Among the stories in this new issue are several that highlight the enduring nature of cultural forms. Culture, as social scientists define it, is paradoxical, in that it embodies and perpetuates lasting truths and values, even while undergoing continuous adjustment as each new generation faces new realities. Why the lasting appeal of Shakespeare? Was it his ability to plumb the deepest, universal psychological truths, or rather was it his talent for crafting stories that can be fit to the times? In the Black Madonna, we see how an ancient symbol of matriarchal holiness is recast again and again to suit particular times and places. It becomes tempting to reverse Karr’s famous epigram: “The more things stay the same, the more they change.”

In examining questions about cultural stasis and change, UTSA students go way beyond the ability to recite a Shakespearean sonnet or date a medieval icon; they develop lasting capacities to evaluate human behavior and further human knowledge. They learn how to understand large bodies of traditional information and creative work, to think through the historical or philosophical issues they pose, to imagine alternatives, and to communicate their new vision. They prepare to preserve the best that the past bequeaths us while further informing and improving the human condition.

And this is exactly the kind of intellectual ability that today’s employers desire in prospective employees. A new study on behalf of the Association of American Colleges and Universities finds that nearly all those employers surveyed (93%) agree: “A candidate’s demonstrated capacity to think critically, communicate clearly, and solve complex problems is more important than their undergraduate major.”

Few think that having field-specific knowledge and skills alone is what is most needed for individuals’ career success. Eighty percent of employers agree that, regardless of their major, every college student should acquire broad knowledge in the liberal arts and sciences.

As you read our stories, imagine yourself in the classes and research projects described, exploring under the guidance of an excellent faculty member. You will see why COLFA endures as a central component of the UTSA mission.

‘It Takes More Than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success.
Shakespeare offers contemporary connections that people in prisons would relate to and be interested in,” he added.

A Man of His Times

Still, Shakespeare most likely did not envision his works as fodder for high school English classes or inmates in distant centuries. He was a man of his times, writing for his contemporaries to react. He wanted people to cheer and boo at his characters. “These are all things that people in prisons would relate to and be interested in,” Craven said.

Bayer teaches students to examine the historical context of the plays and the people they were written for. “For example, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century British audiences, and indeed, the author himself, did not study nor understand human psychology as it is understood today. Yet the psychologically complex character of Hamlet made for a successful play because of its connections with ideas and events that were relevant to the people of Shakespeare’s time,” Bayer said.

They (early modern audiences) would enjoy the ghosts, the political intrigue, the murder plots, the nations at war. These were things that were on people’s minds at that time,” he said.

“A certain amount of Shakespeare’s notoriety is predicated on hype,” Bayer said.

Nonetheless, Shakespeare manages to shape the experience of many who have never even seen one of his plays, Craven said. Pretty much everyone knows the story of Romeo and Juliet, and most people can recite at least a couple lines from Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” soliloquy. “A lot of people are affected by Shakespeare even though they don’t think that they know a lot about him,” Craven said.

Even in prisons, inmates who pursue educational opportunities regularly find lessons about Shakespeare and his plays. The Tragedy of Julius Caesar, a play about the conspiracy to assassinate the Roman emperor, is one of the works regularly used to introduce inmates to literature and learning, Craven said. The plot and themes involve murder, political treachery and justice. “These are all things that people in prisons would relate to and be interested in,” he added.

The language is so dense, so rich, the first couple plays they read are difficult. Not because the language is archaic, but because it is semantically dense. You have to read the lines over and over,” said Bayer. But like anything else, time and effort bring an understanding, he said. “Students go into it because it is a requirement, but I do think they end up enjoying it.”

Perhaps some of those students will end up like Craven, who finds that Shakespeare forms a lens through which he sees life.

“Find myself quoting Shakespeare all the time,” he said. “There is almost always a quote for almost anything one wants to say.”

The Department of English and the UTSA Friends of Shakespeare host an annual performance series and residency by the world-renowned actors from the London stage. To learn more visit: http://colfa.utsa.edu/english/shakespeare.html

Mark Bayer

Of course, England is the real heart of Shakespearean love and lore. No vacation to that country can be considered complete without a visit to Shakespeare’s hometown of Stratford-Upon-Avon. A tourist in London may be able to find three or four theaters simultaneously presenting different Shakespearean works, Craven noted. Despite the limited opportunity to see performances in San Antonio, UTSA’s courses on Shakespeare remain popular with students, who gain appreciation for the lilting language and talent of an author from another era.

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A Man of His Times

He laughed, recalling a recent experience of seeing Romeo and Juliet live in a theater that seemed to be filled with teenage girls. They sighed, moaned, giggled and cried as one throughout the production, something the professor delighted in. “That is exactly the way Shakespeare intended for his plays to be experienced,” Craven said. “Shakespeare wanted audiences to react. He wanted people to cheer and boo at his characters.” These physical connections to Shakespeare are not as strong in San Antonio as in other areas of the United States, where summer months bring Shakespearean festivals or where there may even be local theater groups that focus on Shakespeare, said Craven.

Humans still experience love, loss, betrayal, war, humor and tragedy, which gives Shakespeare a foothold in modern times, Craven said. Still, the playwright wrote for live audiences, and Craven encourages students and other Shakespeare lovers to get out of the books and go see the plays in a theater.

“He plays were written to be performed. He conceived in them what an audience needs to know,” Craven said. “If we come at his plays from books and classrooms, we are doing it the wrong way.”
Q: What is evil?
A: That question might be older than Thales’ query as to what is the source of all things! Theologians might focus on the inherited defect of ‘original sin’; anthropologists might point to a particular culture’s idea of evil as mystical, shadowy, or dark; sociologists might wonder if the question itself is regressive because it circles back to eras of witch hunts and scarlet letters. In my experience, philosophers are less keen to label particular acts or instances as ‘evil,’ but would want to understand what we mean by the term itself.

One common philosophical way of thinking about evil is as a measure of suffering. There is suffering that comes about metaphorically (‘I’m a physically limited being, so I can’t run a 40-yard dash in 4.4 seconds, can’t remember the names of my students on the first day, and get frustrated when I trip over toys my kids have left out’); there is suffering that comes about naturally (many in our own state have suffered as a result of hurricanes, tornadoes, and the like); and there is suffering that comes about from our own choices (imagine if I lied about running a 4.4 forty, didn’t care if I ever learned my students’ names, and lashed out in anger over tripping over the kids’ toys).

For those of us in the midst of it, the breakneck rate of cultural, scientific, and technological evolution is hard to fully appreciate. Harder still to grasp are the radical long-term implications behind this frenzied state of change that so defines our era. In his Pulitzer Prize-winning book _The Denial of Death_, renowned cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker proposed that humankind’s deepest aspiration is “to be free of the anxiety of death and annihilation,” the implication being that encased as we may be in fragile, decaying bodies, we are simultaneously compelled to rise above our mortal nature and inhabit a higher and immensely more powerful state of being. Indeed, few would argue against the notion that with the ability to tap into collective knowledge at will via the Internet, manipulate the genetic blueprints of life, and end civilization at the push of a button, humanity truly seems to be acquiring divine-like characteristics.

