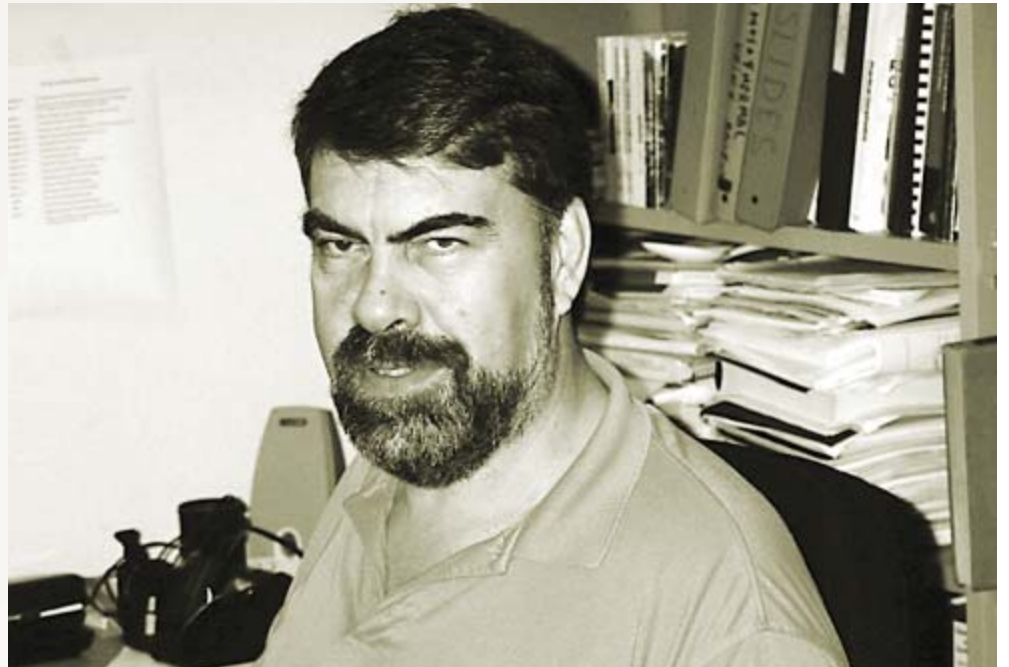
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**“We have seen enrollment in second year geology courses increase by four hundred percent in the past three years.”**

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dened. In North America, there might be ten to fifteen thousand exploration geologists. Most of them are attached to large mining companies”—as van Hees had been—“or work as independent consultants,” as he himself was now beginning to do. “But the economy went south after three years,” van Hees says, “and it was then that I thought the time was right to pursue a PhD in Geology.

Though he retained the company, the next year saw van Hees returning to school, beginning work on his PhD at the University of Michigan in 1990. The decade that lapsed between beginning and completing his PhD was because “there is an awful lot of field work in my research. I was gone for the first four or five months of every year. I also began doing research unrelated to my PhD that eventually became part of my post-doctoral studies.” This research was done on



*Dr. Ed van Hees*

gold deposits in the Arctic near the town of Yellowknife in the Canadian Northwest Territories. “Go to Montana,” van Hees says, jokingly giving directions, “and turn right. It’s due north a thousand miles.”

A more recent interest for van Hees is the mining of diamonds. In September of 2004, he did some work for a consultant and a prospector who had a diamond prospect near Wawa, Ontario, about a two-hour drive north of Sault Sainte Marie, Michigan. The prospector had made his initial find in the simplest way imaginable: he had gone into the Magpie River with a pan and found diamonds, including one that weighed 1.3 carats and was gem quality. He followed up on this discovery and found a bedrock source for diamonds—sedimentary rock in this case, an unusual host for diamonds. “I was asked to do some of the initial petrography, characterizing the nature of the rocks,” van Hees says. When the prospector and the consultant called on mining companies, they proposed that research be done on the prospect. “I ended up meeting the president of Dianor Resources, a diamond exploration company,” van Hees says, and they came to an agreement that now supports one of his graduate students working on the project.

“Canada is becoming one of the major diamond suppliers in the world,” he continues. “It now has three diamond mines that supply about 25% of the world’s diamonds. These mines have been discovered and put into production since 1990. In four years, the first of these mines produced \$7.5 billion worth of diamonds.” The differences between searching for gold and searching for diamonds aren’t so great, van Hees insists. “It’s about finding resources in the ground. The ability to explore for things like gold and diamonds—these technologies are evolving with time. And the mining sector is now starting to adapt techniques from the petroleum industry, like using computers and geographic information systems (GIS) to study data in three-dimensions.”

