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Macalester College

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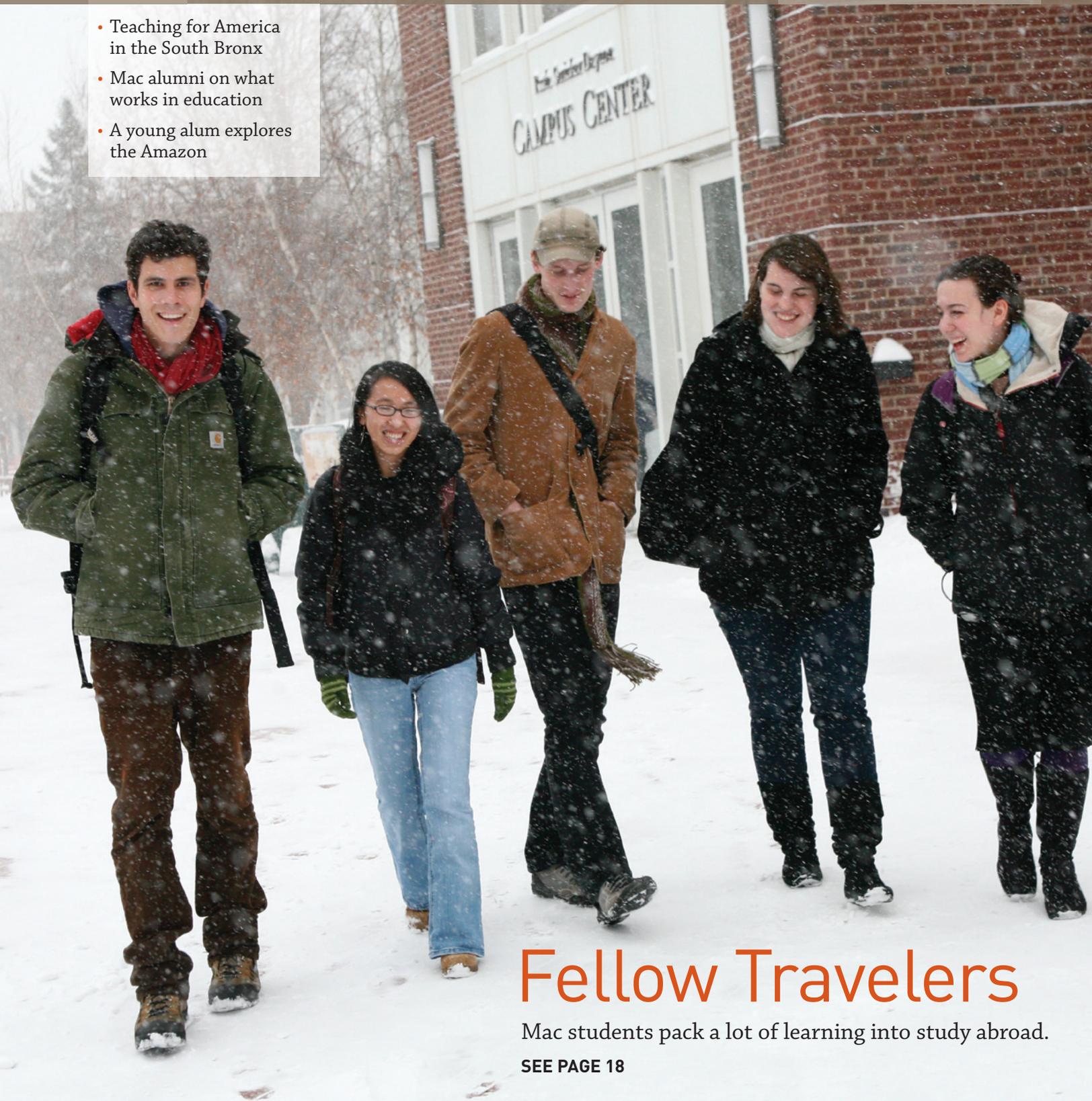
Macalester

Today

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- Mac alumni on what works in education
- A young alum explores the Amazon

SPRING 2009



Fellow Travelers

Mac students pack a lot of learning into study abroad.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: To help Macalester reduce expenses and balance its budget, we will publish only three issues of *Macalester Today* in 2009–2010. Look for the Summer/Fall edition in your mailbox in September.





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Step Forward Campaign

The following remarks were delivered at a recent Step Forward event in San Francisco by alumnus Beth Neitzel '03.

I ENTERED MACALESTER as a transfer student my sophomore year, easily one of the best decisions of my life. A decision, I might add, that would not have been possible without a great deal of financial support from the college. After graduating from Macalester, I spent a year in Colombia on a Fulbright Fellowship and ultimately decided to pursue a PhD in political science. I am now a third-year PhD student at the University of California–Berkeley, focusing on judicial politics in Latin America. My Macalester experience not only helped me achieve what I have thus far, it will always be part of everything I do.

Several years after graduation, I realized that studying at Macalester had profoundly changed my direction in life. Not just because it changed my view of the world (although my classes and many international friends did that), not just because it made me hope

to make a difference in the world (though there's no question that aspiration was fueled), not even because it prepared me so well for the academic life I'm now leading. Rather, the greatest impact Macalester had on me was in how it shaped how I viewed myself.

In other words, attending Macalester made me believe I could do whatever I wanted and could actually make a difference.

This belief came from a handful of role models who saw greater potential in me than I saw in myself. People like Dean of Students Laurie Hamre, who asked me to take a leadership role in the community; people like Dean of Academic Programs Ellen Guyer, who encouraged me to apply for the Fulbright—an experience that influenced me greatly; and people like political science chair David Blaney, who

called me into his office one day to ask why I wasn't writing a senior honors thesis, and who later suggested I might consider a future in academia. And of course, this belief came too from the amazing friends I made at Macalester, who similarly pushed and supported me and continue to do so today.

Macalester's greatest asset—its core—is its community of extraordinary people like these. These are the people who inspire those around them by example, and give them words of encouragement and direction. It was not only my passion for political science that attracted me to a career as a college professor, it was also my hope that I could one day inspire students as these amazing people had

inspired me. Because of them, Macalester students enter the world both yearning to make a difference and *knowing* that they can. ■



Beth Neitzel '03



STEP FORWARD

THE CAMPAIGN FOR MACALESTER

Step Forward Objectives

Progress Toward Goals, March 20, 2009

	GOAL	STATUS
Scholarships and Student Support	\$42.5 million	\$28.1 million
Endowed Chairs & Faculty Support	\$29.5 million	\$11.7 million
Janet Wallace Fine Arts	\$26 million	\$5.8 million
Leonard Center	\$26 million	\$26 million
Institute for Global Citizenship Building	\$7.5 million	\$7.6 million
Annual Fund	\$18.5 million	\$10.7 million
Unrestricted/Unallocated		\$15.4 million
Total	\$150 million	\$105.3 million



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A Pause for Student Appreciation

“Even as we work diligently to safeguard the college’s financial future, we need to remind ourselves why that future is worth preserving.”

BY | BRIAN ROSENBERG

ONE OF THE MORE insidious effects of crises is their power to attenuate our appreciation of many things that remain good and important. Certainly this is true of the current economic crisis, which has, for compelling reasons, left colleges and universities chiefly focused on their financial stability and made it more difficult to devote appropriate attention to the wondrous accomplishments of our students. I want to make sure this does not happen at Macalester. Even as we work diligently to safeguard the college’s financial future, we need to remind ourselves *why* that future is worth preserving by applauding the fruits of the education we provide.

So let us take a momentary pause from the grinding work of balancing budgets to commend the efforts of Macalester students.

We should applaud the work of the students who have participated in the Projects for Peace program, funded through the generosity of Kathryn Wasserman Davis. Among these is **Dara Hoppe '10**, who during the summer of 2007 traveled to the Brazilian Amazon, where she encouraged sustainable economic development and independence by training women in handicrafts production and distribution. **Zainab Mansaray '09** and **Arthur Sillah '10**, both from Sierra Leone, traveled home last summer to rehabilitate a primary school destroyed in the recent war and implement youth community service projects on

malaria prevention, HIV/AIDS awareness, and environmental sustainability.

We should honor the achievements of student scholars such as **Michael Waul '09**, who will use his Rhodes Scholarship to pursue a two-year degree in medicinal chemistry at Oxford University; **Chris Ramon '08**, who is using his Fulbright Scholarship to explore immigration law and workers’ rights in Spain; and **Hector Pascual Alvarez '08**, who is using his Watson Fellowship to study the role of community-based theater in Latin America, South Africa, and the United Kingdom.



We should appreciate the dedication of Lilly Fellows such as **Emily Cohen '09**, **Hannah Pallmeyer '09**, and **Hannah Emple '10**. Cohen worked with the St. Paul Area Council of Churches on interfaith engagement among Muslims, Christians, and Jews; Pallmeyer worked at the International Institute of Minnesota on refugee settlement and support; and Emple worked with Minnesota International Health Volunteers on issues relating to breast cancer among Somali women.

Jenna Machado '12 started a suicide prevention nonprofit in Colorado with the goal of preventing teen suicide by sending trained peer-mentors into the school system. She plans to create a similar program in St. Paul (see article on page 5).

Phillips Scholarships are awarded to students who strive to improve life in Minnesota communities; **Elizabeth McCreary '09** used her scholarship to develop artistic and educational activities for homeless children. McCreary’s work has also been recognized by the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Partnership Foundation.

The efforts among Macalester students to develop a higher level of environmental awareness and responsibility are almost too numerous to count. **Timothy Den Herder-Thomas '09** developed Summer of Solutions, a program for students from around the country created and run by students at Macalester. For two months last summer, these students gathered on our campus to learn how to foster our transformation to a more sustainable society, and during the coming summer the program will expand to include up to 10 additional cities. MacCARES, our student environmental organization, has worked with Facilities Services staff and others to change how we live on campus, saving us money in the process.

I could expand this list to fill an entire issue of *Macalester Today*. Students at Macalester in every year, from every field of study, and with a wide range of interests and priorities are combining their dedication to learning with a passion for improving life on campus, in our local community, and beyond. They have the skills and motivation to take up the many challenges we currently face. They are the reasons we must, in the near term, overcome those challenges and ensure that the critically important work of education, at Macalester and throughout the world, moves forward. ■

BRIAN ROSENBERG, the president of Macalester, writes a regular column for *Macalester Today*. He can be reached at rosenbergb@macalester.edu.

Summit to St. Clair

CAMPUS NEWS SUMMARY



Card Sharp

Before he was 20, junior **Haider Malik** had played in three World Junior Bridge Championships. The Pakistan native's team has played in Thailand, Australia, and China, where last fall they placed a somewhat disappointing 13th. They might have made a better showing, but practices are difficult to schedule when one teammate lives in Minnesota and the others are in Connecticut and Pakistan.

The four began playing bridge in high school to pass the time between classes. As they improved they started to play in clubs, and before long they were off to play in the "under 20" category at the World Junior Team Championships. "When we started, no one else under 25 played bridge," Malik points out, "so there wasn't much competition."

Traveling to international tournaments is expensive, but the team has been fortunate to have sponsors. For the Beijing competition, Malik's team was sponsored by the World Bridge Federation and World Mind Sports; the Pakistani government picked up the entry fees.

The current student preference for video games means that Malik has few friends on campus with whom to practice, though he still manages to play bridge six or seven hours a week, mostly on weekends. When they can coordinate their schedules, the four teammates play online, and they played regularly last summer while home on vacation.