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In the face of this dazzling leap from ape to god, one question takes center stage: Will we learn to wield our growing power benevolently, or will we instead use it to create a dystopian future? The problem of evil, ancient as civilization itself, takes on added significance in a world where one unwise decision can result in the death of millions. Humanity’s current obsession with post-apocalyptic tales is just one indication that the sense looms large in our collective awareness of the urgency behind this monumental choice between creativity and destruction.

One thing is certain: no amount of technological or scientific innovation will enable humanity to conquer its demons if we fail to come to terms with evil. These issues, traditionally dealt with in a theological context, are becoming increasingly relevant to society at large.

Eager to pursue our most pressing questions on the topic, we approached Department of Philosophy and Classics J Jill Graper Hernandez for an enlightening exchange. Hernandez, a recent recipient of the President’s Distinguished Achievement Award in Research and Teaching, has taught, lectured publicly, and published extensively on the problem of evil most recently in the form of a monograph titled _Gabriel Marcel’s Ethics of Hope: Evil, God, and Virtue_. She is currently writing a book on the contributions of women philosophers in the early modern period.

Homo sapiens, the first truly free species, is about to decommission natural selection, the force that made us… soon we must look deep within ourselves and decide what we wish to become.”

—Edward O. Wilson
My recent research focuses on a category of moral evil called ‘atrocious evils’. These aren’t individual claims to suffering (so, not the suffering that results to my own kids if I lash out in anger), but a category of moral evils that are culpable, preventable, and always create disproportionate harm. Atheist philosopher Claudia Card says, ‘evils are reasonably foreseeable intolerable harms produced (maintained, supported, tolerated, and so on) by culpable wrong-doing. So understood, evils have two irreducibly distinct components: a harm component and an agency component.’ So, think holocaust, global poverty, and genocidal rape, but also things like domestic violence, gross civil rights abuses, and so on.

Q: CAN EVIL BE ELIMINATED?
A: You know, as a pithy response, my knee jerk reaction is, ‘Well, if you want to eliminate free will, but, let’s think about this together a little further. ’ I’ve categorized evils as tied to suffering. If evil is just suffering, though, we could do away with suffering and evil would be eliminated too. The Stoics had a view that was similar to this. Epicurus said things like, ‘When your wife dies do not say, I have lost her, say, I have given her back.’ Freedom, for the Stoics, was knowing what to give assent to. Since we can’t control things that happen to us, we can focus instead on what we can control – our emotions about those things. Suffering comes about when we attempt to control what we cannot actually control. When we learn to care about only what we can control, we stop suffering. The Buddhists are on to this, too.

So, do the Stoics have the answer to this? Well, here is where we might be wrong to think about evil as suffering, instead of simply tied to it. If one suffers as a result of murder, rape, and torture, would those acts no longer be evil? I would say no to saying ‘yes.’ Just as theists who believe in free will wouldn’t trade in their freedom in order to eliminate evil in the world, so too acts like murder, rape, and torture (even if imagined as not causing suffering) would still be acts of forcing, coercing, and imposing another person’s will on someone else, and that seems … well, wrong. Even if we could live in a world without suffering (and, given that we are sentient, experiencing, loving beings the pragmatic sense that is that we can’t live in a world without suffering) we could still have evil in the world. At the end of the day, the question of the problem of evil really is a communal one: what can I do to ease suffering, to motivate healing, and to effectuate peace around me – in the world? 

Q: IF THERE WERE A GOD BEHIND THE CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE, WHY WOULD EVIL BE ALLOWED TO EXIST?
A: This is really the root of the question of the problem of evil. If there is a God, and God is perfect, then God should know the evil that will occur (given that such a being would be omniscient), should want to prevent evil from happening in the world (since such a being would be omnibenevolent), and should be able to prevent or limit evil from occuring (since such a being would be omnipotent). But, evil is in the world – so, what gives?

There are many answers to this question, and my work has focused on several of them. One very interesting response actually comes from contemporary atheists like Card who argue that theists have hijacked the concept ‘evil’ removed it from human agency, and imbued it with theistic tones, whereas evil should be secularized so that we as humans can hold responsible those among us who perform the most heinous evils (called atrocity’s). That move is very compelling. My current research indicates that the female scholars of the early modern period share Card’s desire that if there is a god, and god is perfect, then god should know the suffering that results to my own kids if I lash out in anger), but they were also theists who defended divine perfection in spite of the evil in the world. Fascinating stuff!
When archaeologists and anthropologists head off to examine ancient ruins, they still pack the traditional tools—the pointed trowel, the measuring tape, the hand broom and the dustpan. But these days their backpack is also likely to contain a laptop computer to help record and preserve the fruits of their careful searches.

More and more, contemporary researchers are turning to electronic measuring tools, databases, geographical information systems and reconstruction software to help discover and preserve data from old burial grounds, living camps or ancient cities. On the narrative side of this history, educators also are discovering that digital humanities tools such as interactive websites offer valuable ways to introduce students to and excite them about the lifestyles and cultures of ancient peoples. This mingling of old knowledge and new technology is becoming common at UTSA, where faculty and students are learning how to build interactive tools that preserve information in useful ways for future scholars.

**Mapping the Ancient World**

“My students built something that all students in this school and elsewhere will be able to use as a resource in the future,” said William Duffy, a lecturer in classics and philosophy at UTSA. His undergraduate students in a recent Ancient Travel and Ethnography class were sent on a virtual trip through ancient cities. During their “Roadrunners’ Guide to the Ancient World” project, the students used the Internet, books and other available resources to learn and document all they could about less commonly studied ancient cities from the oldest known civilizations. They then wrote copy and assembled visual aids for travel guide websites to each of their cities. The guides covered topics such as local demographics, economy and customs, and worthwhile tourist attractions that visitors might want to see.

Students were required to choose two cities each, one in either Greece or Italy and one outside those regions, and Duffy stipulated that all city descriptions had to contain information from throughout its settlement in antiquity. Future classes will be assigned lesser-known cities from the Hellenistic period, or the years between the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC and the conquest of Egypt by Rome in 30 BC. Many took to the challenge with gusto, Duffy said, adding, “I didn’t even know myself about some of the cities the students picked!” The class project ended up with 52 cities all over Europe and the Middle East, including locations in what are now England, Germany, Pakistan, Libya and Ukraine.

“They could actually see how big the ancient world really was,” Duffy said. “They put themselves in the shoes of a Roman trader or traveler who would go there.”

Students familiar with technical requirements helped build a web interface that their classmates could access. As the semester progressed, student-produced material began to go online (see the web extra). From a Google map on the front page, visitors can link to any of the cities, where there are photos and narratives about the history and commerce of the city, along with links to other informative sites.