Given the opportunities available to him outside of the academy, what is it that keeps van Hees at Wayne State? “I like the challenges that come from working in a small department with a small number of students,” he says, adding: “I really want to increase the size of the Geology Department.” He cites his work with Associate Dean Dave Njus to establish the Environmental Sciences Program, a joint undergraduate degree between the Biological Sciences and Geology Departments, as an example of the sort of creative thinking necessary to stimulate student interest in the field. So far, such efforts seem to be working. “We have seen enrollment in second year geology courses increase by four hundred percent in the past three years,” van Hees says, sounding as proud of this fact as if he’d just struck gold. ■

# The Physics Open House

by **JEFF CONN**

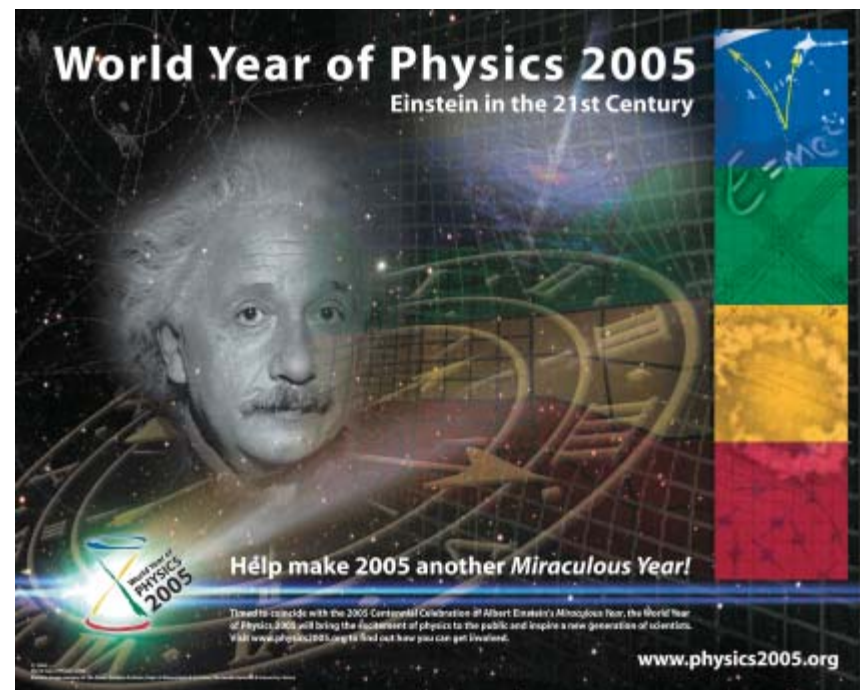
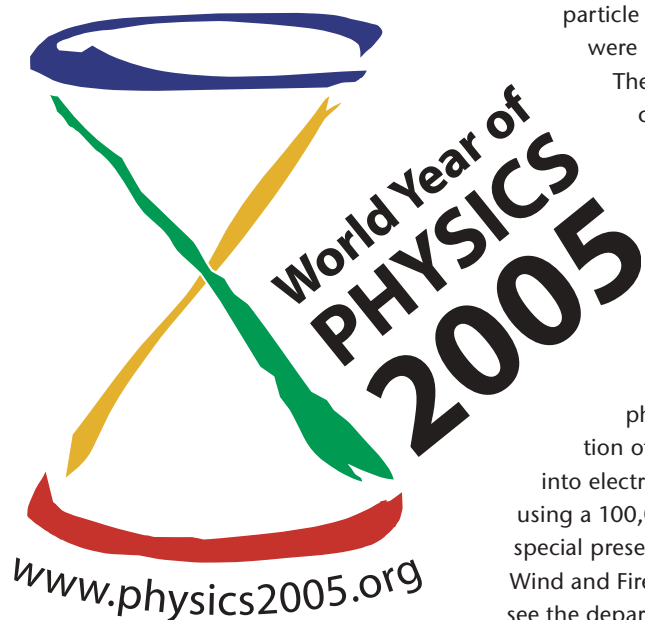
The year 1905 is often referred to as “annus mirabilis,” the miraculous year, by physicists, for it was in that year that the 26 year-old Albert Einstein, while working as a patent clerk in the town of Bern, Switzerland, produced a series of papers describing ideas that have since influenced all of modern physics. Einstein went on, of course, to produce other important cornerstones in physics and became an iconic figure known to people everywhere.

In order to raise public awareness of physics and its importance in our lives, herald the accomplishments of both twentieth and twenty first century physics, and honor Einstein as one of humankind’s most influential citizens, the United Nations and the international scientific community designated 2005 as the World Year of Physics. Around the globe, science museums, school groups, and physics departments have arranged special events to mark the occasion. The Wayne State University Department of Physics and Astronomy decided to present a special Physics Open House as part of this international celebration.

Professor David Cinabro led the team from Physics and Astronomy. Cinabro and a group of his colleagues worked for months to organize the open house and spread the word throughout the community. As a result of their efforts, an impressive array of research projects, demonstrations, and lectures were presented to the public at the Physics Department on October 22. Wayne State officials and students, area high school students, parents with children, and visitors from other universities were among those who toured the department during the open house. Graduate and undergraduate students from Physics & Astronomy, along with dedicated staff, pitched in and played an important role in helping to coordinate the day’s events.

As part of the physics demonstrations, current research efforts in thin films, nanotechnology, superconductivity, atomic physics and particle and nuclear physics were highlighted for visitors.

The latest electronic and computer technology associated with the observatory was also made available. Included among many exciting presentations in ‘gee-whiz’ physics were an explanation of cosmic rays, insights into electricity and magnetism using a 100,000-V Tesla coil, and a special presentation called “Earth, Wind and Fire” where visitors could see the department’s famous fire tornado in action. A planetarium show highlighted Mars and well-known winter



night sky examples of the key stages of stellar evolution, including supernovas and black holes.