"Once you play bridge you get hooked," says Malik. "It's a lot of fun if you're into math, probability, and calculating." Malik, a mathematics and economics major, has the perfect mind for the game. His heavy-duty fall schedule included macroeconomics, differential equations, and probability.

What does it take to be a contender in bridge? According to Malik, "You have to practice a lot, read books on bridge, have an experienced teacher, study expert players as they play, and be really, really committed."

PHOTO: DARIN BACK

Volunteer Wunderkind

When her 20-year-old cousin Colie committed suicide five years ago, **Jenna Machado '12** was devastated. But instead of retreating inward in her grief, she asked herself what she could do to prevent such tragedies in the future.

Her answer was to form a suicide prevention and education nonprofit called Colie's Closet in her hometown of Boulder, Colorado. Although the original goal was to raise money through used clothing sales to help teens afford therapy, the nonprofit has since grown beyond those parameters. "I learned that many people have misconceptions about suicide," says Machado. "Many kids, especially, believe it is weak to ask for help, or that if someone talks about suicide they'll never do it. In both cases the opposite is actually true."

Colie's Closet trains peer educators to go into middle and high school classrooms and discuss the prevalence and warning signs of suicide, as well as to educate students about what to do or not do when they think a friend is suicidal.

The group has already trained hundreds of kids in the Boulder area,



and now, while others continue to run the Boulder operation, Machado hopes to start a new branch in St. Paul. The nonprofit is supported by clothing sales as well as by sales of blue "Hold On" bracelets that advertise the group's Web site and a local suicide prevention hotline.

Machado's efforts have not gone unnoticed. She was one of 10 middle and high school students nationwide chosen for a 2008 Prudential Spirit of Community Award and also caught the attention of *Parade* magazine, which featured her Colie's Closet work in a December issue.

Machado, who hopes to double major in psychology and sociology, also keeps busy as a midfielder on the women's soccer team. But suicide prevention remains her passion. "The more it's talked about, the more it can be prevented," says Machado. "Every bit of help we can provide makes a huge difference."

 **WEB CONNECT:** www.coliescloset.org

About Face



SOCIAL NETWORKING GROUPS make it easier than ever to meet like-minded people—at least electronically. No matter what your passion or your beef, someone shares it, and it's easy to find out who. A perusal of the Macalester network on Facebook revealed this sampling of groups and the number of their members:

- Mmm...MEAT (123)**
- Awkward Is the New Cool (122)**
- Smile at Strangers on Campus (109)**
- Macalester Campus Climate Challenge (76)**
- Gay Marriage Killed the Dinosaurs (69)**
- I Love My Bed (62)**
- Association of Mad Scientists (61)**
- Veggie Love (59)**
- Death by Organic Chemistry (38)**
- MacSalsa (37)**
- Mac Run N Fun (26)**
- I Support the Senior Class Gift (23)**
- Peace. Love. Doty 2 (17)**
- Pad Thai Fanatics (15)**
- I Have Trouble Growing Facial Hair (10)**
- No, I'm Not Pre-med (10)**
- I Saw Kofi (8)**

Fortunately, there are only two members of "Facebook is Ruining My GPA!"

 **WEB CONNECT:** Become a fan of Macalester on Facebook.

Summit to St. Clair

CAMPUS NEWS SUMMARY

Diving Refugee

Annie Flanagan (Madison, Wisconsin) had just finished a pre-orientation week of biking the French Quarter, sampling local restaurants, and visiting Preservation Hall in New Orleans, her chosen college town. Orientation was to begin at Tulane University that Saturday, but instead of offering the customary welcome, the university's president evacuated the campus because of Hurricane Katrina's approach.

New Orleans was evacuated the next day, and on Monday Katrina hit. On Thursday Flanagan flew home to Wisconsin, and by that weekend she was joining orientation—at Macalester. When hurricane damage closed Tulane, students were temporarily accepted at schools across the country. Flanagan chose Macalester, in part because of her father's enthusiasm for the college (and no, he's not an alumnus). "Macalester was great," says Flanagan. "I called them up and that afternoon they enrolled me in classes."

Although Flanagan enjoyed Mac, she had intended to return to Tulane until they disbanded their women's swimming and diving team. A competitive gymnast in high school, she'd turned to diving in college as a less physically damaging sport. "In both sports you have to have an acute sense of where you are in the air," she says.

There was a problem, however: She wasn't allowed to

compete for Macalester because she wasn't technically a Mac student. Macalester, along with other receiving colleges, had agreed not to keep their temporary transfer students from Tulane, lest the New Orleans school lose its Class of 2009.

Then a whirlwind of circumstances brought Flanagan to Mac for good. A special appeal, based on Tulane's lack of a women's swimming and diving team, was successful. Flanagan quickly bonded with the Mac team and its coach

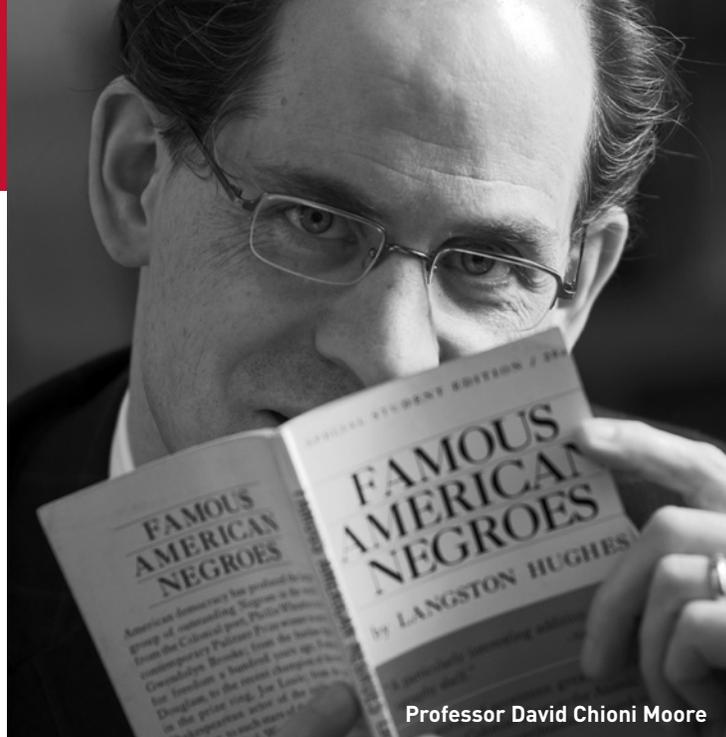
and decided to remain at

Macalester, but not without some regret that she couldn't help rebuild New Orleans.

Although international studies major Flanagan insists that her experience

was nothing compared to that of others in the Big Easy, it had its complications. As a late and supposedly temporary arrival, she was not issued a student post office box, nor was she assigned an adviser or enrolled in a first-year course. Because the latter is required, administrators had to make special arrangements for her to graduate this spring.

All that effort was worth it, though, not least because Flanagan has been a huge asset to the Mac swimming and diving team. She has twice taken second at the MIAC Championships, and in January set school records in the 1- and 3-meter diving events. She also qualified for the NCAA 2009 Division III National Championships, which was hosted by Macalester at the University of Minnesota in March.



Professor David Chioni Moore

Book Return

WAS IT SERENDIPITY or fate that brought a little-known book by Langston Hughes from one Macalester professor to another 45 years later through the Internet?

The Hughes book is *Famous American Negroes*, a students' special edition that originally sold for 20 cents. When Professor David Chioni Moore purchased it recently through AbeBooks.com, it cost him quite a bit more than that. Moore, an English professor and chair of International Studies, first read Hughes as a seventh grader. Later, as a professor, his interest was reignited by the writer's vast global footprint.

When he opened the book, he found it was signed: "Inscribed to Dorothy Dodge with the regard of Langston Hughes. Lagos, Nigeria. July 5, 1962."

Dorothy Dodge, who died in 2003, was then a political science professor at Macalester. Moore and Dodge's tenures at Mac overlapped briefly, though Moore doesn't remember ever speaking with her. Although he had been searching for a signed Hughes book, he didn't know about the Mac tie until he opened the cover.

Dodge, it turns out, was in Africa researching her 1966 book *African Politics in Perspective*. Hughes was a State Department envoy in Africa; writers in that continent's newly independent nations lauded him as a major cultural figure. The discovered connection with Dodge delighted Moore. "I was tremendously happy," Moore says, "in part to imagine what that meeting was like."

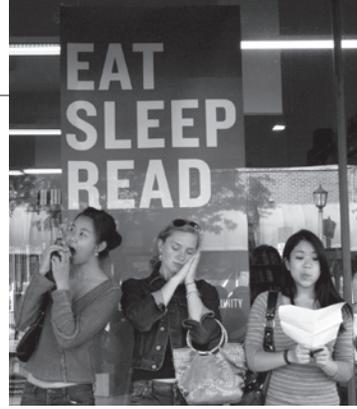
As for Hughes having written a kind of textbook, Moore—who teaches a popular class about the writer—says that Hughes wrote in every genre. "He's best known for his poetry, but he also wrote two memoirs, many children's books, two novels, two collections of short stories, and 66 plays, which were performed in his lifetime." Born in Joplin, Missouri, in 1902, the African American writer was integral to the Harlem Renaissance.

Meanwhile, Dodge's connection to present-day Macalester is affirmed by a (once) 20-cent book, which now resides companionably in Moore's library, a wandering symbol of a shared intellectual curiosity.



Invisible Handshake II

This 6,212-pound stone sculpture by sculptor and mathematician **Helaman Ferguson** was installed outside Olin-Rice Science Center in February 2008. Made from an 11-ton block of Academy Black granite—which is actually not granite but quartz diorite—the sculpture was inspired by *Invisible Handshake I*, created for a 1999 Colorado snow sculpture competition by a team consisting of Ferguson, professors **Stan Wagon** and **Dan Schwalbe** of the Mathematics Department, and **Tamas Nemeth '99**. The title refers to a shape between two hands that come together to grasp each other in a traditional handshake, but stop just short of touching, and is related to the physics of soap bubbles. Its red color comes from a dye made from a Mexican insect that feeds on red cactus berries. The sculpture was the gift of anonymous donors. To learn more about the mathematics behind the sculpture, go to stanwagon.com/wagon/Misc/invisiblehandshake.html



Culture Crossing

AMERICA plus the metric system equals...America? Although the United States may not yet be switching from feet to meters,

minor cultural differences such as this can reflect larger divisions between Macalester students. Acknowledging this pressing issue, members of the International Student Program (ISP) created Ametrica as a way to cultivate stronger relationships between international and domestic students.

Ametrica arose from a series of brainstorming sessions held last summer by ISP Coordinator Aaron Colhapp and students involved with the ISP. The group discussed the lack of participation by domestic students in the ISP and came up with events aimed at getting them more interested. "Though domestic students have always been invited to our trips and programs, it seems apparent that they don't realize this or they feel insecure about being a minority population at the functions," says Colhapp.

Taking these sentiments into account, the group sought an appealing label that would entice domestic students to attend events and thus break down barriers that prevent interaction between them and international students.

"We began listing and reflecting on similarities, differences, and adjustment concepts the ISP hears about annually," says Colhapp. "As we were playing with conversions, I said something like, 'This is one clear difference between the internationals and domestics. I wish we could find some name to bring everyone together through the metric system.'" And so Ametrica was born.