Besides learning about the history and culture of their project cities, students also developed and honed skills in writing, visual presentation and basic web technology, Duffy said. They even impressed their teacher by finding things he did not know. “I don’t think I have ever learned as much from a student research project as I did from this one,” Duffy said.

**Digital Reconstruction**

UTSA anthropology graduate student Leah McCurdy is a different sort of time traveler who is also learning how to incorporate digital tools. With a strong interest in anthropological, architectural, and archeological research, McCurdy earned a Master’s degree with a thesis that incorporated three-dimensional modeling and virtual reconstruction of the Xunantunich Palace, an architectural marvel built between 750 and 900 AD in the Maya lowlands of what is now the Central American country of Belize. The nation was a hotbed of Mayan culture and is home to some of its most majestic remnants.

McCurdy is now building on her earlier research as she works toward a doctoral degree in anthropology. She is undertaking a detailed examination of the Castillo, a magnificent, soaring stone edifice that is part of the Xunantunich complex and is one of the tallest ancient buildings in Belize.

Initial excavations and studies of this major Central American tourist attraction were completed some years ago. McCurdy is continuing excavations and adding interpretive work to build upon this existing knowledge. With the latest in computer-assisted tools, she is working to understand the construction of the Castillo from start to finish, including the skills and training needed and acquired by the people who built it—the architects, brick masons and general laborers. She is also incorporating earlier research into a single three-dimensional database for a comprehensive look at ancient buildings.

“Architecture has been recognized as an important evidentiary component of archaeology since its birth, digital tools offer precise and accurate ways to explore architecture from an archaeological perspective.”

“I am trying to interpret and understand everything that goes on—the design, planning, recruitment of labor and actual construction. Virtual reconstruction helps you in all those different aspects.”

An electronic record also preserves images and data for the long term.

“We record everything now, just in case something happens and you don’t have the actual artifact or structure in the future,” McCurdy said. “You have a record that is stored there for future archaeologists to come along and put together in some different way or combine it with other data for a different research project.”

Even with all these technological improvements, most archaeologists still believe there is nothing like the real thing. Computers can never replace the thrill of fieldwork, the painstaking, detail-oriented excavation of archeological sites inch by inch, sifting through the mounds of dirt in search for the artifacts left behind by people who walked the Earth thousands of years before us. What contemporary archaeologists are doing is developing ways to use modern tools to enhance learning and preserve the knowledge derived from this fieldwork for future students.

“You just can’t do it without digging,” said McCurdy, who has made six field trips to Xunantunich. “If you don’t get your hands dirty, it doesn’t seem like real archaeology.”

**WEB EXTRAS**


Each summer Catholics from across the world embark on a days- and often weeks-long procession from dozens of towns throughout Poland to the Jasna Góra Monastery in Częstochowa, a shrine considered by many to be the country’s spiritual nucleus. On August 15, the feast of the Assumption of Mary, tens of thousands of pilgrims crowd all roads leading into the city to filter through the famous monastery’s Chapel of our lady, past the discarded crutches and ex-votos (offerings) of the miraculously healed, and offer up their own most profound hopes to the image of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa. Staring not back at them, but through them with a piercing gaze, the dark-skinned Virgin Mary bestows her famously just blessing on these and the nearly five million devotees that visit Jasna Góra every year.

The pilgrimage, part of a centuries-old tradition, is an enduring expression of Catholic worship. Thousands of Black Madonnas in the form of paintings and statues are venerated in countries like Spain, France, Italy, Switzerland, and Russia, their shrines representing the world’s most famous and frequented Marian (that is, centered around the Virgin Mary) sites. While most of the icons are concentrated in Europe – and particularly in the Mediterranean – they are also found in the Americas. Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico is one such example that, like the Black Madonna in Poland, serves as a vital aspect of the country’s religious pulse.

Yet for all her prevalence and influence, the Black Madonna remains a surprisingly misunderstood figure in mainstream Christianity. Too often, racism and ignorance obscure her true origins. One common account of the Black Madonna in France’s Chartres Cathedral holds that her skin was once white, but became dark over the centuries due to exposure to candle soot. This theory, although easily disproven, is accepted in many locations throughout Europe. In other cases, icons have been purposely whitened, such as in Rome’s Santa Maria del Popolo Church, where the representation displayed in the main altar has been bleached, while the same image on the choir altar remains black. In southern Spain, the icon of the Virgin of Regla, originally a single wooden statue, was split in half to separate the Jesus figure from its mother under the pretext of clothing the Madonna with luxurious robes – except that a white Christ Child, rather than the original dark-skinned version, was put back in its place. Given this frequent practice of cultural whitewashing, it comes as no surprise how little is known about the actual identity of this enigmatic figure.

Dr. Malgorzata Oleszkiewicz-Peralba, associate professor of Latin American Literary and Cultural Studies in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, studies syncretic religions and representations of the divine feminine. Her acclaimed book, The Black Madonna in Latin America and Europe, explores the historical precedents of modern-day Black Madonna worship. “It goes all the way back to primordial times,” she says. “In Russia and Poland, the Virgin Mary is referred to as the Mother of God. This is very close to her original name of Mother Goddess.”

As Dr. Oleszkiewicz-Peralba explains, the Mother Goddess, revered throughout all of human history in forms that change according to time and culture, represents the essential state of reality, that which gives birth to all of material existence. “She is the mother of universes, identified with the primal darkness and chaos of the universe, and with the moist and fertile black earth; her many historical incarnations include the Roman goddess Ceres, the Anatolian and Roman Cybele, Artemis in ancient Greece, Kali in India, and the Ancient Egyptian Mother Goddess Isis. Like the Black Madonna, these and a host of pre-Christian goddesses associated with the earth and fertility were commonly depicted as crowned, seated on a throne, and holding a divine child on their lap.

Asked whether contemporary Black Madonna devotees are in fact practicing an ancient form of worship within the context of modern-day Catholicism, Dr. Oleszkiewicz-Peralba explains: “I don’t see much difference. They’re worshipping the same divine feminine element...an ancient tradition in modern times.”
that has always been revered. It’s a continuity, but one that is waning with the spread of materialism and consumerism. As these new tendencies gain influence, the meaning of rituals and the sacred significance behind religious icons fades into the background. We forget why we do things. We lose the original meaning.”

“For example, in the shrine in Eureka, Missouri dedicated to the Black Madonna of Częstochowa, the replica is much whiter and looks like it’s gotten a facelift. It’s as if the same concepts of beauty marketed on TV and in magazines have been applied to it.” Dr. Oleszkiewicz-Peralba observes the same process of materialistic adaptation at work in contemporary festivals throughout the world, once rich in ritual meaning and tied to the turning of agricultural seasons, which are gradually becoming reduced to mere financial ventures. “It seems that in order for something to be more commercially viable, it is often emptied of sacred connotations. Another example of this is yoga, which is presented simply as a form of gymnastics in the West. Of course, this is not the meaning of yoga at all. Its real purpose is to align the body and mind. But this idea would be rejected by many consumers and is commonly discarded to increase marketability. In a similar way, Christianity coopted the Mother Goddess figure as the Virgin Mary.”