An especially important feature of the open house was a series of lectures that specifically focused on branches of physics related to Einstein’s discoveries. Talks on Brownian motion, the photoelectric effect, special relativity,  $E=mc^2$ , and cosmology helped give insights into the remarkable nature of Einstein’s physics.

Among the distinguished visitors enjoying the open house were College of Liberal Arts and Sciences Dean Robert Thomas, Honors Program director Dr. Jerry Herron and Dr. Fred Pearson, director of the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies.

Dr. Pearson said, “I got to learn about interesting things I didn’t know, like the decay of muons and time dilation, and I got to ask my ‘Stephen Hawking questions’—all in a fun and relaxed atmosphere that was very conducive to interdisciplinary relations.”

Norbert Vance, director of the Sherzer Observatory at Eastern Michigan University, traveled from Ann Arbor to attend the open house. He commented that he enjoyed all aspects of the open house and “particularly appreciated the spectacular night sky in the WSU planetarium and the presentation there.”

Professor Ratna Naik, recently appointed chairperson of the Department of Physics and Astronomy, said that “the Open House presented us with an important opportunity to showcase the department and its research and to make interesting and exciting physics accessible to the general public.” She also noted that “the enthusiasm of the visitors was wonderful to see.”

Looking back on the open house, Dr. Cinabro commented, “This open house was different from past open houses in that its focus was on a specific theme. This was a great deal of fun; not only did visitors learn a lot, but we did too. We look forward to doing this sort of open house again.” ■

AN ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT FEATURE OF THE OPEN HOUSE WAS A SERIES OF LECTURES THAT SPECIFICALLY FOCUSED ON BRANCHES OF PHYSICS RELATED TO EINSTEIN’S DISCOVERIES. TALKS ON BROWNIAN MOTION, THE PHOTOELECTRIC EFFECT, SPECIAL RELATIVITY,  $E=MC^2$ , AND COSMOLOGY HELPED GIVE INSIGHTS INTO THE REMARKABLE NATURE OF EINSTEIN’S PHYSICS.

# FAIRY TALES FASCINATE PROFESSOR OF GERMAN

Professor Donald Haase, Chair of the German and Slavic Studies Department for the past sixteen years, dates his academic interest in fairy tales back to 1983. “We were sitting around at a faculty meeting,” he said, “trying to come up with ideas for courses that might be popular, that would draw in large numbers of students.” Because of Haase’s specialization in Romantic literature—his dissertation was on the German writer Novalis, who wrote on fairy tales—Haase floated the idea of his teaching a course on fairy tales. As ideas batted about at faculty meetings go, this turned out to have been a good one.

Haase had come to Wayne State in 1981, and though his decision to teach a course on fairy tales a couple of years later was, he said, “a very practical, curricular move,” it quite quickly became “a career emphasis.” The course—“Understanding the Fairy Tale,” started back in the mid-80s—has closely linked Haase’s teaching with his research. “The one has fed the other,” he said. He acknowledges that not everyone understands the academic allure of what are sometimes perceived as nothing more than children’s stories. “You feel you have to justify teaching and researching fairy tales,” he said, “because it seems unusual. But in fact, it couldn’t be more pertinent. You get to deal with social, cultural and political issues because fairy tales always turn up in the struggle over values. What else would you expect of stories that poet W. H. Auden claimed ranked next to the Bible in importance in Western culture? Are they worth studying? You bet.” He has dealt with such issues in graduate-level courses on similar subjects, including “Fairy Tale Reception,” “Children’s Literature and Culture,” “Grimms’ Fairy Tales,” and “The Reception of Grimms’ Fairy Tales.”

Because of their popularity, fairy tales have taken Haase out of strictly academic surroundings. “I’ve spoken to community groups,” he said, “and fairy tales have led me into storytelling in schools.” He has served as a consultant to the British Broadcasting Company on issues relating to fairy tales and society, and as a consultant to Oregon Public Broadcasting for a project concerning Grimms’ fairy tales. He has also done three summer seminars, supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, with high school teachers. “In 1985 and 1986” he said, “there were bicentennial celebrations of the Brothers Grimm taking place all over the world. That, coupled with an NEH grant, brought it all together for me. I knew I was on to something.” He continued: “There was, at the time, an important reevaluation of fairy tales and their role in society. It was part of the larger coming of age of the fairy tale.” He points to a film like Terry Gilliam’s recent

*The Brothers Grimm* as evidence of the postmodern potential of traditional fairy tales.

Aside from his teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities, Haase also finds time to edit the international journal *Marvels and Tales*. The journal was started in 1986 at the University of Colorado by a French scholar who, Haase said, “had once solicited an article from me.” When the scholar decided to retire, he approached Haase for the job. The journal is now in its twentieth year, and Haase is in his tenth year as editor.