The organization kicked off the school year with a barbecue at the International Center and a photo contest in which teams were made up of both domestic and international students. Future group outings are planned to the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Orchestra Hall, and the St. Paul Art Crawl.

— Excerpted with permission from the Mac Weekly

Security Blankets

When first-year students pack their bags for Mac, just as important as computers are those special items reminiscent of home. With everyone now settled into their second semester, first-year student **Taylor Tinkham** [Minneapolis] used Facebook to ask her classmates what special items they'd tucked into their suitcases last fall. (Note: There was only one actual blanket.)

Alexandra McLennan [Altadena, California]: A mask I got in Hawaii and a mirror painted with gold peace signs from Venice Beach

Michael Manansala [Rochester, Minnesota]: Sheet music of songs I played in the high school orchestra

Jessica Baier [Seeley Lake, Montana]: Pictures of friends, and shirts and hoodies from high school

Nate Smith [Madison, Wisconsin]: A plaque of my high school football team

Natalie Pavlatos [Superior, Wisconsin]: A blanket my grandma made for me

Jack Wickham [Ridgefield, Connecticut]: A mask my sister bought me in Africa

Karl Reichter [Duluth, Minnesota]: The Dr. Seuss book *Oh, the Places You'll Go!* signed by my classmates and family friends

Robert Williams [West Covina, California]: A California Interscholastic Federation championship ring

Danielle Dweck [Sea Cliff, New York]: Pictures of my friends, dogs, and family

John Carvalho [Flossmoor, Illinois]: A hoodie that matches one that a good friend got in London last year

Lorin Leake [Whites Creek, Tennessee]: A scrapbook my best friend made me of all my friends at home

Summit to St. Clair

CAMPUS NEWS SUMMARY

MUSIC MAN



When **Eugene Rogers** was studying vocal performance at the University of Illinois, he won a conducting competition judged by longtime Macalester professor and choral music icon Dale Warland. At that point, realizing he had a gift for conducting, Rogers switched his major, eventually earning a doctor of musical arts degree from the University of Michigan.

As he began to interview for faculty positions, it was that Dale Warland connection that first piqued Rogers's interest in Macalester. But when he boned up on the college for his interview, he says, "I knew that here I would be working with brilliant students and challenged by my colleagues." The college's long-standing commitment to multiculturalism and diversity was also perfect for Rogers, who'd been named "Most Influential Educator" for founding and directing a multicultural high school chorus in suburban Chicago in the '90s. And when he walked across campus last spring, says Rogers, "I fell in love with the place."

As Mac's new director of choral activities, Rogers conducts the Macalester Concert Choir, the Singing Scotsmen (men), and the Hildegard Singers (women), many of the members of which are neither music majors nor minors. Rogers has been guest conductor and lecturer at festivals as far away as Singapore, Portugal, and Italy. He serves as bass section leader of the St. Paul Chamber Orchestra Chorale, conducted by none other than Warland. And he's just getting warmed up.

"I was put on this earth to teach young people and to make music," says Rogers. Coming from a passionate artist and a man of faith, this is no sound bite. Rogers grew up singing gospel with his church choir but didn't learn to read music until ninth grade when he took up the piano and began teaching and conducting.

He puts those conducting chops to the test this spring with two major performances: the inaugural "Songs of the Earth" concert, an eclectic mass featuring music from Uganda, Tanzania, Ghana, Egypt, and the American gospel tradition, and the War and Peace concert, featuring Mozart's *Requiem* and *A Procession Winding Around Me* by Jeffrey Van '63

The latter unites the various student choirs with the Macalester Festival Chorale, a 35-voice group of faculty, staff, and alumni singers that Rogers brought back as an annual opportunity for adult vocalists to connect with Macalester. "Songs of the Earth," which brought together the college's Concert Choir and African Music Ensemble, kicked off rehearsals with a three-day retreat about the history and culture of the works. As his friends have observed to Rogers, "You don't do anything simple."

This ambitious first year at Mac might give the wrong impression of Rogers, a warm and unpretentious man who loves fiction and biography, walking along the Mississippi, and all kinds of music. (The last three CDs he bought were folk and rock, contemporary gospel, and hip-hop.)

Rogers's hope for the choral department is that people know "whatever your background, there's a place here for you." And his top non-musical goal? "To try every highly recommended ethnic restaurant in the Twin Cities!"

PHOTO: MYRA KLARMAN

TRIPLE THREAT

MAJRA MUCIC makes everything look easy. This sophomore from St. Louis Park, Minnesota, has lived in the United States for less than a decade, but speaks accent-free English. She arrived at an appointment with this reporter immediately after passing her U.S. citizenship test but merely noted, "It went well." And she competes in three Division III sports but of juggling her schedule says only, "It's not a big problem."

As far as Mucic and Mac administrators know, she is the only student in the MIAC who competes in three separate sports: volleyball, basketball, and track and field. All three seasons overlap, but as Mucic calmly puts it, "It's not too bad because all the basketball plays were the same as last year and I'm still in shape...plus track is an individual sport."

Recruited first for basketball, Mucic told Macalester's coach she was looking for a school where she could play volleyball as well. She comes by her love of that sport honestly: Her mother played professional volleyball in the family's native Bosnia.

Although she'd planned to stick to two sports, Mucic "missed track too much, so hopped into that as well." She competes in all the jumps—long, triple, and high.

She's used to the busy schedule, having competed in the same three sports throughout high school. What's her secret? "When I



have little chunks of time I use them wisely," says Mucic. "If I have an hour between classes I study. I don't lounge around."

She hasn't lounged around much since arriving in Minnesota at age 13 in 2001. The war in Bosnia had been over for several years when the Mucic family emigrated, determined to offer their children a better life. Their sponsors, who already lived in St. Louis Park, were former neighbors in Bosnia. Mucic spent that first summer watching a lot of TV to learn English. Placed in an accelerated English class in her American junior high, she struggled at first, then began excelling. Mac looked like a remote possibility until Mucic discovered the school would meet her financial need.

Because work-study in the Athletic Department is part of that financial package, Mucic spends a lot of time in her beloved Leonard Center. "It's so nice having a new gym and our own lockers," she says. "We can go in any time and practice."

Mucic, an international studies student, has goals well beyond sports, however. She is a volunteer interpreter for the Immigrant Law Center and an intern for the Genocide Intervention Network. The first person in her family to become a U.S. citizen, she hopes to someday work for the United Nations or the U.S. State Department "helping countries like Bosnia. I think that would be a good place for me."

Ace Athletes

MACALESTER has a long tradition of producing some of the country's finest scholar-athletes. Last year, 11 teams posted combined GPAs that led the nation or earned them top rankings among Division III teams.

"The academic accomplishments of our student athletes are outstanding, and the fact that the tradition continues year in and year out reflects the combined efforts of the coaches and student athletes as well as the administration, faculty, and staff," says Kim Chandler, athletic director. "We are proud of our student

athletes. This is college athletics in its purest form."

THE NATION'S FINEST Women's Water Polo—

Ranked #1 in the nation among all divisions. The team's 3.54 GPA edged out #2 ranked Harvard and #5 ranked Stanford.

Women's Soccer—Ranked #1 among all NCAA Division III institutions and fourth highest nationally among Divisions I, II, and III. Cumulative team GPA 3.62.

Women's Softball—Received top honors for their #1 ranking in Division III. Cumulative

team GPA 3.55.

ADDITIONAL TOP RANKINGS

• **Men's Soccer—**Ranked among the top Division III teams with a 3.25 cumulative team GPA.

• **Men's Cross Country—**Tied for #4 ranking in Division III with a 3.51 cumulative team GPA.

Men's and Women's Track and Field—The men's team finished as the #1 ranked MIAC team with a 3.310 cumulative team GPA. The women's team earned a #19 ranking nationally with a 3.43 GPA.

Women's Cross Country—The

team received All-Academic Team Honors with a 3.47 cumulative team GPA.

Men's and Women's Swimming & Diving—For the 28th consecutive semester, both men's and women's teams earned All-Academic honors. The men's team accumulated a 3.16 team GPA, and the women's earned a 19th national ranking with a 3.42 team GPA.

Women's Volleyball—For the ninth time in ten years, the Scots received the American Volleyball Coaches Association Team Academic Award with a 3.45 combined GPA.

{ Head } { of the Class }

IN THE SOUTH BRONX, GRANT STEGNER '08 IS TEACHING FOR AMERICA.

BY | **DANIEL LACHANCE**

In the movie version of Grant Stegner's life, his first year as a South Bronx middle-school teacher would involve climactic moments of triumph: students stumbling into an epiphany during a free-form discussion of "Rip Van Winkle," a group of kids so enthralled with Shakespeare that they stay after school to keep acting out scenes, a moment of teary-eyed understanding as a student who began the year withdrawn opens up in a class discussion.

But this isn't Hollywood. So the moments in which Stegner feels as if he may have a handle on teaching are far less dramatic. Success is in those all-too-brief periods of silence that hover over his eighth graders as he walks down the rows of his classroom during a silent reading period. It's in the give and take of the Saturday coaching sessions he's done with a handful of sixth graders, preparing them for the state-administered English Language Assessment (ELA) test. It's on the Excel spreadsheet that

shows how his students' ELA practice test scores are improving.

And that suits the mild-mannered Stegner just fine. He's a calm, understated guy who speaks in the low, hesitant rumble of a pragmatist rather than in the lofty platitudes of an idealist. Stegner is one of six Macalester students from the class of 2008 who stepped off the graduation stage last year and into Teach for America (TFA), the nonprofit program that each spring takes college seniors with no formal training, gives them a crash course on teaching, and places them in some of the nation's most challenging classrooms.

The program was founded in 1990 by Wendy Kopp, who conceived of it as a way of closing the achievement gap between poor minority students and their wealthy white counterparts. Those chosen for TFA's teaching corps commit to two years of service in a needy urban or rural school. Thirty Macalester graduates have participated in the program in the past three years. With 3,700 teachers selected

PHOTOS BY | **MICHAEL CROUSER**

from an applicant pool of 24,718, the program is harder to get into than many Ivy League schools.

Stegner is passionate about TFA's work, but doesn't consider himself a starry-eyed missionary. "I didn't do this out of some 'change the world' idealism. I don't think that's effective," he says. "You're not really thinking about the nuts and bolts of planning if you're always thinking about changing the world. I mean, you need to break that down a little bit," he laughs.

Indeed, in the four months since he began teaching at Luisa Dessus Cruz Middle School 302, in the South Bronx, Stegner has learned that part of being a great first-year teacher is realizing that there is no such thing as a truly great first-year teacher.

In some ways, it's an easy lesson to learn. He spends half his day co-teaching his eighth grade classes with another first-year TFA teacher, Grant Walker, a Vanderbilt University graduate. Their classroom, reached by hiking up four long sets of stairs in

cent white, 1 percent Asian), most of whom qualify for free lunch. The school is two subway stops from Hunts Point, an area that embodies the specter of the post-industrial ghetto: stripped, abandoned cars, high levels of drug dealing, rampant prostitution, and way too much violent crime.

In 2006, MS 302 was placed on New York State's list of "schools under registration review" because of its dismal standardized test scores. If listed schools don't improve, they're shut down or reorganized. Stegner's students' performance on the state's ELA exam will count for a lot, both for his school and for his students, whose scores play a role in determining whether they'll be admitted into their top choice high school.