Indeed, it was common practice in early Christianity for pagan shrines and icons to be incorporated and modified according to the interests of the religion. In many cases churches were built upon pre-Christian structures, and devotion to the old relics continued under the aegis of the new hosts. A clear example can be observed in the southern French village of Saints-Maries de la Mer, where thousands of Romani people make a pilgrimage every year to worship the icon of Sara-la-Kali, their patron saint and one of the unofficial Black Madonnas. The statue is kept in a church built over a site that once held a pagan temple, within a crypt that evokes the Mother goddess through its physical representation as the womb of the earth. Sara-la-Kali, known as Saint Sarah in Christian terminology, represents a combination of the Virgin Mary and the Hindu goddess Kali. The figure, says Dr. Oleszkiewicz-Peralba, “stands on the margins between the Church’s official acceptance and sanction. These types of devotion continue to exist today and new forms are being created. They are very syncretic, containing layers of tradition, in this case from Europe and India.”

Syncretism, defined by Dr. Oleszkiewicz-Peralba as the blending of multiple cultural traditions giving way to a novel form of expression, implies both continuance and forgetting. While the Mother Goddess’ transference to Christianity brought with it a degree of institutional erasure, her presence continues to effect an irrevocable impression on human consciousness in the West through the figure of the Black Madonna. Dr. Oleszkiewicz-Peralba’s upcoming book, currently in manuscript form, is an extension of her Black Madonna research and focuses on representations of fierce feminine goddesses throughout Europe, Asia, and the Americas. “Most of these strong female figures have been either sweetened, demonized, relegated to fairytales, ridiculed, or dismissed. Kali is the only one that is still exalted and worshipped as a goddess in India,” she says.

Perhaps one day the Black Madonna will regain her throne as the acknowledged Mother Goddess, the progenitor of reality, humanity, and the unifying element among spiritual traditions both ancient and modern. But for millions of devotees the world over who worship her, no such wait is necessary. Knowingly or subconsciously, these individuals practice a powerful form of worship that connects them to the very roots of humanity and even beyond, to the origins of the universe itself.
Few in San Antonio might know that more than 5,000 political refugees from around the world reside in the city, given asylum from political persecution and life-threatening circumstances such as genocide and war. These exiled families have come to the U.S. to begin life anew, and their children are in need of basic requirements such as clothing, school supplies, and grooming products.

Demonstrating its commitment to community service, the UTSA chapter of sociology honor society Alpha Kappa Delta raised funds to help support child refugees enrolled at the Colonies North and Glen Oaks elementary schools in northeast San Antonio.

In all, the society donated:
- 105 pairs of pants
- 115 shirts
- 18 belts
- 48 pairs of underwear
- 29 pairs of socks
- 75 toothbrushes
- 75 tubes of toothpaste

We share some of the touching thank-you letters written by the children to the members of AKD.
Sociology Researchers Explore the Health Implications of Religiosity

By Patrick Collins

A s a graduate student at Duke University in the late 1980s specializing in politics and economic development, Dean’s Distinguished Professor of Social Science Christopher Ellison noted a significant omission in sociology studies. His undergraduate degree in Religious Studies and his upbringing in the religion-saturated South highlighted the surprising fact that only a limited body of research had been conducted on the influence of religious practices and institutions in the U.S. This piqued my interest,” he recalls. The observation brought about a sharp course correction in his academic trajectory at an auspicious time when, less than a mile down the road, researchers at Duke Medical Center were beginning to explore the health implications of religion from a physiological perspective. “I was very fortunate to find myself at ground zero for the emergence of this multidisciplinary field. Once I began to read and excite myself, I became convinced that this was an important direction for my future work.”

Skip ahead to 2005, when Associate Professor Gabriel Acevedo launched a promising career at UTSA. The young professor, armed with a PhD and two master’s degrees from Yale, brought a unique perspective to his new environment: “As an undergraduate I double majored in sociology and theology and have always had an interest in religion from a physiological perspective. I was very fortunate to find myself at ground zero for the emergence of this multidisciplinary field.”

Today, these parallel paths have intersected to form an exciting research synergy in COLFA’s Department of Sociology, where the two professors — now colleagues — are investigating multiple and complementary aspects of the religion-health connection to uncover fascinating new insights. Primary among their findings is compelling evidence that communal forms of religious worship can dramatically increase the health of practitioners, often providing stunning results that argue for the consideration of religion as a powerful form of health management.

“In a sample of more than 22,000 U.S. adults,” says Ellison, “we found that persons who attend religious services more than once per week have a risk of death that is approximately 20 percent lower than those who do not attend services at all.” He points out that the difference held true among subjects closely matched in characteristics such as age, background, and prior health status. “This means that public forms of worship have the greatest benefit on health effects was established between collective religious participation translates into useful social networks and positive lifestyle choices, which then translate into positive health outcomes. I would hypothesize that immersion in such positive institutional settings, religious or secular, could have positive effects on mental health.”

Even in the face of its imperfections, both researchers agree that the health effects of religion are too significant to ignore. Importantly, these benefits can become available to non-religious individuals who take part in caring, responsible social groups that offer emotional support, practical aid, and encouragement of healthy life choices. Secular activities such as meditation, exercise, and stress reduction techniques can also bring about effects similar to those traditionally associated with life-affirming religious beliefs. “There are non-religious ways of finding meaning and purpose, and alternative value systems that can promote forgiveness, gratitude, humility, and other character strengths that have been shown to be correlated with mental and physical well-being,” says Ellison.

“My findings on a sample of Texas residents indicate that public forms of practice have the greatest benefit on overall health, while private religiosity may actually negatively impact mental health functioning,” he says. The study suggests that the link between religion and health may be more closely related to the collective nature of public worship than to its religious elements.

Ellison is careful to note that religion is not always a positive factor in people’s lives. He stresses that many religious individuals struggle with chronic doubts about their faith brought about by personal crises, world events, or a perceived lack of response to their prayers.

“For some people, especially those who are most religiously committed, these struggles can be extremely troubling and can actually become sources of stress and trauma.” Even in its collective form, he says, religion can play a negative role. “Religious communities are not always warm and supportive. Indeed, they can be sites of significant conflict over everything from theology to politics to local church affairs. They can even be places in which petty jealousies and non-religious disagreements are played out.”

As promising as their findings are, the pioneering sociologists have acknowledged that their work is far from complete. They are aware that religious participation translates into useful social networks and positive lifestyle choices, which then translate into positive health outcomes. I would hypothesize that immersion in such positive institutional settings, religious or secular, could have positive effects on mental health.”

In a study carried out by Acevedo, a clear distinction in health effects was established between collective religious devotion and private practices such as personal prayer, meditation, and exposure to religious media. “My findings on a sample of Texas residents indicate that public forms of practice have the greatest benefit on overall health, while private religiosity may actually negatively impact mental health functioning,” he says. The study suggests that the link between religion and health may be more closely related to the collective nature of public worship than to its religious elements.