“We’re responsible for the content and scholarly direction of the journal,” Haase said. “It’s peer-reviewed, so we send out submissions we receive to be critically evaluated by other specialists. We get submissions from scholars all over the world.” The “we,” in this case, includes Haase; Seth Knox, who received his PhD from the German and Slavic Studies Department and now teaches full time at Cranbrook; and Professor Anne Duggan of the Romance Languages and Literatures Department, whose book *Salonnières, Furies, and Fairies: The Politics of Gender and Cultural Change in Absolutist France* (University of Delaware Press) also deals with fairy tales. “We define fairy tale broadly,” Haase went on. “It’s hard to come up with a universally satisfying definition. We focus on literary fairy tales, not oral or traditional folk tales, as represented in print, film, theater, and other media such as the popular press and advertising. Fairy tales pervade every realm of our culture, from children’s education to politics. I’ve written an article on William Bennett’s use of fairy tales in his *Book of Virtues*, which is a good example of how fairy tales can be exploited for a political cause. Fairy tales have been appropriated by diverse groups with diverse agendas, from the Nazis to theologians to school teachers to parents to psychoanalysts. You can see what you want, if you remain willfully ignorant of history. We prefer socio-historical pieces that contextualize fairy tales.”

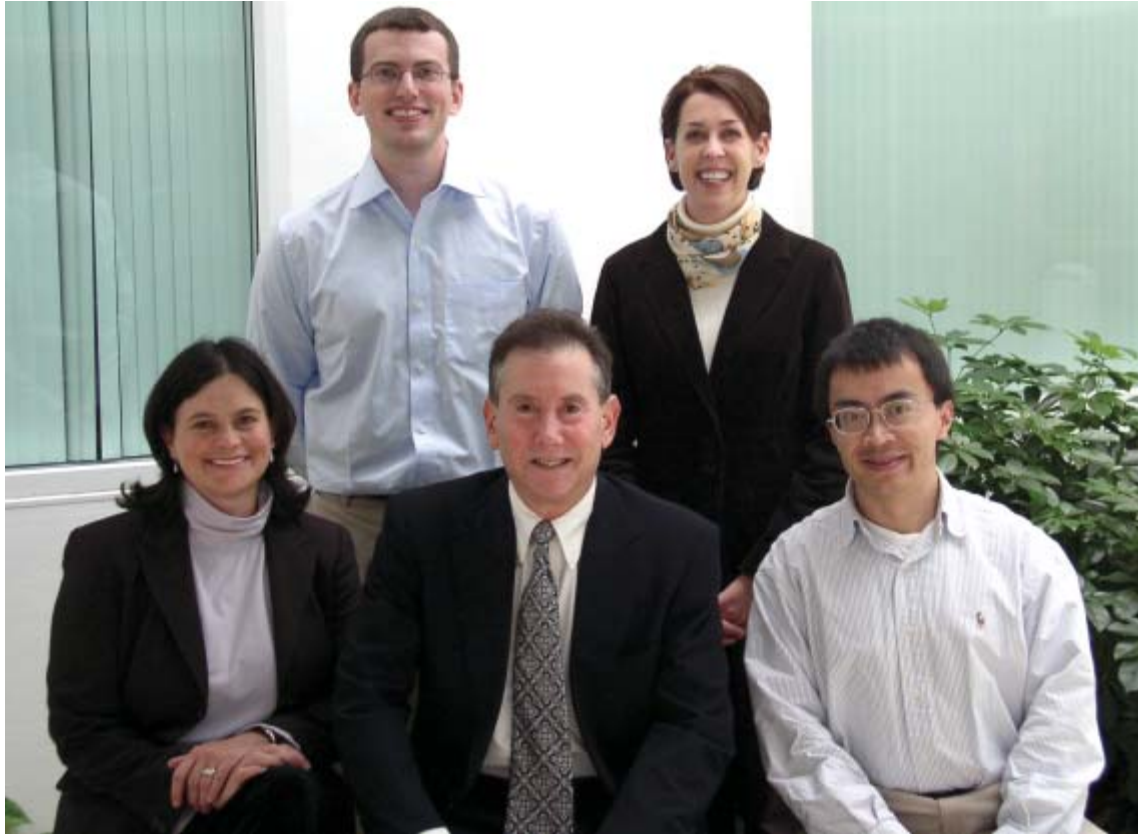
Haase recently edited the volume *Fairy Tales and Feminism: New Approaches*, published last year by Wayne State University Press, and is general editor of the Wayne State University Press’ Series on Fairy-Tale Studies. He is currently editing, for Greenwood Publishing, a three-volume *Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales*, which is scheduled to be published in the summer of 2007 ■

Dr. Donald Haase



# Influx of New Professors for Political Science

by PATTI ABBOTT



(L-R): Drs. Sharon Lean, Timothy Carter, Daniel Geller, Jody Nachtwey, Yumin Sheng,

International Week 2005 was observed by the Department of Political Science with a provocative round-table discussion in which three of its new faculty members, each of them in comparative politics, posed and then answered a critical question relevant to their area of scholarship. The turnout was larger than expected, necessitating a quick room change. The students in attendance asked pertinent questions and later expressed hope that the round table would be repeated. The new faculty expressed similar enthusiasm for the event.

Dr. Sharon Lean, a scholar in Latin America politics, posed the question, "Is Latin America Really Democratic?" Dr. Jodi Nachtwey, a scholar in Middle Eastern and North African politics, asked "What's Going on in Iraq?" Dr. Yumin Sheng, a scholar in Chinese and Asian Politics, wondered, "Why Hasn't China Collapsed Under Globalization?" Dr. Brad Roth (standing in for a fourth new professor, Dr. Timothy Carter) asked, "Does International Law Still Matter?" The forum, organized by Dr. Kevin Deegan-Krause, was, in many ways, the successful culmination of a two-year journey for the department.