Stegner worries at times that the test has become the end-all and be-all of urban schooling. "There's so much emphasis on testing that it's kind of self-defeating" in the larger system, he says. In New York, the highest performing students go to the same pub-

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a stairwell encased by chain-link fencing, feels like a refuge. With its worn hardwood floors, gray chalkboard, and fire engine-red lockers, the room is less 1970s linoleum-and-cement anonymity and more 1950s everyone-knows-your-name security. It's here that Stegner and Walker have provided support and a constant reality check for one another, watching and sharing in each other's successes and failures, reminding each other when things go haywire that tomorrow is a new day.

Still, their room is not impervious to the pressure they feel to catch up their students to grade-level work. MS 302 has been moving in the right direction, Stegner says, since Principal Angel Rodriguez took over six years ago. Before Rodriguez arrived, students came and went as they pleased. Rodriguez, a short man with a pencil mustache who exudes non-nonsense competence, overhauled the school, replacing 45 teachers and instituting a host of new policies aimed at restoring discipline.

But while order has been restored, the challenges that remain are daunting. The school serves 871 students (79 percent Latino, 19 percent black, 1 per-

cent white, 1 percent Asian), most of whom qualify for free lunch. The school is two subway stops from Hunts Point, an area that embodies the specter of the post-industrial ghetto: stripped, abandoned cars, high levels of drug dealing, rampant prostitution, and way too much violent crime.

Still, Stegner is no fierce critic of standardized testing. He sees it as a necessary measure of whether schools are succeeding at educating kids. And he rejects the notion that one "teaches to the test"; if the test measures skills, which most seem to agree it does, then teaching to the test just means teaching, period. Deficits indicated by students' scores, he says, are noticeable in non-test-taking contexts, a fact that is sometimes overlooked by critics.

When I visit their classroom in January, Stegner and Walker are having their students take a practice exam. Standing under a sign that says, "100 percent of our class will follow directions the first time, 100 percent of the way, 100 percent of the time," Stegner tells the students, "We were really impressed with how far you've come on the writing portion of your practice test last week. We think we have half the test

taken care of. Today, we're going to look at the reading portion. I know this class can do this. I know you have it in the bag."

As the students begin to work, Stegner circulates through the room with a clipboard, checking boxes next to students' names. "Not engaged" is one option; "Not using multiple choice strategies" is another. He periodically squats down next to a student, urging him or her to come in for extra practice. As he points out something to a student, the cuff on

ed for drug dealing a month ago. He showed up in homeroom one morning and told Stegner, "They ran my Dad down in the backyard. He's completely innocent." Other students have been homeless for all or part of the semester. Still others have been present for fewer than half the classes. On the day I visited, only 12 students were in class, fewer than half the number enrolled.

Stegner is sympathetic to the complexity of these kids' lives, a complexity unknown to him while growing up in the affluent Minneapolis suburb of Edina. "When I was in eighth grade, I had myself less figured out than my students do. They've matured fast—they've had to. They've had to be independent outside their homes, to be self-sufficient. And sometimes when they get to school they don't want to do that anymore. They want to have someone notice them." He thinks of Juan. "You know, other adults were coming by the house later that day to see how the family was doing. And he had to be a man. But he's an eighth grader."

Later, Stegner and Walker discuss the challenges of navigating the turmoil that sometimes afflicts their students' lives outside the classroom. It's hard to know, for instance, how to respond when something like a parent's arrest happens. Do you give that student leeway and ignore the missed homework or poor behavior? Or do you hold him accountable, figuring that school is the most stable thing in his life, and the best thing you can do is to continue that stability? One person's sensitivity, it seems, is another's "soft bigotry of low expectations."

Then, of course, there's the problem that any middle-school teacher has to deal with: managing kids who are not quite children and not quite adolescents. Stegner cringes as he recounts an early effort at imposing discipline in his class. Under the mantra "we're all in this together," Stegner and Walker had taken to dismissing their classes by rows, and only when every member of the class was seated and silent—a process that had sometimes resulted in explosive confrontations when one student detained the rest.

Last October, Nelli, a student going through a tough phase, refused to sit at her desk and wait for dismissal. True to their word, Stegner and Walker



his shirt-sleeve pulls back to reveal a bracelet similar to those yellow plastic LiveStrong ones. This one is a subtle gray, though, and reads "English: Teach Strong"—a gift to new English-teaching corps members from their TFA advisers. Walker wears one, too.

I ask Juan, a short, stocky boy who sits toward the back of the class, about Stegner and Walker. "Are they nice?" "Too nice," he says. "Sometimes they are pushovers." But then, perhaps seeing an opportunity to get word back to his teachers through a published article, he says with a smile, "But they work us too hard. They have to be easier on us kids."

Like many of Stegner's students, Juan's life outside school is complicated. His stepfather was arrest-



held the students. Five minutes went by. Then ten. Nelli still refused to sit. The tension grew outside the classroom as well, as kids whose lockers were located in the room crowded outside the door, blocked by Walker from entering. “They started banging at the door trying to get in. We weren’t letting them in,” Stegner recalls. Then from the hallway he heard a kid—normally a cooperative student—yell, “Open the door, you dick!”

“That’s not who they are,” Stegner recalls thinking at the time. Here he was, trying to create the order needed for his students to learn, and the result was that he had kids he’d never had trouble with calling him names. The two new teachers gave up at that point, their effort at providing an orderly atmosphere crushed by the sound of students clomping angrily out of the room.

But when it comes to the nitty-gritty, TFA has been exceptionally helpful. The program equips its teachers with tools that enable them to prepare students to succeed on standardized tests. Stegner was given computer software and training that he uses to measure and monitor his students’ progress. Students’ responses on practice tests are entered into Excel workbooks and then aggregated so that Stegner can tell what kinds of questions the students, both individually and as a whole, are struggling with.

It’s that less-than-glamorous Excel file, ironically, that has helped Stegner experience the small victories that give him hope for succeeding at a teaching career. The quantitative data may seem impersonal, but it has actually allowed him to tell kids where they need help and how he can help them. And that, to him, is a much smarter and humbler

Stegner was taken aback by how some of his TFA training leaders seemed to wrongly assume that the trainees were not planning to become career teachers. “A whole piece was missing for me,” he says. “There was no vision of the career teacher.” That’s what he was looking for. If all goes well, he plans to continue teaching in New York indefinitely.

But assessing a situation, knowing when a disciplinary strategy is going to backfire—that’s the kind of knowledge you don’t have your first year of teaching. Indeed, the program’s two-year commitment has made it the target of criticism in some circles. Some see TFA as part of a trend in public education that sees quick fixes, rather than long-term financial investments, as the solution to schools unable to attract and retain master teachers. Just as these teachers start to become skilled, their commitment is up and a new crop of inexperienced teachers replaces them. Though many TFA teachers stay on beyond two years (Stegner works with 5- and 15-year teachers who started with TFA), the most hardened cynics see the program as a two-year resume builder, a tour through poverty done to gain social capital on the way to law school.

Stegner himself was taken aback by how some of his TFA training leaders seemed to assume—wrongly, in his case—that he and his cohorts were not planning to become career teachers. “A whole piece was missing for me. There was no vision of the career teacher, you know, ‘be a professional.’” That’s what he was looking for. If all goes well, he plans to continue teaching in New York indefinitely.

approach to teaching than vague platitudes or gimmicky tricks.

He mentions a student who has improved immensely by faithfully working on his writing skills deficits over the lunch hour—deficits Stegner identified in a first acuity test. “I put myself in his shoes: he probably never before had somebody who took the time to say, ‘OK, this kid didn’t do as well as he could have on this, and I’m going to ask him to stay and work on it.’ It’s not the sympathetic, condescending, ‘Oh, you didn’t well on this; do you want to talk about it?’ thing. It’s recognizing how to improve something specific. They realize that their academic problems are specific, and that you took the time to pinpoint that.”

And that observation, more than anything, is what Stegner is taking away from this year. It’s not sentimentality these students need from him, but competence. They don’t need a superhero, just a dedicated professional who cares about getting them from point A to point B. Slowly but surely, he thinks, they—and he—are getting there. ■

DANIEL LACHANCE is an American studies graduate student and freelance writer living in Minneapolis.



Spiritual

Historian **R. Andrew Chesnut '86** studies changes in Latin American religious traditions.

BY | HELEN CORDES

How do you choose your religious faith? That's the question R. Andrew Chesnut '86 explored in Brazil and other Latin American countries, where in recent years the populace has steadily shucked traditional Catholicism to embrace Protestant Pentecostalism, charismatic Catholicism, and African diaspora faiths such as Santería.

What Chesnut learned fueled his conviction that our faith choices reflect a "spiritual economy"—that religious consumers pick the most attractive product best marketed to gain their time and money. Latin Americans, he discovered, were most interested in faiths that offered direct communication with a spirit and emphasized faith healing for pressing health and relationship problems.

Chesnut has outlined his findings in two books, *Competitive Spirits: Latin America's New Religious Economy* (Oxford University Press, 2003) and *Born Again in Brazil: The Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty* (Rutgers University Press, 1997).

Now he's turning his research spotlight on the longtime spiritual star of Latin America, the Virgin of Guadalupe. He'll be teaching and writing a book on the subject while serving in his new post as Bishop Walter F. Sullivan Chair in Catholic Studies at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Why write about the Virgin? She has long held top status in the Latin American religious landscape, and is "definitely the most important manifestation of the Virgin Mary in the world," says Chesnut, who goes by Andy. Some 20 million pilgrims from all over the globe flock to her shrine in Mexico City each year, and the Virgin's image has been employed for a whole range of causes. "She's seen as a champion of the poor and downtrodden," he explains, prominent in posters for causes ranging from the revolutionary Zapatista movement in Chiapas, Mexico, to the U.S. farm-worker and Chicano movements. But the Virgin was also used by Spanish conquistadors to frighten and subjugate the Indians during Spain's colonization efforts. "She's complex," says Chesnut.

His scholarly interest in Latin America took root during his Macalester years, turbocharged by courses with now retired professors Emily Rosenberg (history) and Leland Guyer (Hispanic and Latin American studies). Guyer sensed even then that Chesnut would pursue academia: "Andy just absorbed knowledge, and was such an enthusiastic presence," he says.

A semester-long stay in Bogota with a Colombian family was "absolutely pivotal," says Chesnut, lending real-life heft to Mac classroom discussions. The Bogota program was part of the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs; Macalester is one of 20 liberal arts colleges offering HECUA as a travel-based tool for social justice. When Chesnut returned from Colombia, informal mentoring from anthropology professor Jack Weatherford added to his intellectual understanding of Latin America.

Following graduation, Chesnut won a Fulbright grant that took him to Brazil to probe Pentecostalism's rise. He then earned a PhD in Latin American history from UCLA and taught at the University of Houston for a decade before moving to Virginia. Over the years, he has also added a family—wife Fabiola, a bilingual elementary schoolteacher, 12-year-old Vanessa, and 9-year-old Nicholas.

The shifting Latin American religious winds are mainly positive, Chesnut believes. "It's part of a trend toward pluralism," he says. "Gone are the days when if you were born Catholic, you stayed Catholic. Now Latin Americans have almost as many choices as we do in the United States." He notes that Americans are following similar paths, with a recent Pew Research Center survey finding that nearly half of all Americans have left the faith in which they were raised.