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Unmistakable Benefits

Even in the face of its imperfections, both researchers agree that the health effects of religion are too significant to ignore. Importantly, these benefits can become available to non-religious individuals who take part in caring, responsible social groups that offer emotional support, practical aid, and encouragement of healthy life choices. Secular activities such as meditation, exercise, and stress reduction techniques can also bring about effects similar to those traditionally associated with life-affirming religious beliefs. “There are non-religious ways of finding meaning and purpose, and alternative value systems that can promote forgiveness, gratitude, humility, and other character strengths that have been shown to be correlated with mental and physical well-being,” says Ellison.

“I would never argue that God ‘blesses’ people with positive health,” says Acevedo. “Rather, our research tends to indicate that active religious participation translates into useful social networks and positive lifestyle choices, which then translate into positive health outcomes. I would hypothesize that immersion in such positive institutional settings, religious or secular, could have positive effects on mental health.”

So should doctors recommend activities that emulate health-enhancing religious practices? “While optimistic about the role of religion in health care, Ellison argues for a cautious way forward. ‘It would be ill-advised for individuals to turn to religion and spirituality mainly to seek better health. And it would be inappropriate, practically and ethically, for health care providers to recommend or prescribe religious or spiritual practices to patients.’ Rather than prescribe religion outright, he suggests, health care providers and mental health professionals might gather information about the religious beliefs and communities of patients. “These factors could influence attitudes and preferences with regard to treatment,” he says. “They could also affect the kinds of spiritual issues that may arise for patients, as well as the coping resources and support systems to which they have access.”

While proper health care is less accessible, such as in underserved communities where religious involvement tends to be higher than in more affluent areas, congregations can play an important role by serving as conduits for health education and disease prevention programs. The research findings could also be put to use by clergy and counselors who wish to enhance the health and quality of life of their community members, and are applicable as well in a larger societal context. “I believe church leaders, congregants, and policy makers all have an interest in better understanding these effects,” says Acevedo.

While potential applications of the researchers’ discoveries are already dauntingly — and excitingly — broad, Ellison believes one effect of his and Acevedo’s work will be to facilitate a greater understanding of religion’s social dynamics. “The findings may serve to enhance public appreciation for the role that religion and spirituality play in the lives of many individuals, and in contemporary society in general,” he says.

Religion will continue to be a major force in contemporary society, agrees Acevedo. “Islam is growing around the world, while immigration is changing the religious landscape of many American cities. Finally, the growing ‘inagachurch’ phenomenon, as well as continued ties between religion and politics in the U.S., are just a few of the factors that will continue to interest scholars and the public at large.”

Christopher Ellison

Gabriel Acevedo
UNDERSTANDING Ourselves

Psychology Research Offers Advice for Life

By Nancy S. Diehl and Patrick Collins

Have you ever wondered what academic research has to do with actual day-to-day living? If at any point in your life you've struggled to gain a sense of social belonging, dealt with crippling amounts of stress, or wondered how to make more meaningful connections in your online interactions, the question may be easier to answer than you'd imagined. You need look no further than the Department of Psychology, where faculty researchers recently published a number of studies that explore real-life situations and offer practical insights into the personal and interpersonal dynamics at play in our everyday lives.

David Pillow: A Sense of Belonging

One of the most cited articles in psychology, “The Need to Belong” by Roy Baumeister and Mark Leary, argues that belongingness is a core human need that is met when individuals enjoy frequent, positive interactions with one another in the context of a stable and mutually caring relationship. Despite the work’s acceptance, no one had attempted to apply its conclusions in a direct evaluation of the effectiveness of individual relationships. So David Pillow and graduate student Glenn Malone took up the challenge.

In a series of related studies, the research team asked subjects to evaluate each of their close relationships based on seven criteria, including length of time in the relationship, frequency of interactions, and expectation of the relationship’s future success. “If the relationship met all the criteria, we designated it as a whole relationship—a relationship that helps to fully satisfy one’s belongingness needs,” says Pillow. “If it met some, but not all criteria, we designated it as a partial relationship.”

While it comes as no surprise that whole relationships were found to positively affect one’s sense of belonging, a number of interesting possibilities were revealed by the studies. Partial relationships, Pillow’s work suggests, not only appear to not contribute to belongingness but could actually damage wellbeing. This means that having a few close, long-term relationships may be healthier than maintaining a greater variety of casual ones.

For Pillow, “the big take-away is that frequency of interactions is important. I think finding someone, or a small group, that you can spend quality time with once a week is a good goal.”

Mary McNaughton-Cassill: Stressors of a New Era

In her recently published book, Mind the Gap: Managing Stress in the Modern World, Mary McNaughton-Cassill examines stresses brought about by modern lifestyles. Over her 20-year teaching career, she says, “I gradually found myself writing more and more lectures that differed from the chapters in the standard stress management textbooks.” She incorporated her lectures into a book designed both for university courses and to serve as a useful guide for those who wish to understand the sources of stress in daily life.

The title for the book, McNaughton-Cassill explains, came to her while traveling in England. “I was already thinking about the book when I had the chance to go to a stress management conference in London. While there, I took the Tube (London’s subway system) and heard the repeated warnings to ‘Mind the gap’ while getting on the train. During one of those rides I realized that the phrase was the perfect title for the book, since I routinely describe stress as the ‘gap’ between what we have and what we want, and argue that the only real way to manage that gap is to manage or ‘mind’ your own thoughts.”

Mental assessment is crucial to stress management, says McNaughton-Cassill, because avoiding stress entirely is not an option. “A moderate amount of stress motivates people, but high stress levels interfere with performance, while chronic stress is correlated with poor physical and mental health.”

McNaughton-Cassill believes that many of society’s stressors are the result of modern demands. Sources of stress often include time pressure, information overload, and social expectations. We also deal with debilitating amounts of mental stimulation, spending hours every day surfing the Internet and watching TV. Combined with insufficient rest, lack of exercise, and limited contact with nature, we’re asked of ourselves to put up with demands they simply weren’t designed to handle. A situation, McNaughton-Cassill says, our grandparents didn’t have to deal with.

“We have very little quiet time,” she concludes. “We have to rethink our priorities and how we live our lives, even if that means turning off the phone for an hour.”

Ray and Stella G. Lopez: Connecting Meaningfully Online

In a study conducted with husband Ray Lopez, Stella G. Lopez examined online interactions between strangers in a two-way messaging environment. “We asked subjects to evaluate perceptions of themselves, their online partners, and the interactions themselves,” she says. “We found that the more the participants accurately inferred the content of each other’s thoughts or feelings during the online interaction, the more they reported a qualitatively positive, less awkward, and less guarded interaction.” Crucial to the subjects’ ability to connect in this way was the degree to which they were attuned to their partner’s experience over their own. “The more partner-focused participants were, the more they experienced a sense of ‘we-ness’ during the interaction,” says Lopez.