In October, 2003 the Department of Political Science submitted a Strategic Initiative Proposal to the university, stating that, if granted enhanced funding, it hoped to broaden the range of its course offerings and its research agenda through the addition of three new professors in the research areas of comparative and international politics. Such an addition would allow the department to increase its national and international visibility and raise its already strong national ranking in professional evaluations.

The additional funding would also permit the department to recruit more international graduate students, and to improve financial support for the department's Dubrovnik Study Abroad program, which takes undergraduate and graduate students, along with faculty, to Croatia each year for a ten-day conference. The department's ability to offer international and comparative courses had been limited in recent years by retirements without replacement in these two areas. Current students expressed interest

in more courses with an international focus, and the department was increasingly admitting international students who were, as one would expect, interested in world politics. The University's Strategic Plan emphasized a "global presence" stating that Wayne State graduates should "possess the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and experiences necessary to meet the challenge of an increasingly interconnected and dynamic global environment." The department's goals were nearly identical with those of the university, and the request for enhancement was granted by the new provost, Nancy Barrett. The proposal had earlier been approved and enthusiastically supported by the Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Robert Thomas.

The department was also conducting a search for a new chair. It was thought that the strong possibility of enhancement would attract established scholars eager to be a part of a growing department. Dr. Daniel Geller, a professor from the University of Mississippi and a scholar in international politics, was selected. After an active year for the new chair and the departmental search committee, four promising assistant professors were hired. The department was now able to offer a comprehensive education in political science for the first time in a decade. As Dr. Geller explains, "The department had been traditionally strong in the areas of American politics, political theory, public policy, urban politics, and public administration. The quality of our faculty in those areas led to the fine national ranking of the department. However, with the addition of four new faculty members in our weakest fields, the department

becomes a first-tier research and teaching asset to the college and university."

Course schedules for the 2005-06 year include many new and revived courses in the fields of comparative and international politics. Dr. Timothy Carter, the department's new professor in international politics, is also a specialist in the areas of game theory and international political economy. His research examines United Nations peacekeeping. An even newer project looks at the diffusion of political processes, including how leadership instability spreads, and how insurgency has spread in the war in Iraq. Dr. Carter says, "I am excited to be part of the new initiative in the political science department. My global politics course this first term is proving to be both interesting and rewarding for myself and, I believe, the students. I look forward to expanding my course offerings and to the interactions with students that will come with these new courses."

Dr. Sharon Lean's research looks at the question of how international democracy assistance has affected democratization in Latin American countries including Venezuela, Haiti, Nicaragua and Peru. Dr. Lean says, "In our increasingly globalized world, it is important for students to have exposure to world politics. The most compelling political problems at home or abroad often demand global solutions. In Latin America, the rise of the new political left, the problem of rising inequality, the question of free trade, and the prospect of increasingly close economic ties with China are all issues we must pay attention to. I'm pleased to offer Wayne State students the opportunity to learn about these issues and proud to be part of this initiative."

Dr. Jodi Nachtwey conducts research in Middle Eastern and North African politics. Her current interests include the role of religion in attitudes toward governance and democracy; views toward political violence; the impact of regional political development on Arab youth; and the role of changing economic patterns on women's behavior. Dr. Nachtwey is currently examining social and cultural factors influencing Arab public attitudes toward terrorism. She says, "With international events in the Middle East becoming increasingly complex and salient to U.S. foreign policy, this initiative provides an excellent opportunity to offer courses that can augment understanding of the region's political landscape. It also feels great to be part of a team of colleagues that provides opportunities for collaboration and a fruitful exchange of ideas across regional and substantive specialties."

Dr. Yumin Sheng's research examines the causes and effects of institutional changes under the growing economic openness in China. He is also collecting data from around the world to determine whether implications of his research on the relationship between market integration and political institutions are more widely applicable. Dr. Sheng says, "So far I have been thrilled by the collegiality and supportiveness of the department and college, and am impressed by the inquisitiveness of my students."

The department is very pleased to be able to offer students an even more comprehensive education in political science than in past years and looks forward to the scholarly contributions of these new faculty members. ■

# Study tackles cell-phone usage *on the road*

by **LESLIE MERTZ**

**P**eople often talk to passengers when they drive, so why is a cell phone any more distracting—or is it? To find the answers, a WSU researcher is leading a large study to evaluate driving performance using complex but telling tests that reveal behavior and brain activity during a cell-phone call.

“Cell phone usage is very common at this time. My purpose is to clarify which part of cell phone conversation would start to interfere with driving, if there is any interference at all,” said Li Hsieh (pronounced SHEE-uh), project leader and assistant professor in the Department of Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology. “After all, we always ask passengers to sit in the front to have conversation, so conversation might not be the problem. The distraction could come from the ring of the phone, or it could be the maneuver to try and retrieve the message or to pick up and dial the phone.” People who keep their cell phones in a purse or under the seat, for example, may have to take their eyes off the road just to find the phone, she said. “That’s why we need more scientific studies that will make consistent measurements and determine which part of this process – this multitasking – may affect driving performance.”