Has the rise in Pentecostal-type religions sparked a right-wing shift in Latin American politics as the rise of religious fundamentalism has done in the United States? Chesnut doesn't believe there's been a significant effect, noting that even in areas where followers have achieved political power, "politics as usual" prevails. The hope that the liberation theology goals of some Latin American Catholics would result in more social equity is dim, with little remaining of that '70s-era movement, Chesnut notes.

As is true in U.S. faiths, Latin American religious trends have been largely driven by women. In the dominant spiritual practices that Chesnut charts, women constitute two-thirds or more of membership. Women are the organizational backbone of both the Pentecostal and Catholic charismatic churches (although only men can be leaders), and are encouraged to head local practices in the African diasporan traditions.

What's ahead in the Latin American religious landscape remains to be seen, but what's certain is that Chesnut's work—fomented in his Mac past—is providing plenty of provocative grist that's sure to affect religious institutional policy as well as his students' spiritual paths. Says Chesnut, "It'll be interesting to see how spiritual institutions will market themselves and how consumers will respond." ■

HELEN CORDES is a Texas freelancer who has written for *Mother Jones*, *The Nation*, and other national magazines.

REVOLUTION



WORLDWIDE CAMPUS

**Mac students pack a lot of learning
into a few months of study abroad.**

BY | JAN SHAW-FLAMM '76

Most college study-away offices organize their libraries by location—Europe, Central America, Africa—but Macalester's is organized by discipline—social sciences, hard sciences, humanities, and fine arts. That's because Mac considers study away (off-campus study, both abroad and domestic) not just as an opportunity to expand students' horizons but as an important component of their academic careers.

"We look at it not as 'Where do you want to go?' but as 'What's the best place in the world to study that particular subject or research that question?'" says Paula Paul-Wagner, assistant director of the International Center.

By graduation, about 65 percent of Mac students will have spent at least a semester studying away for course credit. This spring, 148 Macalester students are studying off campus, 3 in the United States and the rest in 41 countries around the world, according to Paul Nelson, study abroad coordinator. All but three are juniors, so nearly a third of the junior class is studying away. The most popular country destinations are the Netherlands (14 students), Denmark (13), Brazil, (9), Argentina (8), and Scotland and South Africa (7 each).

At least 40 of those students, and probably more, will do independent study projects resulting in substantial papers. A sample of their proposed topics includes gentrification in Buenos Aires, mapping the range of toad species in Costa Rica, women and family law in Morocco, and traditional dance in Ghana. Many students then further develop their research into a senior honors thesis.

Study away is expensive, but Macalester is generous when applying students' financial aid award toward their experience. In order to provide a semester's study away to the greatest number, Mac students are limited to one semester except for rare cases. One exception is Macalester's own program Globalization in Comparative Perspective, now in its third year. Participants in this program spend the fall studying in another country, then gather in Maastricht, Netherlands, where they compare experiences in a January Macalester program before spending spring semester studying at Maastricht University.

Macalester sponsors two other study-away programs and expects to launch another this fall. Macalester's German Stud-





World travelers: Macalester seniors (left to right) Andrew Meeker, Mai Youa Moua, Luke Franklin, Philippa Anastos, and Mara Forster-Smith, back from their study abroad adventures, gathered recently in the Campus Center rotunda.

ies Program in Vienna and Berlin, begun by Professor Emeritus Ellis Dye in 1969, continues to be popular. Globalization and the Natural Environment in Cape Town, South Africa, a collaborative program with Pomona and Swarthmore Colleges, is now in its sixth year. And the new program, called Global Cities in Comparative Perspective: London and the Twin Cities, is a collaboration between Macalester and the Foundation for International Education in London; it is expected to be a yearlong program taking place in these two diverse metropolitan areas.

But about 90 percent of Mac students who study off campus do so through non-Mac programs, with a few students directly enrolling in programs, particularly in English-speaking countries. Popular programs are run by the SIT Study Abroad (once known as the School for International Training), Associated Colleges of the Midwest, the Council on International Educational Exchange, and Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs.

Luke Franklin '09

Hometown: Castle Rock, Colorado

Major: Russian Studies, International Studies

Study Abroad: Tbilisi, Georgia, Fall 2007

Most memorable experience: Choosing a “most memorable experience” from several months in another country isn’t easy. I’ve never seen anything like the High Caucasus, or climbed to a church built 2,170 meters above sea level. I’ve also never had to go around a village asking for keys to said church and, when eventually finding their possessor, been treated to a breakfast of homemade wine and musky cheese. On the other hand, in November after the mountain passes had for all intents and purposes become “impassable,” I spent evenings walking the few blocks from my host family’s flat to Parliament, to speak in a mixture of Georgian, Russian, and English to encamped protestors calling for an early presidential election. A couple days after the protests began, I walked out of my Chechen language class into a little market, where everyone was silent. Their eyes were fixed on a small television that was flashing scenes of civilians running, tear gas and water hoses, and police in riot gear. And walking home that evening, reaching the turn to my street, I saw four buses full of police and military forces blocking the street leading to Parliament.

Most important thing I learned: I learned plenty of Russian, eventually struggling through Pushkin and Chekhov in the original. I memorized Chechen poems about mountain hospitality, bride kidnappings, and raids on Cossack villages. And I learned how to eat *khinkali* dumplings. I learned that many in this country with such strained ties to Russia wished that Putin was their president and had a few good words for Stalin. But really what I learned was how to take my near-bedridden host mother’s blood pressure, my nightly ritual.

How study abroad changed my life: I always wanted to travel; finally getting a taste of it has made me also want to live abroad. I hope I’ll be spending a lot more time in the Caucasus.

“We owe a great debt to the Registrar’s Office, particularly Jayne Niemi and Julie McEathron, the registrar and assistant registrar,” says Paul-Wagner. “They work with all these different programs and translate the coursework to the American system, so that students receive the appropriate Macalester credit and grades. It’s a huge undertaking.”

This summer the International Center programs will move to the new Institute for Global Citizenship (IGC) building at Grand and Snelling. This will bring together offices and programs that, in the words of the mission, “encourage, promote and support rigorous learning that prepares students for lives as effective and ethical ‘global citizen-leaders’” beyond as well as within the United States. The International Center, International Programming, the Civic Engagement Center, and the Internship Office are all part of the IGC.

To learn more about what study away is like these days, we asked five students to tell us what the experience has meant to them.



Luke Franklin '09 near his study-abroad home of Tbilisi, Georgia, in the High Caucasus.

PHOTOS: LUKE FRANKLIN



Top left: A young girl holding a baby bird in a rural village outside of Kumasi, Ghana. **Bottom left:** Host family members pounding fufu in Ghana. **Above:** Central market, Kumasi, Ghana

Mara Forster-Smith '09

Hometown: St. Paul

Major: Anthropology, Art History

Study Abroad: Ghana, West Africa, Spring 2008

Most memorable experience: Preparing *fufu* with my host family for the first time. *Fufu* is a common dish in the Ashanti region, where I spent most of my semester in Ghana. My family ate it once a week on Sundays, and it took the entire afternoon to prepare. My host mother would begin by boiling plantains and cassava in a large pot. When they were soft, we would pound them together using a large mortar and pestle. As my host brother pounded, my mother turned the mixture with her hand, adding water until it became a sticky ball of dough. Then she served the *fufu* with a fish soup poured over it, and we ate it with our hands, as is typical with most Ghanaian food. While I never learned to love *fufu* the way some do, I always enjoyed preparing the dish with my host mother and brothers.

Most important thing I learned: Living with a family offers a richer experience of a country and culture. As part of a Ghanaian family, I felt a sense of support and security in the new and at times overwhelming cultural and geographical setting that surrounded me. My host mother in particular had an enormous influence on my growing accustomed to Ghanaian life. She explained certain cultural customs, such as greeting an elder formally and using my right hand at all times, as courteous gestures that were essential to know and to use in daily life. Living with a Ghanaian family I learned the importance of establishing meaningful relationships with people wherever I go.

How study abroad changed my life: I long to return to Ghana to visit my host family and to take part in the culture and community once again. That's why I'm planning to spend my first year after graduation in Ghana, doing service work and teaching through a program for young adult volunteers. I fully comprehend the importance of cross-cultural friendship and understanding, and I wish to promote this idea through my life's work. The semester I spent living in Ghana has shaped my view of the world and given me a picture of the person I hope to become.



Mai Youa Moua '09

Hometown: Oakdale, Minnesota

Major: Asian Studies, Psychology

Study Abroad: Nanjing, China, Spring 2008

Most memorable experience: Toward the end of our semester in Nanjing, a good friend and I decided to make a weekend trip to Beijing. Before returning to Nanjing, we just couldn't resist having Peking roast duck, a delicacy of the ancient city. After our feast we rushed to catch our overnight train, but missed it by three minutes; we'd underestimated the size of Beijing. All we could get were standing tickets on a 15-hour overnight train. I was scared, tired, and frustrated. As we entered the train, all eyes were on us, especially on my white American friend. It must have been rare to see a *laowai* on such a crowded train. People were sitting knee to knee, and there was nowhere to stand except in the aisle. Fortunately, two girls offered to let us squeeze in with them and soon they helped us find seats in the dining car. It was still uncomfortable, but at least we weren't standing. By the next morning I was able to get us hard sleeper tickets after being called a "stupid Chinese" for not understanding the guard with his thick Beijing accent.

Most important thing I learned: I realized that I've taken so many things for granted, such as clear blue skies, open green lawns, the quietness and orderliness of the streets, freedom of speech, the openness of the Web, and much more. Knowing what I didn't have abroad, I've learned to appreciate more the things I have here in the States.

How study abroad changed my life: It's given me another perspective on life and opened up another door for me. I never knew what it felt like to be in the majority until in China I was mistaken for Chinese and blended in with my black hair and dark brown eyes. The sense of comfort I found in China has assured me that I can survive there and do psychological research, an ambitious dream of mine.

Top: Bamboo rafts carry tourists down the Li River, which is surrounded by the legendary mountains that have inspired generations of Chinese painters. **Bottom:** Mai Youa Moua '09 (second from left) and friends from her study-abroad program, dressed as emperors and empresses at West Lake in Hangzhou, China.



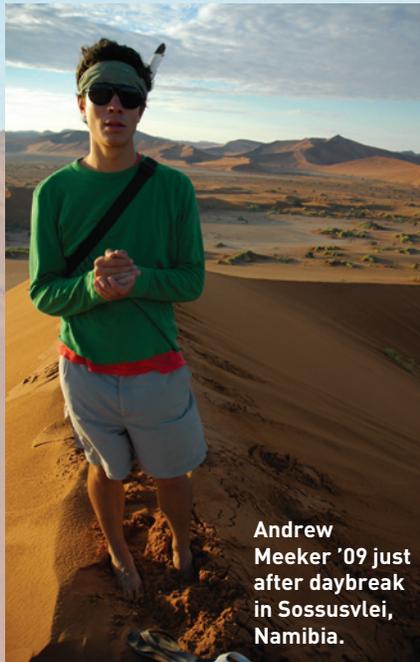
PHOTOS: MAI YOUA MOUA

Andrew Meeker '09

Hometown: Larchmont, New York
Major: Geography, Environmental Studies
Study Abroad: Cape Town, South Africa
Spring 2008

Most memorable experience: A few friends and I rented an old Toyota Corolla, learned how to drive a manual transmission and on the roads from the opposite side, and drove north to Namibia, navigating the vast and diverse deserts of the world's second least populated country. Toward the end of our trip, we wound from the coastal city Swakopmund through the Namib-Naukluft Desert to the Sossusvlei sand dunes. We drove along bumpy dirt roads, taking it slow and losing our hubcaps along the way. Around late afternoon, the scrub desert transformed into jagged mountains covered in long green flowing grass, stretching forever. It made me smile.