Another interesting finding of the study suggests that certain dynamics involved in traditional conversations also apply to electronic interactions, despite the more limited nature of the exchange. “Even without the nonverbal behavioral and vocal cues typically available in face-to-face interactions, the quality of the online interaction was influenced by participants’ personality traits,” she says, noting that healthy self-esteem and sociability are as important to establishing a positive, mutually fulfilling interaction online as they are in the physical world.

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A young girl of seven sits transfixed and horrified, tightly gripping the plush armrests of her seat in New Orleans’ iconic Joy Theatre. Looming above her on the seemingly stories—full screen is the unforgettable image of Katrina, the vampire queen played by Grace Jones in the horror film Vamp (1985). As the credits roll, the girl is awash in relief and pride at having made it through the screening. Then the unimaginable happens. Her Aunt Emrol announces that the movie was so good, they’ll be staying for the next showing. The girl huddles back into her seat, fearfully anticipating another round of torture. But as the movie plays once more, stripped this time of the elements of surprise and mystery, a shift occurs in the girl’s perception—and her path in life becomes irrevocably altered.

Years later, Dr. Kinistra Brooks sits in her office in the Department of English surrounded by posters advertising her popular and innovative courses that explore the intersection of race and gender in the genres of science fiction, fantasy, and horror. “My Aunt Emrol gave me a great gift that day by awakening my intellectual curiosity toward horror,” she reminisces about her childhood experience. “Watching Vamp again allowed me to really engage with the film rather than simply react to it.” The event, she says, set her on a path of personal inquiry that ultimately gave rise to the examination of black female characters in popular media that characterizes her teaching and publishing today.

That day at the Joy Theatre brought with it another important realization. Even as the young Kinistra became increasingly enthralled by the enigmatic allure of Katrina, a dawnpire queen, she began to investigate black women writers and directors whose work was based in horror, science fiction, and fantasy. “Most people know about Octavia Butler and a growing number know Tananarive Due,” says Brooks. “But very few have heard of L.A. Banks, Nalo Hopkinson, Phyllis Alessa Perry, N.K. Jemisin and Nnedi Okorafor. A goal of my monograph is to give a scholarly introduction to some of these lesser-known yet incredibly talented women.”

Taking a break from her demanding project, Brooks spoke with us about her teaching and research.

Q: What led you to this unique field of research?
A: I think black women in horror have been ignored or constructed as characters based on dangerous stereotypes. I do a lot of work on the comic book version of The Walking Dead (2002) — so much better than the television series — and I find the character of Michonne fascinating, sometimes horrifically so. She was the tipping point for me to explore black women in horror. Her character’s treatment by series creator Robert Kirkman was so inhumane and heartbreaking, I was simply devastated. I knew I had to do something, to find more complicated ways in which black women were manifested in horror.

Q: How did the highly interdisciplinary perspective you bring to your work come about?
A: I believe my background in Comparative Literature, which is different from English, helps the interdisciplinary nature of my research. Comparative Literature allows me to compare across texts—literature, film, comic books, etc. It also allows me to compare across national borders; I study literature of the African diaspora, so I have texts by women who are African American, Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Canadian, and Nigerian.

I also believe the genre of horror itself is interdisciplinary. Horror is everywhere. On television, film, literature, and comic books. There are also horror toys and figurines — I have one of Michonne and Rick — as well as “icons” or conventions where genre fans gather and squeeze out together. I’ve been to WisCon and The World Horror Convention, where I got a chance to attend the Bram Stoker Awards ceremony with Linda Addison, a three-time winner who is also a black horror poetess. Next on my list is DragonCon in Atlanta and SlayerCon – because I will always love Buffy Anne Summers!

Q: Your courses are very popular among students. What are your experiences teaching horror in the classroom?
A: I find that I get several types of students in my classes, all pretty interesting in their own way. There are the true genre fiction fans who are already experts on particular authors and specific movements in the genre, and are totally geeked to take an official class. I love those students! Sometimes they will send me extra films and articles they know I will love. I try to build upon their energy and let them share their knowledge and excitement with ten-minute class presentations. I also have to be careful to temper their geekdom because I must use the first third of the semester to do something, to find more complicated ways in which black women were manifested in horror. I always tell my students that even if they never read another book or watch another film, my job is to help them build their own critical framework. I help them think about how they see the world and teach them to critically analyze information — from a graduation speech to a cereal commercial – so they can make solid and informed decisions in their careers and personal life.

Another group of students I encounter are those who mistake the subject of the class for an opportunity to make an easy A. I remove that illusion quickly and I lose some students that way. Again, that is okay. But it’s the ones that decide to stay and make a go of it that are so surprising! As they begin to see the themes and patterns in the fiction, reading and incorporating the different critics, I see the ideas starting to connect and the wheels begin to turn, and half-way through the semester they begin making graduate-level insights into the literature and the films — that’s why I love teaching!
ALUMNI PROFILE ANDREA ANWEI CHEN

TAMING THE BEAST

COLFA Alum Brings Magic to the Big Screen

By Rudy Arispe

While most people who chase a career in the film industry aspire to appear on the silver screen, Andrea Anwei Chen is content to work behind the scenes. To put it more precisely, Chen, in her role as a post-production visual effects manager, helps create the scenes themselves, and her work to date has been far from going unnoticed. Last year, she worked on Disney's "Beasts of the Southern Wild," which garnered Oscar nods for Best Picture, Best Actress, Best Director and Best Adapted Screenplay.

During her work for the critically acclaimed feature film, Chen oversaw a team of 30 artists responsible for 81 visual effects shots, an experience she characterized as "a beast" in itself. "It's hard work. I've gone days without sleeping," said Chen, 25, by phone from her home in San Francisco. "It took us four months to complete the film (for the Sundance Film Festival) and then we were asked to fix a couple of shots after Fox Searchlight Pictures picked it up for distribution."

"After scenes are filmed, it goes to editing and then it goes to sound and visual effects," she explained. "You get to see the final result of the film. You're one of the last people to see the shots before they were altered."

One example of Chen's work involved removing a baby that Wink, portrayed by actor Dwight Henry, carries in his arm during a boat scene with child actress Quvenzhané Wallis, who delivers a captivating performance as Hushpuppy. "All of this is done with computers. It's all digital," she said. "With Beasts, about 70 percent of the visual effects we worked on you wouldn't know are there."

After viewing the film following its national release, Chen would have guessed the film was to become a box-office hit. "I saw the first cut and was not entirely sure what the focus was or what the director was trying to convey," she said. "After its huge success at Sundance, I was very intrigued and really wanted to see it again to see what the hype was all about."

"I got an invitation to Skywalker Ranch (the headquarters of director George Lucas' production company) to see the film and attend a Q&A with the director and the two main actors. It was amazing to see that all hard work up on the big screen."

Chen's journey to filmmaking was not a direct one. After graduating in 2008 from UTSA with a bachelor's degree in communication, she moved to China to work as a journalist. During her six months in the country, she edited for the Guangzhou Morning Post and wrote English-language articles from the perspective of a visiting Chinese American.