Based on a major, three-year grant from the GM Foundation and a 15-month grant from the Crash Avoidance Metrics Partnership (CAMP) Foundation, a nonprofit group for driving safety, Dr. Hsieh developed a comprehensive study. In it, participants take virtual driving tests in Dr. Hsieh’s behavioral and brain imaging labs at Henry Ford Hospital or the WSU School of Medicine where they simultaneously undergo brain scans. The scans show which higher cortical and attention-related brain regions kick in when a driver is involved in a cell phone conversation. To make sure that the scanner itself is not a distraction, the participants take the same virtual



driving tests, but without being scanned, in Dr. Hsieh’s Speech Language Neuroscience Laboratory.

In the scanning experiments, participants lie back in either a functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) or a magneto-encephalography (MEG) scanner, and look up at a screen. A computer projects a driving scene onto it. The participant has a hand switch, which acts as the phone, and a foot-brake switch. When the phone rings, she pushes the hand switch to answer the hands-free phone and enters a conversation. At the same time, the participant must depress the brake switch when a red light appears on the screen.

After collecting baseline data on driving performance in the absence of conversation, Dr. Hsieh introduced a long or short cell-phone chat into the mix. In the short version, the participants first press the hand switch, and then simply tell the caller they are driving and cannot talk now. Afterward, they press the hand switch again to end the call. Concurrently, each participant must watch the driving scene and depress the foot pedal when the red light glows. For the longer conversation, the

driver responds to questions about birth date, home address and telephone number while on the phone.

Although the study is still under way, Hsieh said the preliminary findings suggest longer conversation may lead to a slightly slower reaction time. Both the fMRI and MEG scanner results indicate that the red light combined with brake depression corresponds to activation of several regions of the brain that are associated with focused attention, stimulus processing, decision responses and motor execution. These include the thalamus, the cerebellum and the large frontal-parietal neural network.

Hsieh is now dividing the phone call into small pieces to examine each part of the call—from the initial ring through the conversation and to the hang-up—and its effect on brain activity. She remarked, “One good part of my study is that we can time-lock those parts and analyze them separately.”

Her early findings helped pave the way to receive a new, three-year grant this year from the Michigan Technology Tri-Corridor to continue her work. “For the next stage of the project, we will add a second *continued on page 9*

**Cell-Phone Study** *continued from page 8*

red light on the periphery," she said, noting that this experimental model is based on previously published work by GM. She also plans to vary the conversation to include more emotional or mentally demanding content to determine how that might affect performance, and to compare the consequences of speaking to oneself and speaking aloud.

In addition, she is working with the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute to examine how her virtual-driving tests are associated with actual, on-road driving results. "We would like to go on-road using a similar behavioral paradigm, but we have to make sure it's safe and it's doable," she said.

The results of this virtual vs. on-road comparison is important to other studies that are based on virtual data, she commented. "If we can get a bit closer to predicting the on-road data, that would be good not only for this study, but also for the many other simulated driving studies that are being conducted."

The applications of these studies are varied, and may include improved driver training programs that make drivers aware of their performance limits. It may also help to develop effective, advanced-crash-warning systems that alert drivers to danger so that they can apply the brakes or control the steering to avoid an accident. ■

# Philosophy Professor takes on Public Role

Though he isn't comfortable with the term, Dr. John Corvino of the Philosophy Department is a public intellectual. Corvino calls it an "awkward term," admitting, however, that "there are people who think of me that way." How, then, would he describe what he does? "I'm someone who tries to bring philosophy to a public audience," he says. When told that this would seem to be the very definition of a public intellectual, he laughs, admitting to the logical lapse.

It's a rare slip for Corvino, whose academic and public careers are based on a commitment to clear argumentation. As an academic, Corvino's main philosophical interest is in ethics—the justification for moral claims. And this interest has led to his public career, one in which he uses philosophical



*"My public talks focus on specific moral claims. I want to bring a certain level of rigor to the public debate... I'm not into crossfire politics, with people talking in soundbites."*

rigor—along with wit, humor, and anecdotes from his own history—to defend the rights of homosexuals, gays and lesbians. "My public talks focus on specific moral claims," he says. "I want to bring a certain level of rigor to the public debate. I want the debate to be reasoned. I'm not into crossfire politics, with people talking in soundbites."

Corvino began delivering his talk "What's Morally Wrong With Homosexuality?" while a graduate student at the University of Texas in 1992. "Someone at Texas A&M saw the tape of the talk," he says, "and said, 'Will you come here?' Then someone at Vassar saw the tape and said, 'Will you come here?'" He has been refining the talk ever since, and has also engaged in numerous debates with opponents of gay marriage at campuses all over the country. A frequent opponent is Glenn Stanton, of Focus On The Family, for whom Corvino expresses the utmost respect. "We both believe in the importance of reasoned, respectful, but spirited public dialogue," Corvino says.

He recently returned from a debate at a conservative campus college that was ranked the least hospitable for "alternative lifestyles." "It actually went really well," Corvino says of the visit. "I prefer going to that kind of campus rather than to a liberal campus. At a liberal campus, I often end up sitting back as the audience beats up on my opponent. At conservative campuses, there is more of an interest in serious dialogue and philosophy, and less interest in turning the debate into a political rally."