Most important thing I learned: During my trip, I did an independent research project on the liminality of refugee identity. Specifically, I was looking at the role of the refugee identity in Zimbabweans' experience in Cape Town. Be-



Andrew Meeker '09 just after daybreak in Sossusvlei, Namibia.

ing an outsider, I was very aware of intruding in the foreign world I was entering, and I had trouble coming to terms with it. At the same time, I was hearing the Zimbabweans' stories of being outsiders in a foreign land, and having a very different experience from mine. It struck me how the interaction between a person's identity and environment has

a substantial influence on the privileges, limitations, oppression, access, and prejudice the person experiences in that place.

How study abroad changed my life: I worked with a refugee activist group called People Against Suffering Suppression, Oppression and Poverty. Early one morning at the Department of Home Affairs, I was chatting with a Zimbabwean asylum seeker (also named Andrew). He said to me, "We are just a spectacle to you." I was taken aback by how direct he was, but also by the pertinence of his observation. It was impossible to do that work not as an outsider; it is impossible to exist outside of myself. Although this is not necessarily problematic, it was difficult to reconcile my desire to make positive change with my being an outsider. I think my experience in South Africa cemented my desire to "think globally, act locally." Travel is important to gain a global perspective, but I'd like to "be the change I wish to see in the world" in my own home.

PHOTOS: ANDREW MEEKER

Philippa Anastos '09

Hometown: Deerfield, Massachusetts
Major: Economics
Study Abroad: Geneva, Switzerland
Summer 2008

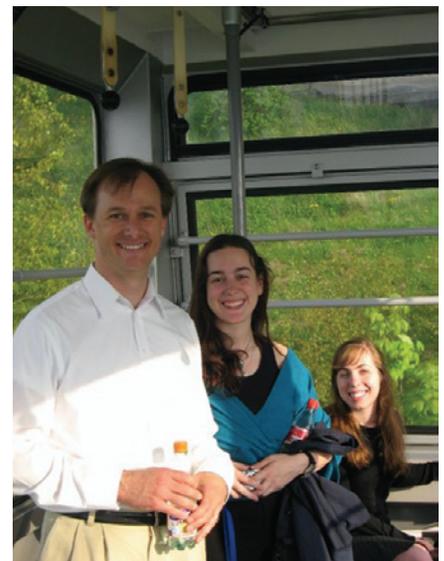
Most memorable experience: Economics Professor Raymond Robertson arranged for three of us to go to Geneva and intern with the International Labour Organization. As a whole, the ILO aims to protect workers' rights worldwide. The Better Work Program, which we interned for, publicizes working conditions in specific factories. My fellow students and I were there to help untangle the data to be publicized. One memorable experience was sitting around a conference table with my fellow Macalester students and my Australian, Canadian, and Danish colleagues, having a Skype discussion with an ILO statistician in Qatar about the details of statistical analysis. It was a remarkable moment, not only because of the incredible scope of the project and the people involved, but also because we Macalester students were taken seriously, and our input was valued.

Most important thing I learned: Every situation presents its own unique set of difficulties, but there is always some way forward. The process of getting the data, cleaning it, and extracting results was more frustrating than we could have anticipated. It seemed like everything that could go wrong, did: late data, missing data, incorrectly filled-out surveys, data-base glitches. But after weeks of struggling, we began to see patterns in the data, changes over time. Things began to fall into place, and most importantly, we could see that the Bet-

ter Factories Cambodia Program was working—working conditions were improving. The results made our efforts worthwhile.

How study abroad changed my life: I realized how well my Macalester professors had taught me to learn. I have a greater awareness of my intellectual curiosity and my capacity for new knowledge, and I realize how many doors have been opened to me. Last fall I began a yearlong independent study with Professor Robertson, assessing minimum wage compliance in four developing nations. No one has done an analysis of this type before, and our results could alter economic theory and policy—just the type of thing I was learning to do over the summer. **M**

JAN SHAW-FLAMM '76 is a writer/editor for the College Relations Department and a regular contributor to Macalester Today.



Mac people in Geneva, Switzerland (from left): Professor Raymond Robertson, Philippa Anastos '09, and Jamie Moore '10.

PHOTOS: PHILIPPA ANASTOS

EDUCATION NEXT

Mac alumni speak out on what works in American education at the dawn of a new political era.





After years of teaching high school, Anne Crampton '88 has taken on a middle school class at a private alternative school in Minneapolis.

BY | JEANNIE OUELLETTE

Americans lost confidence last year in our nation's public schools and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), according to a national survey administered by the education reform journal *Education Next*. But if the decline didn't catch your attention, it may be because America's education "crisis" has stubbornly persisted since the Reagan era landmark report *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform*. That report shocked the nation and catalyzed an unrelenting concern that American schools are failing. It also touched off a wave of local, state, and federal reform efforts.

Unfortunately, reform efforts haven't led to resounding success or even lasting improvements, as measured not only by public perception but also by hard data, including an escalating drop-out rate, declining test scores, and a teacher retention problem so dire that more than 30 percent of teachers leave the profession within their first five years. Last year, on the 25th anniversary of the release of *A Nation at Risk*, the nonpartisan organization Strong American Schools released a report card of our nation's progress since the initial report, commenting:

"Now is not the time for more educational research or reports or commissions. We have enough commonsense ideas, backed by decades of research, to significantly improve American schools. The missing ingredient isn't even educational at all. It's political. . . .

Without vigorous national leadership to improve education, states and local school systems simply cannot overcome the obstacles to making the big changes necessary to significantly improve our nation's schools."

Whether the needed "vigorous national leadership" will emerge in the Obama administration remains to be seen. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has said, "Our kids cannot wait. They get only one chance at a quality education. I want to move with a huge sense of urgency. We're for anything that works."

George Theoharis '93 couldn't agree more. "We are constantly re-inventing the wheel, we're 'helped to death.' We've got this alphabet soup list of programs that come and go, and meanwhile we try to do something new and at the same time we're not doing anything well. Anything that lasts takes a long time, but nothing we do lasts."

Theoharis is an assistant professor at Syracuse University in the Teaching and Leadership Department. His forthcoming book, *The School Leaders Our Children Deserve: Seven Keys to Equity, Social Justice, and School Reform*, makes the case for decisive action toward fast reform based on what educators already know works. "I really believe we know how to teach kids. It comes down to our will to do it—our will collectively, as teachers, as leadership, as a country."

Theoharis calls for three major shifts. First and foremost, he says, schools must improve access to the "core learning context," which he explains as the general education teaching and learning. This means shifting away from ability grouping, tracking, and special education

pull-out programs, all of which Theoharis calls ineffective. Instead, he says, we need to “re-envision a new understanding of inclusion.”

Second, teachers and administrators need to undertake intensive and ongoing professional development to improve their understanding of everything from curriculum to key justice issues.

Third, schools must cultivate a culture of belonging. “Too often our schools are places no one wants to be—not students, not parents, not staff,” he says. “I think that leadership has fallen down over the last century. We have to change people’s minds and recognize that when change is too slow, we can’t actually accomplish it.”

Theoharis cites his years at Macalester as formative. “Mac shaped my interest in being engaged in the community. Ruthanne Kurth-Schai really made the connection for me between teaching and issues of equity and justice.”

Kurth-Schai, chair of Macalester’s Education Department, teaches a course called “Education and Social Change” that many Mac alumni call a turning point in their journey toward teaching. But she deflects credit from herself to the ideals of Macalester as an educational institution. “Mac has an incredible legacy of highly prepared teachers making a difference in diverse urban public schools. Many students have gone into education policy and research, and are tirelessly and creatively working to promote those ideals.”

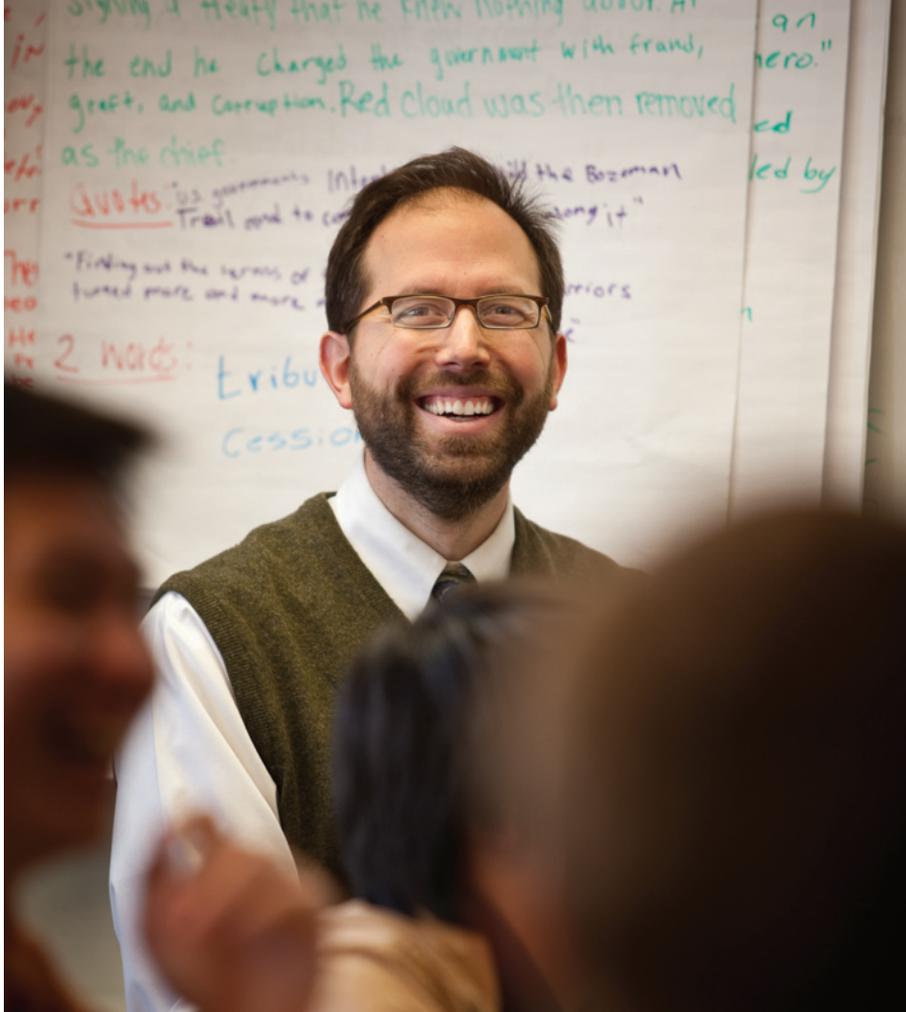
Kurth-Schai believes that lasting improvement in public schools will come only when our society commits to training highly prepared and qualified teachers of diverse backgrounds who are academically well prepared in the disciplines they’ll teach. This, she says, is essentially an NCLB provision that has not been well implemented.

But Kurth-Schai can imagine it being achieved through a number of means, including through loan forgiveness and tuition support for aspiring teachers, and through high quality professional development and continuing education and mentorship as well as improved salaries for teachers.

In addition to quality teachers, Kurth-Schai sees the need for universal childhood education on one end of the continuum, and on the other, a dramatically overhauled approach to preparing young people for the transition from high school into the adult world. Citing high school dropout rates as high as 50 percent, Kurth-Schai says that students who wish to leave school should fulfill certain requirements, such as establishing a clear plan for how they could attain high school equivalency.