After China, Chen headed for San Francisco to attend the Academy of Art University. While her original goal was to become a 3D animator, she was immediately drawn to visual effects and enrolled in a compositing for production class. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Prior to completing her program Chen was given the opportunity to work as a visual effects artist on a feature film, and thus began her association with Disney's "Beasts of the Southern Wild." Since the film's release Chen has continued to build an impressive resume. She has done post production work for the short film "Cocada Princess," which illustrates the final moments of a "cocada" life, as well as for the feature film "Frogtale Station," which chronicles the true story of the shooting of San Francisco Bay Area resident Oscar Grant. She has also worked on the sci-fi thriller "Rocael" and created effects for the Marvel "Thor 2" trailer. "I got to work with a lot of people from Marvel, which was cool," she said of that latest experience.

One of the unexpected rewards of Chen's hard work is the excitement of seeing her name in the credits. "It's always very surreal. I never imagined my name would be up there," she said. "For Beasts I actually missed seeing my credit the first time I watched the film because I was busy making sure everyone else's name was spelled correctly, and I was still very much overwhelmed at the fact that the film was so successful. I had to go watch it a second time when it premiered in San Francisco."

Chen is currently working as a full-time production assistant at eMotion Studios in Sausalito, California. The studio does production and post-production work for Adobe, GAF, and Hewlett-Packard commercials, among others.

Although she keeps busy behind the camera, there are moments when Chen ponders being on the other side of it. "I'm very camera shy, but once in awhile I'll try to get in front of the camera when I'm asked to," she said. "I worked on a jomatch.com commercial when I was at UTSA, and I'm in a Hewlett-Packard 'how to' video which hasn't been released yet."

My experience at UTSA was a memorable one. There are things I don't think I could've done at another school if it weren't for the experiences I gained. The communication department has helped me a lot in my success, especially thanks to the influential professors and mentors who helped me along the way. They are part of the reason why I chose the paths I did and why I think the way I do.

One of my very first professors was Ryan McPherson. He encouraged everyone to think outside the box and to experience things with an open mind, because one never knows what adventures are ahead. He's the reason why I decided to study abroad in Spain during one of my summers at UTSA.

Professor Sara DeTurk was the first to bring communication journal publications to my attention. She would talk about her experiences writing these journals and how there are always limitations to our work, how we shouldn't be biased, and how there's always room for improvement.

This led to my thesis-writing quest, which lasted almost two years, with Professor Viviana Rijjas. Towards the end, Professor Juyan Zhang helped me with the international aspects of my thesis because I was writing about China. It was definitely a giant learning experience about myself and about the area I was researching. This was the reason I decided to go to China to learn Chinese, travel, and see more so I could write about my experiences.

During my last few semesters at UTSA, Professor Seok Kang introduced me to a number of software programs. I became experienced with applications like Dreamweaver, InDesign, Photoshop, and AfterEffects. He's one of the reasons why I decided to pick up everything and move to San Francisco to learn how to become an animator.

Of course, this didn't go quite as planned because I became more interested in production, but I still use what I learned from him to this day.
The Power of Persistence

By Ashley Festa

As one of 13 children, Victoria Olivo often felt neglected growing up. Her mother, who had problems with alcohol, simply gave up. “She didn’t want to take care of us,” Olivo says. Her father and stepmother did what they could to make ends meet, but money was constantly a struggle. Olivo started working full time at age 17. She was never encouraged to continue her education. That was considered a waste of money.

But when Olivo found herself working 60- to 80-hour weeks in a downtown San Antonio clothing store, she realized that path wasn’t what she wanted for her life. She started steering in a different direction — toward higher education. Following that route meant she would be the first in her family to pursue a degree.

Her family didn’t offer much support. Her father reminded her that college was expensive, and she didn’t have the means to pay for it. Not one to be easily deterred, Olivo began classes at St. Philip’s College. Two years later, she started her studies at UTSA.

Now a senior on the verge of graduation, Olivo, 23, will earn degrees in both psychology and women's studies. On especially hard days, she reminded herself that there were a lot of people who didn’t believe in her, people who didn’t expect her to accomplish anything in life. “I’m really going to surprise them,” she says. “I don’t think anything can stop me from getting a Ph.D.”

Olivo wasn’t always so self-assured. When she was admitted to UTSA, she wasn’t sure what to study because she didn’t know what kind of job she could get with a bachelor’s degree. So she entered the College of Business, thinking she couldn’t go wrong. “I was trying to be smart about it,” she says. “But I realized it was not for me.”

She changed gears and headed into the College of Liberal and Fine Arts, deciding psychology suited her better. Then she took an introductory course in women’s studies.

“I was pretty skeptical at first,” she says, and admits she frequently argued with her professor. But it didn’t take long before she was hooked. “It made me understand more where I was coming from. I’m a feminist, and I’m proud of it,” Olivo says. The course taught her the true meaning of feminism, a knowledge that sparked a deeper appreciation of her own life.

Her voice radiates with passion as she talks about what she’s learned. “I had been taught that whatever anyone teaches you, then that’s true. Not to question it,” she says. Now, she’s no longer afraid to challenge others’ ideas. “I’m a more well-rounded person by questioning those things rather than just accepting them.”

Plans for the Future

After uncovering a love of women’s studies, Olivo declared it as a double major with psychology. She discovered links between the two courses of study and eventually found ties to business as well. Dr. Kristina Durante, assistant professor of marketing, was searching for a research assistant. Olivo’s interests made her a natural fit for the type of experiments Durante had in mind.

“She has an unbridled curiosity and passion for understanding human behavior,” Durante says. “I use an evolutionary theoretical foundation to inform my research on the consumer behavior of women and families. Victoria’s background in women’s studies allowed my research team to get a better understanding of other perspectives on our topic, which has been quite valuable to our writing and research design.”

Although Olivo loves working with Durante and enjoys the research, her heart is set on combining psychology and women’s studies. The portrayal of women in media such as video games intrigues her; she cites studies in which some participants were asked to play games depicting violence against women and afterwards were asked questions about the treatment of women. Those who played violent games responded more negatively than those who played non-violent games. Olivo plans to pursue similar research avenues on her way to a doctoral degree. Though it can be difficult to move straight into a Ph.D. program from undergraduate work, Olivo is confident she’ll be accepted.

Olivo credits UTSA with awakening a sense of curiosity she didn’t know she had. Then, her professors guided her into study avenues on her way to a doctoral degree. Though it can be difficult to move straight into a Ph.D. program from undergraduate work, Olivo is confident she’ll be accepted.