Corvino was hired as a philosophy lecturer at Wayne State in 1998, and hired on the tenure track in 2001. He says he never tried to hide his sexual orientation from his future colleagues, joking that "if you put my CV in the copying machine, it'd come out lavender."

"Some of my colleagues worry that public work distracts me from more serious philosophical work," Corvino admits. "My colleagues are so pro-gay that they can't understand why I spend so much time protesting bad arguments [against homosexuality]. They would rather see me work on responding to arguments that aren't astoundingly silly. That said, the arguments are out there, and they need answering." Corvino also continues to work on the moral philosophy of the eighteenth century empiricist David Hume.

It is clear how Corvino's philosophical training influences his public presentations—he takes the arguments against homosexuality, one by one, and proceeds to logically pick them apart. But is the reverse true—does his being a public intellectual influence his philosophy? "It does," he says. "It reminds me that these deep issues we talk about in philosophy have real-world implications, that they have an effect on people's lives. I also think they help me be a better teacher. I experience different audiences during these talks, and bring that experience back to Wayne State. I feel that these campus visits are pedagogical."

Perhaps Corvino's most public moment came earlier this year, when the national gay and lesbian magazine *The Advocate* ran his essay "Kiss and Tell," which Corvino sardonically describes as being about "a run-in I had with a Texas state trooper." After seeing Corvino kiss another man, the trooper began to harass him, saying that "homosexual conduct is against the law." As Corvino wrote elsewhere in the essay, he cited *Lawrence v. Texas*, and "pointed out that Texas state law never banned mere kissing." When the trooper continued to press the point Corvino relented, and was let go. Afterward, Corvino filed a formal complaint, and the trooper was "put on six months probation, was given a formal written reprimand, and will be required to take additional classes on Texas state law." Corvino laughs: "I don't think he realized who he was picking on."

Corvino has plans beyond his current lectures and magazine and newspaper work. "I certainly have been itching for some time to do a trade book on gay issues," he says. "Right now, all I've got worked up is the title—I'm thinking about using the title *The Gay Agenda*." He laughs. "It will be a moral defense of homosexuality, which sounds boring, but I hope it'll be lively in the way my lectures are lively. It will couple academic rigor with personal sensitivity." He's also thinking of collecting, under the title *The Gay Moralist*, the regular columns he writes for the local gay and lesbian paper *Between The Lines*.

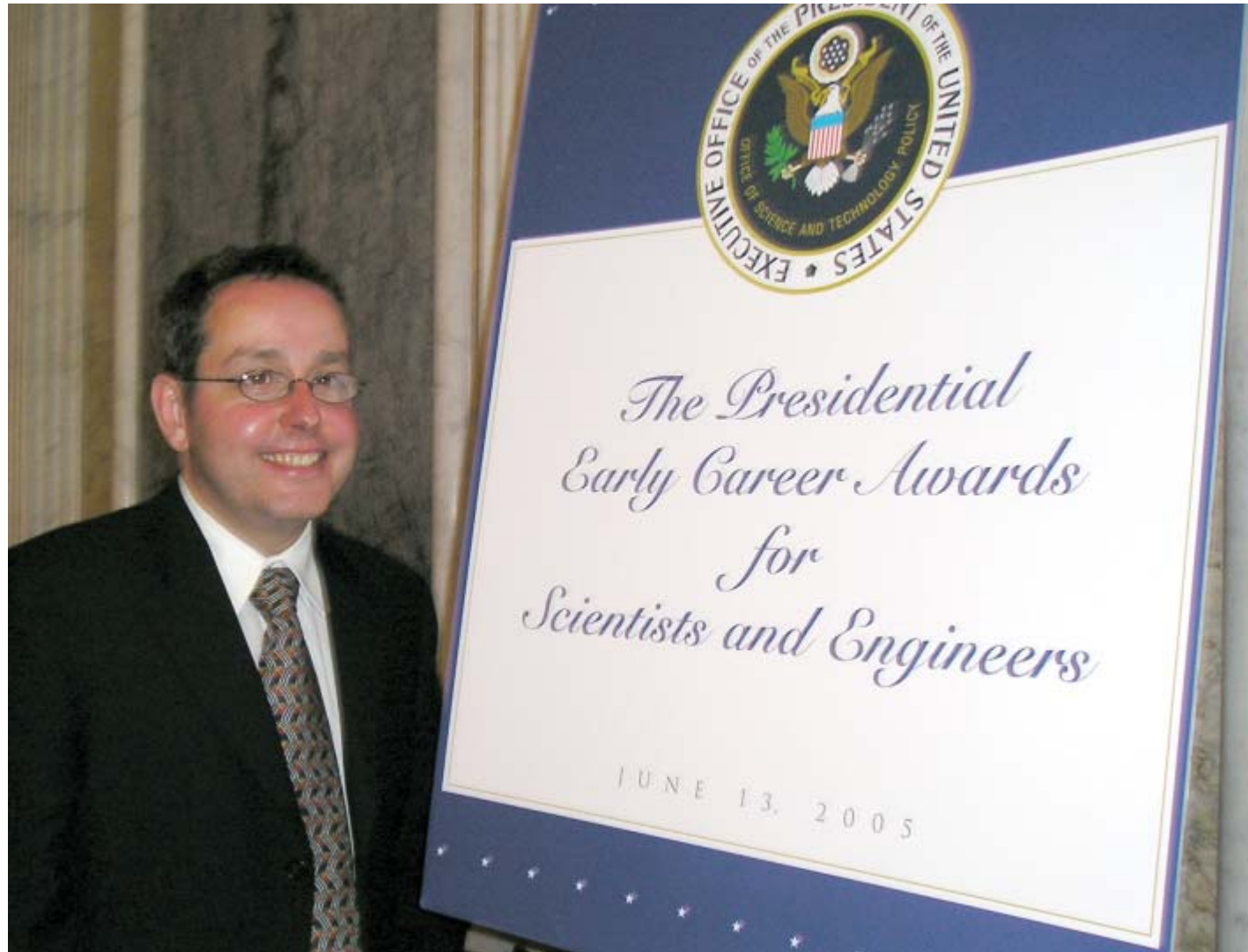
"My reason for doing the work I'm doing—though it does get exhausting—is that, as a gay person who grew up Catholic, with a great deal of guilt, I want to help other people in similar situations," Corvino says. "I want to help prevent people from experiencing unnecessary pain and isolation. The letters I get are often from people who are young, college-age, who say, 'Reading your stuff really made me feel better about things.' That's very gratifying." ■