Even for those who are graduation bound, she says, requirements should be expanded to include work and life readiness skills, as well as preparation for civic life. “We need to help young people learn how to get everything from health care to financial advice to legal counseling to parenting guidance. And we need to help them know how to make a contribution to society.”

It’s critical to remember, says Kurth-Schai, that NCLB is actually a reauthorization of the 1960s-era Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which was designed to provide educational equity. “So to turn away from it because it’s too expensive and too difficult is



unthinkable.” Instead, she says, we need to significantly rethink the policy but continue with its core aspiration of leaving no young person behind.

Many Macalester alumni are already out there working in the scholastic trenches—as teachers toiling in this country’s classrooms. We have chosen just three of those educator alumni to highlight here: one who works at a private alternative school, one who works at a public high school, and one who co-founded and directs a charter school. Here are their stories.



Anne Crampton '88 City of Lakes Waldorf School Minneapolis

If Anne Crampton '88 weren't teaching sixth grade at City of Lakes Waldorf School in Minneapolis, she might be an artisan cheese maker, a midwife, or even a private investigator. Which isn't as surprising at it sounds, considering that all Waldorf teachers are expected to maintain an active and diverse interest in the world at large. This interest is thought to benefit students, who see in their teacher an adult authority with a genuine intellectual curiosity about all things.

Waldorf schools, founded in Germany in 1919 by Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner, are private schools offering what they describe as “a developmentally appropriate, balanced approach to education that integrates the arts and academics” and enables students to fully develop their unique capacities. Serving children from preschool through high school (City of Lakes goes only through 8th grade),



Erik Brandt '95 teaches English to the top students of a St. Paul inner-city high school.

Waldorf schools strive to encourage the development of “each child’s sense of truth, beauty, and goodness, and to provide an antidote to violence, alienation, and cynicism.” Ultimately, Waldorf teachers aim to inspire in each student a lifelong love of learning.

For Crampton, teaching fulfills her need for truly meaningful work. And she found many of her models of good teaching at Mac, she says, citing such former professors as Harley Henry, Robert Warde, Norm Rosenberg, Jan Serie, and Donald Betts.

Crampton taught high school for many years before coming to City of Lakes. “As I read about and studied the philosophy, I realized how similar it was to how my own ‘inner education’ had been; the Waldorf approach evoked the things I remembered from childhood, that early inner life, and I really liked that about it.”

One key element of Waldorf education is the use of oral storytelling instead of textbooks. “I always loved stories and got a lot out of reading, but now I see that I was biased toward reading over storytelling. It took me a long time to understand that as a teacher I have to be willing to be a storyteller every day to help my students care about the lesson.”

Beyond storytelling, all of the arts play a central role in the Waldorf curriculum, which Crampton sees as imperative to improving education. She also emphasizes the powerful impact of continuity of relationships. In the ideal Waldorf model, students remain with the same main classroom teacher from first through eighth grades. In our mobile society, however, teacher transition is not uncommon during the eight-year cycle. In Crampton’s case, she began with her class as fifth graders and will see them through their eighth grade graduation in 2011. “I’ve become very attached to them. I’m a part of their life, and they’re a part of mine. I think adults and a cohort group who know each other for a long time is very powerful,” she says.



Erik Brandt '95 Harding High School St. Paul

Erik Brandt '95 has been teaching English at St. Paul’s Harding High School for 13 years. He also coordinates Harding’s International Baccalaureate program. And he’s straight to the point about what he thinks makes a great teacher. “I’ve been at it 13 years, I’m on my fourth major educational reform, and look, there’s an art to it, but it’s not rocket science,” he says. “You’ve got to know how to write a good lesson plan and how to teach kids to shut up. At the same time, you’ve got to like kids a lot, in most cases more than the subject you’re teaching.”

The ongoing challenge of how to teach kids of wildly different ability levels still raises questions for him. “At Harding, most of our students are living in poverty. These are kids who, if they weren’t getting breakfast and lunch at school, might not eat those meals. And these students are tracked by choice—they pretty much choose what level of classes they want to be in. In my IB English classes I’ve got the top performing kids in the building, and even within that group the range of ability is striking. You’ve got some that think the verb ‘hurtet’ is just fine, along with kids who are brilliant, fluent writers who can dash off something flawless. That’s the dilemma in every classroom, those varying ability levels in one room.”

Brandt spent the 2007–’08 school year teaching in Budapest, Hungary, through the Fulbright Teacher Exchange program. “It was a very different model, one that many schools around the

world follow. Kids are put in an advisory homeroom of about 30 kids. From grades 9 through 12, they take all their classes with that group, like a family.” While Brandt saw some benefits to that continuity, he also saw drawbacks. “The kids who were picked on were picked on all day long, so there’s huge pressure to conform to the group norm. If it’s a positive group norm, those kids learn a lot and it’s successful. But if it’s not, then the kids are sentenced to this negative downward spiral.”

And some kids seemed underchallenged in this model, Brandt says. “There were students who were great at English, ready to go to a much higher level, but the other kids weren’t there yet, whether through lack of effort or exposure.” Motivated kids should be able to choose to work at a higher level and take more challenging classes, Brandt believes. “At Harding there are only two levels, IB classes and regular classes. In IB, I spend about 1 percent of my time on discipline. In the regular classes, it’s more like 40 percent.”

In Harding’s regular-level classes, the two things that seem to work best are having a consistent teacher throughout the year and keeping class sizes smaller. “When kids change teachers it causes turmoil. Teachers are not consistent; we have our own little kingdoms, our own rules and things we like to do, and it takes kids a while to figure out our systems and what we expect from them.”



Jessica Wodatch '93

Two Rivers Public Charter School Washington, D.C.

Jessica Wodatch '93 spent two years teaching third grade in the Bronx through the Teach for America program. Following that experience, she returned home to Washington, D.C., and spent several years doing research at Policy Research Associates, a Washington-based consulting firm. “I traveled around the country, observing this incredible range of schools and programs, interviewing school leaders, observing master teachers, and helping to train teachers,” says Wodatch. “It was during those years that I gained a clear sense of what does and doesn’t work in education.”

Today Wodatch is using that expertise as the executive director of Two Rivers Public Charter School on Capitol Hill, a thriving institution

Jessica Wodatch '93 working with kids at the Washington, D.C., charter school she co-founded and now directs.



she cofounded in 2004. Two Rivers uses Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound, an educational model that emphasizes interactive, hands-on, project-based learning, says Wodatch. “The school focuses on the whole child, recognizing the importance of character education and the social-emotional needs of children while helping them achieve excellence.”

Two Rivers’ founders and staff share a strong belief that all children can be high achievers. The school is based on four values: that learning should be hands-on, fun, interactive and relevant to students’ lives; that developing character and community should be as important as academics; that arts, movement, and Spanish should be focuses; and that diversity should be honored by valuing all learners and grouping classes heterogeneously, with students of varying academic levels together. “Of course, it’s a challenge to instruct multiple ability levels in the same classroom,” says Wodatch, “but it’s essential to our learning philosophy.”

The student population at Two Rivers does reflect the school’s commitment to diversity: only a third of the student body is white and nearly a third qualify for free or reduced-cost lunch.

Wodatch and her staff pride themselves on the atmosphere at Two Rivers, a place where visitors often comment on how happy the kids seem. Two Rivers currently serves nearly 400 students in preschool through seventh grade, expects to add an eighth grade next year, and plans to reach full capacity by 2012. Meanwhile, the waiting list for Two Rivers is more than 800 names long.

Second to the school’s educational philosophy, Wodatch credits the school’s teachers for its success. “A school is only as good as the people who work in it,” she says. “I spend an inordinate amount of time on hiring,” she adds, a process that includes long interviews, model lessons, and a writing component. “We really want to make sure that the candidate is right for our school, and that the school is right for them.” **M**

JEANNIE OUELLETTE is a Minneapolis writer and teacher.



Sacred Spaces

Drawing 12th-century religious structures takes **Mary Griep '73** around the world.

BY | DAVID MCKAY WILSON

IN A TINY DORMITORY ROOM at the University of Oslo, Mary Griep '73 experimented with color on her drawing of the Borgund stav church, one of 28 wooden structures built more than 900 years ago that is still standing in Norway.

She was just back from a week in the village of Laerdal, which she spent photographing and sketching the church. On this summer afternoon she has begun the process of finding the right blend of colors to capture what she calls the church's "sense of dark light. It's very dark inside the church yet there's a sense of luminosity," says Griep, an associate professor of art at St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota.

The stav church is the sixth in Griep's series of drawings of 12th-century sacred spaces around the world. The series—which she began a decade ago—is called the Anastylosis Project, a phrase that describes the process of restoring monuments using the original materials. Griep's commitment to the project resonates with the message she conveys to her students, says Wendell Arneson, a colleague at St. Olaf. "She's always challenging her students to trust their ideas, and to push themselves to find their own unique take on the world," he says.

What began as an excursion to explore European cathedrals has turned into an international artistic exploration of the sacred spaces of several religious and cultural traditions. The series, exhibited in 2007 at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, includes drawings of Chartres Cathedral in France, Angkor Wat in Cambodia, a Buddhist temple in Burma, a Mayan palace in Mexico, and a Turkish mosque.

In Griep's renderings, the buildings' interiors and exteriors are drawn to a scale of one inch to two feet. Like their subjects, the works are monumental. Her drawing of Chartres Cathedral stands 14 feet by 9 feet, and her Angkor Wat drawing is 32 feet by 8 feet. "They're so big that you have to step back to see the whole picture, then move forward to see the details," says Griep. "You can't see it all at once, which mimics the experience of seeing these buildings in person."

Griep didn't set out to undertake an epic project when she traveled to Chartres. She drew what she saw, and liked what she drew. Then when her husband, Randolph Jennings '79, was named director of international programming at Payap University in Thailand, she found herself in a region where many ancient sacred spaces had withstood the ravages of time. "After I decided to draw Angkor Wat," she says, "it just kept going. It was an organic process."

Drawing Angkor Wat was "a huge challenge," says Griep, who is now back living in Northfield with Jennings and their two teenage children. "Could I really make myself pay attention that long? But then I thought, 'When else would I have this kind of time to draw?'"

In 2007, she traveled to Turkey to draw the Great Mosque of Divrigi, an important yet little known example of early Islamic architecture. While there, she teamed up with Turkish photographer Ahmet Ertug on a book about the mosque, which will be published later this year. She and Ertug plan to hold exhibits in Turkey once the book is out. The first exhibit of Griep's mosque and the stav church drawings opened in February at St. Olaf's Flaten Art Museum.

After a childhood spent in Billings, Montana, and Dubuque, Iowa, Griep came to Macalester in 1969 to study studio art with painting teacher Jerry Rudquist and drawing instructor Bill Saltzman. But it was her courses in history and literature that helped inform her work, she says. "Taking history classes with history majors made me work to a high level. I was looking for that kind of intellectual stimulation."

Griep's focus on 12th-century sacred spaces has drawn her into the medieval world, a time that saw the rise of Christianity, the development of building technologies that allowed construction of large, durable structures, and a growing movement toward world exploration.

This exploration led to an unprecedented melding of cultures. The Turkish mosque was built by Armenian masons who had previously built churches; its carvings were done by a craftsman who'd traveled in Asia. Dragons carved into the Norwegian church were similar to those Griep had seen in Southeast Asia, leading her to speculate that the Vikings may have influenced Eastern artists. "People were seeing things from other parts of the world in the 12th century," says Griep. "It's amazing how similar some of these buildings are."

This spring she's finishing drawings of the Castillo at the Maya site Chichen Itza and the Shwedagon Pagoda in Burma, and is considering several new sites to explore—the Ely Cathedral in England, medieval buildings in Yemen, or the entirety of Chartres Cathedral, whose west façade she drew in 1998. Then there's Ertug, the Turkish photographer, who'd like to collaborate on another 12th-century building along the Silk Road. Griep has applied for foundation funding to support these trips.

"I'm casting my net out again," says Griep. "I'll have to be open to how it develops." ■

DAVID MCKAY WILSON is a writer from Mahopac, New York. He writes regularly for the alumni magazines of Stanford University, the University of Chicago, and other colleges.

PHOTO: MICHAEL CROUSER





DETOUR

→ TO ADVENTURE



Top: Amy Voytilla '04 (right) and Carol Wendorff, near the tri-border region between Peru, Colombia, and Brazil, working on a Wilderness Classroom website update. **Bottom left:** The team on the last day of paddling, entering Belem, Brazil. Front row (from left): Jay Bancroft, entomologist; Voytilla; Anne DeCock, Northland College student; Back row (from left): Eric Frost and Dave Freeman, cofounders of Wilderness Classroom; Antonio Carlos Osse, canoe builder/teacher.



As Amy Voytilla '04 found out, sometimes life gets in the way of a regular career.

BY | **CHUCK BENDA**

AMY VOYTILLA '04 enrolled at Macalester with some pretty strong ideas about where she was headed. For starters, she wanted to major in art. When an introductory psychology course intrigued her, she decided to combine her interests and pursue a career in art therapy. After earning her master's degree in art therapy from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 2006, Voytilla planned to look for a job—right after she enjoyed a little R & R in northern Minnesota.

Two and a half years, one kayak trip around Lake Superior, and one trek across South America later, Voytilla still hasn't landed that day job. What's more, she's not even looking. In the fall of 2006, she got the chance to kayak around Lake Superior with an organization called the Wilderness Classroom. After that, says Voytilla, "I got hooked."

Wilderness Classroom—founded in 2001 by Dave Freeman—is a nonprofit organization that uses satellite communications and the Internet to share wilderness adventures with schoolchildren across the United States. During their expeditions, Wilderness Classroom staff members post trip notes on their website, host live chat rooms, and otherwise involve kids in their adventures via the Internet. After each trip, staff members travel to schools around the country and continue to share their experiences through assemblies and other presentations. "It's amazing to see how excited the kids get," says Voytilla. "They always have so many questions for us."

What's also amazing is the scope of the adventures Voytilla has taken part in through the Wilderness Classroom. Her most recent trip was also the most extreme: a 3,000-mile journey across South America by bicycle and canoe. During the first leg, team members pedaled from the Pacific Ocean, across the Andes, and down to the headwaters of the Amazon. From there, they paddled some 2,500 miles to the Atlantic Ocean.

Along the way, Voytilla encountered sights and sounds so fantastic she had to pinch herself to make sure she wasn't dreaming. "I remember biking through the Andes during the first leg of the expedition," she says. "For two solid days, we did nothing but climb, climb, climb. It was one switchback after another."

As the expedition finally passed into a cloud forest high in the Andes, however, Voytilla forgot about her aching muscles. She was surrounded by dozens of sparkling waterfalls, colorful parrots, and all manner of flowering plants. It was a scenario that would play out over and over again, throughout the trip: long hours of hard travel interspersed with moments of near euphoria as the group encountered new and wonderful landscapes.

Another such experience came not long after the expedition members began canoeing on the headwaters of the Amazon. "We were there during the high-water season, and the river just ran off into the trees in every direction," says Voytilla. "Sometimes we took short cuts through the forest as the river wound back and forth. The wildlife was incred-

ible. Sloths. Macaws. The howler monkeys woke us up as soon as the sun started to rise."

The Trans-Amazon expedition—which stretched from April 2007 to November 2008—was completed in three stages, each lasting about 50 days. With the exception of a short section of the lower Amazon, team members completed the entire journey under their own power.

"There is a stretch of the Amazon where it breaks up into hundreds of smaller channels," Voytilla explains. "We were warned by the locals not to travel in that area because it is overrun by pirates and thieves. So on that section of the river, we rode on a small riverboat."

No matter what challenges they encountered, however, Voytilla remained remarkably calm and even-tempered, according to Freeman. "One night on the lower Amazon, a storm was driving the water up into the trees where we were camped," says Freeman. "We weren't sure it would stop before the tents were standing in water. Finally the water stopped about four inches below the tent. Amy slept through it all."

In the interest of full disclosure, Voytilla and Freeman have become more than just expedition teammates over the last few years. Says Freeman: "My mom told me that, having found a girl who would paddle across the Amazon with me, I should probably marry her."

Freeman hasn't taken his mom's advice yet, but the two are definitely a couple. When the Amazon expedition ended in November, they returned to northern Minnesota to spend the winter guiding dogsled trips. They spend summers leading kayaking trips on Lake Superior, and they're already planning their next Wilderness Classroom expedition: a "big trip across North America," as Voytilla puts it.

Big might be an understatement. Although the final shape of this expedition could change, the current plan is to start in Seattle and head north to Alaska, possibly in kayaks, before angling down toward northern Minnesota. From there they plan to travel via kayak, bicycle, dogsled, and canoe through the Great Lakes and the St. Lawrence Seaway to the East Coast before heading south to Florida. After that, who knows?

"I'd like to keep doing this sort of thing for a while," says Voytilla. "And I'd like to write about our travels, too; maybe a book about the Superior trip and one about the Amazon. But eventually I think I'll get back to the art therapy stuff."

We'll see. Judging by her passion for adventure travel, eventually might be a long time coming. ■

CHUCK BENDA, himself a former wilderness guide, lives and writes in the woods south of Hastings, Minnesota.



WEB CONNECT: To learn more about the Trans-Amazon Expedition or the Wilderness Classroom, go to www.wildernessclassroom.com/amazon/index.html

Moments of Being

BY | GRETCHEN LEGLER '84

I WAS WITH McMURDO TECHNICIAN Tracy Dahl on a morning helicopter ride up the Taylor Valley, in Antarctica's Dry Valleys, the world's coldest desert. After making some deliveries, finally Dahl and I were set down outside the three uninhabited canvas structures or jamesways that made up the Lake Fryxell Camp, which Dahl was to prepare for a soon-to-be-arriving field party.

After the chores were complete, Dahl and I sat beside the fuel stove in one of the jamesways and warmed our feet on its metal sides, tipped back in our chairs, drinking tea, passing the time until his helicopter arrived to take him back to McMurdo. Then I would be on my own. I was equipped for a small expedition: radio, backpack with tent, stove, sleeping bag, extra food, and clothes. I would make my way back on foot to Lake Hoare, the field camp where I had been staying for the week. Mine was an officially sanctioned several hour walk. If I did not arrive at Lake Hoare by dinnertime, there would probably be a helicopter sent from McMurdo to find me. Nevertheless, it felt like an adventure—a walk in Antarctica, a walk in the wildest place I had ever been, a walk in what might yet be the wildest place on Earth.

Every walk, said Henry David Thoreau, that 19th century American saunterer of woods and mind, is a sort of crusade—a westward going, a wildward going—a journey toward self awareness, transformation, and the future. We should be prepared, he said, on even the shortest walk to go “in the spirit of undying adventure, never to return—prepared to send back our embalmed hearts only as relics to our desolate kingdoms.” The name itself, walker, saunterer, Thoreau wrote, may have derived from the expression used to describe a person in the Middle Ages who wandered about the land, *a la Sainte Terre*, a pilgrim, heading toward the Holy Land. Or it might be rooted in the words *sans terre*, without a home, but everywhere at home.

I felt both as I set off across Lake Fryxell, my ice axe swinging like a walking stick at my side, its metal point pinging against the hard turquoise surface beneath me. The teeth of my crampons bit in as I walked: metal against ice. The blue lake ice was cut by geometric patterns of crazy white lines and rising white orbs. I felt homeless and at home in the universe, and as if I too was a pilgrim, walking not toward, but in, a holy land.

The flatness of the valley I was in was broken on each side by distant hills swathed in shades of brown and white, the ones to my back more mountainous and sharp, and the ones facing me, softer. My way led across Lake Fryxell, so beautifully disturbed by the designs in its frozen surface, toward the edge of the Canada

glacier, which spilled out of the mountains between Fryxell and Lake Hoare and which I would have to go around. I paused frequently on the walk, gazing, enthralled with patterns in the snow made by wind, so delicately and improbably shaped—like letters, like words, like whole sentences written in dark brown dust on snow. Often I would stop to simply gaze about me, down the valley where it spread out wide and met the blue and white cloud-spattered sky, behind me to see the tiny jamesways of the Fryxell camp receding, and the towering glacial wall, emanating coldness. Many times, when I paused, the glacier would crack and thunder and I would jump for fear that I would be smashed by a falling chunk of ice as big as a house, me like a fly beneath it.

Such congenial openness I had never walked in, never traveled by foot in such intimacy with. One step at a time would take me back to Lake Hoare by evening. Each step I savored, giddily feeling my strong legs hinge at the hips, feeling each stride, my lungs expanding fully, my arms swinging, my back bearing up the weight of the pack. I felt as Thoreau did when he wrote, “In my walks I would fain return to my senses.” The land here was bare bones, stripped down, elemental, and beautiful; beautiful in the way the bleak, landless, endless ocean is beautiful to fishermen; the way deserts are beautiful to Saharan nomads; beautiful in its smallness—the many-colored pebbles in my path, the ragged ice along the shore, the turquoise glass I walked upon; and beautiful in its largeness—the infinite reach of sky, the gigantic arc of the land. The land brought me back, as it did Thoreau, to my senses; back to my body, back to my self. ■

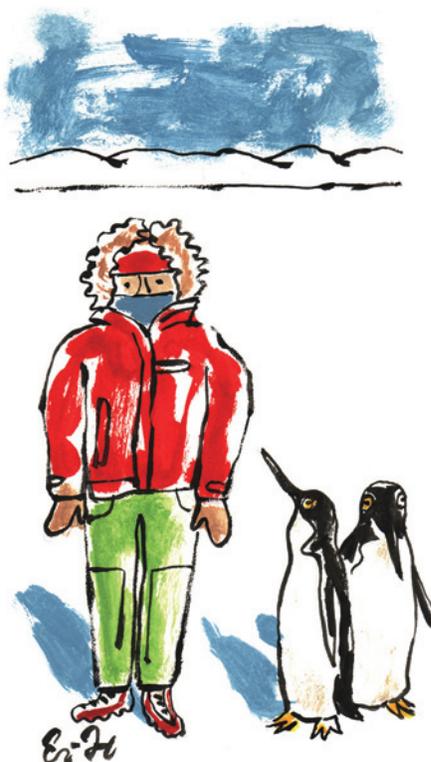


ILLUSTRATION: ERIC HANSON

GRETCHEN LEGLER '84 is a professor of creative writing at the University of Maine at Farmington. This is an excerpt from her book *On the Ice: An Intimate Portrait of Life at McMurdo Station, Antarctica* (Milkweed, 2005).

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