# White House Visit for Physics Professor

Professor Sean Gavin of the Physics Department describes his June 13th meeting at the U.S. Department of Treasury with President Bush in a few brief words—fitting, given the brevity of the meeting itself. Gavin had been invited to Washington to accept the prestigious Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers (PECASE), an award given out by the president himself. “I shook his hand, said maybe two words, and he kind of winked,” Gavin says. And that was that.

The road leading to that short meeting was a long one, and began during Gavin’s boyhood in New York City. “Neither of my parents graduated high school,” Gavin says. “I hesitate to say that they were high school dropouts, because not a lot of people graduated high school back then.” Gavin calls his a lower-middle class upbringing, which doesn’t mean that the life of the mind wasn’t considered important. “They took me to bookstores,” Gavin says of his parents, and it was in the books they bought him that his imagination was first piqued by scientific ideas. “The first book I picked up was *What Makes Day and Night?*,” he says, laughing a little. He notes that in the 1960s, science had more glamour attached to it for a kid. “This was after Sputnik and just before Apollo,” he says. He was drawn to what he calls the “human drama” of the scientific research he encountered in books on figures like Madame Curie and Albert Einstein. There was, in those early books that so inspired him, a “romance” that attached to what he calls “the detective work and struggle against entrenched authority” that goes into scientific discovery. Science, in short, seemed exciting.

He attended public elementary school in New York, went to high school on Long Island, and completed his undergraduate studies at SUNY-Stony Brook. His MS and PhD were both earned at the University of Illinois. He was awarded tenure and promoted to associate professor at Wayne State last year, and has established himself as one of the world leaders in the theory of quark gluon plasma—the material that made up the universe moments after the Big Bang. He works with four other Wayne State physicists—Drs. Rene Bellwied, Thomas Cormier, Claude Pruneau, and Sergei Voloshin—at the Brookhaven National



Laboratory on Long Island. The others are all experimental physicists, and they wanted a theoretical physicist to join the group. When they hired Gavin in 1998, they got one.

It is at the Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider at Brookhaven that Gavin studies the quark gluon plasma, research that led to a National Science Foundation (NSF) Career Grant in 2003. A major component of that grant—which led, ultimately, to his PECASE award and presidential meeting this past summer—is educational outreach for K-12 teachers. This wasn’t the first time that Gavin had secured NSF funding for scientific outreach. A few years earlier, he was co-principal investigator on a Research Experience for Undergraduates Grant that introduced ten undergraduates per year to research experiments in physics. Many of these students came from groups underrepresented in the sciences.

It was his working-class upbringing, Gavin says, that made him want to reach out “to similarly disadvantaged children in urban Detroit.” Through his current NSF grant, Gavin will be working with the WSU College of Education to develop a masters level course—tentatively entitled “The Scientific Method (In The Real World)” —that will “take a number of real-world scientific problems and work them into case-studies which [education] students will read and debate in class.” The idea, Gavin says, “will not be to teach them scientific concepts, but to teach people how the scientific method works.” It’s a course, Gavin says, designed for “science teachers who don’t like science.” He hopes that creating an interest in science in future teachers will translate, down the road, into an increased scientific interest in the students they instruct.

Gavin sees his work as being in the long-term best interest not just of the students and teachers involved, but of the Physics Department itself. “It’s something we have to keep on top of,” he says of the department’s declining enrollments. “If you have no students, they’ll find some way to close you down. And it’s not just the numbers that are down, but the quality of student we’re getting is down as well. It’s something that bothers all of us.” Through the outreach made possible by his NSF grant, Gavin is trying to head the problem off at the pass. “By the time students get to high school,” he says, “it’s too late. How do you get scientific ideas to elementary school kids? You teach their teachers better.” ■

**“By the time students get to high school, it’s too late. How do you get scientific ideas to elementary school kids? You teach their teachers better.”**

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