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From the insidious to the blatant, discriminatory images have circulated in commercial contexts, journalism, and the applied arts, and valiant responses have ranged from subtle coding to bold demonstration. An exhibition coming to UTSA graphically demonstrates the many ways that visual materials not only provide evidence of historic events, but also influence them. In January and February 2014, UTSA’s Department of Art and Art History will host For All the World to See: Visual Culture and the Struggle for Civil Rights, curated by Dr. Maurice Berger, research professor at the Center for Art, Design, and Visual Culture at the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. Co-organized by that institution and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, and adapted by Mid-America Arts Alliance, For All the World to See was made possible through NEH on the Road, a special initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), which also provided an exhibition grant to UTSA.

In September 1955, after the murder of her fourteen-year-old son Emmett Till by white supremacists, Mamie Till Bradley decided to have an open coffin so that others could see the brutality of racism in everyday life. Thousands of people attended the funeral, and the image of Emmett’s mutilated corpse became a flashpoint in the civil rights movement. The exhibition takes its title from Mrs. Bradley’s courageous public protest.

The exhibition includes photographs, television clips, art posters, and historic artifacts, including photographs from LIFE, JET, and EBONY magazines, CBS news footage, and clips from The Ed Sullivan Show. Both negative and positive imagery tell the story of the struggle for civil rights, from Aunt Jemima syrup dispensers and 1930s produce advertisements to Jackie Robinson baseball ephemera and 1960s children’s toys marketed to African Americans.

Along with For All the World to See, selections from the Paula and Edward Miles Collection will help place the representation of the African American experience in a broader context. This local collection includes hundreds of artworks by well-known and emerging artists.

The Struggle for Civil Rights in Texas

These exhibitions coincide with another exhibition, The Struggle for Civil Rights in Texas, on display at UTSA’s Institute of Texan Cultures from January 11 to March 30, 2014. The foundation for this exhibition was developed by UTSA students in an interdisciplinary seminar, “Exhibiting Civil Rights,” taught by Dr. Scott A. Sherer, associate professor of Art History, in summer 2013. For more information, contact the Institute of Texan Cultures at 210-458-2300 or visit www.texancultures.com.

The African American Studies Spring Symposium

The 7th Annual African American Studies Spring Symposium, “100 Years Forward in African American Literary Arts and Media,” shares the theme of these exhibitions. The all-day symposium on Thursday, February 20, 2014, UTSA Main Campus, includes presentations from a diverse array of scholars from across the nation. Featured guest speakers include Valerie Cassel Oliver, senior curator, Contemporary Arts Museum, Houston, and Dr. Howard Rambsy II, associate professor of English and Director of Black Studies, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville.

For All the World to See

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EVENT DETAILS

For All the World to See

UTSA Main Campus

Art Gallery, Arts Building

For additional information: http://art.utsa.edu or 210-458-4391

7th Annual African American Studies Spring Symposium, 100 Years Forward in African American Literary Arts and Media

UTSA Main Campus

Denman Ballroom, UC 2.01.28

For additional information: www.colfa.utsa.edu/english/aass or 210-458-6610

For All the World to See

UTSA Main Campus

Art Gallery, Arts Building

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Awards and Accolades

STUDENTS

Five of eight UTSA students selected for the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship Program for spring 2013 were COLFA students. The congressionally funded program is sponsored by the State Department Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The COLFA awardees were:

Kevin Forester, Modern Languages & Literatures
Ana Garcia, Psychology
Tori Gillum, Political Science
Richard Gonzalez, History
Esther Reyes, Modern Languages & Literatures

Gabriella Zundt, a communication and psychology major, was awarded the Gilman International Scholarship for summer 2013. The recipients are: Sonia Valencia, English
Jennifer Bonavia, Anthropology
Griette van der Heide, Anthropology

Two students in the Department of Anthropology were named University Fellows, a program for doctoral students to develop academic skills while providing service to their departments and the university. The $25,000 awards provide support for one academic year. The recipients are:

Chris Jarrett, Cultural Anthropology
Jennifer Bonavia, Biological Anthropology

Adrian McIntosh, Modern Languages and Literatures major in Japanese, won a trip to Japan by coming in first in the free speech division of the 24th Annual Texas Statewide Japanese Language Contest. The contest is sponsored by the Japan-America Society of Houston. For the competition, McIntosh composed and recited an original two-to-three minute speech in Japanese.

Members of the UTSA Concert Choir joined the San Antonio Symphony Masteringers on a concert tour of Italy, including singing at a Mass at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, the Basilica of Santa Croce in Florence, and the Basilica of San Marco in Venice.

ALUMNI

Erin Ranft, recent English Ph.D. graduate in the Department of English, was awarded a Summer NEH Fellowship to participate in an African American Poetry Project at the University of Kansas.

Eric Yasi, a recent Modern Languages & Literatures graduate, was selected by the Japanese Exchange and Teaching Program (JET) to teach English and participate in other educational and instructional activities in Japan for one to five years.

Kasidee Schnee, 2013 communication graduate, has been admitted to St. Mary’s University School of Law with a dean’s scholarship.

The recipients are:

 Agencies to participate in the 2013 UTS legislative Scholars Program were from COLFA:

Tori Gillum, Political Science
Esther Reyes, Modern Languages & Literatures

Tavis Merriweather was a White House Intern in summer 2013. He served as the Chief of Staff inter to the First Lady, working in the Office of the First Lady within the Executive Office of the President.

Four of the eight students selected to participate in the 2013 UTSA Legislative Scholars Program were from COLFA:

Corrin Marah, a political science major, interned in the office of Rep. Lour Kolkhorst.

Awards and Accolades

Only a select number of faculty members across the System are chosen for the monetary award.

Congratulations to COLFA faculty members who received University Excellence Awards:

President’s Distinguished Achievement Award for Teaching Excellence
Jill Hernandez, Philosophy and Classics
Ann E. Ahern, Psychology

President’s Distinguished Achievement Award for Excellence in University Service
Mary McNaughton-Cassill, Psychology

President’s Distinguished Achievement Award for Performance, Creative Production, or Other Scholarly Activity
Matthew Dune, Music

President’s Distinguished Diversity Award
Ann Eisenberg, Psychology
Rhonda Gonzales, History, and Raquel Marquez, Sociology, were among the group awarded for the Women’s Professional Advancement and Synergy Academy

Awards and Accolades

Ken Little, Professor of Art, was appointed by the Texas State Legislature to serve one year as the 2014 Texas State Visual Artist 3-D. Nominees for consideration must have reached the highest levels of excellence and success and have earned a reputation for their work.

A great year for Joanna Lambert, Professor of Anthropology, who has been appointed to serve 3 years with the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in Geneva, Switzerland as an African primate expert on the Primate Specialist Group of the Species Survival Commission. JUCN, founded in 1948, advises the UN general assembly on issues related to nature and biodiversity.

Lambert has also been named a Fellow of the Royal Linnean Society of London. Founded in 1778, this is the oldest active natural history and biology society in the world. The Society is named in honor of the great Swedish naturalist Carl Linnaeus (1707-1778) whose botani cal, zoological and library collections have been in its keeping since 1829. The Patron of the Society is HRH Queen Elizabeth II and other Fellows include Charles Darwin, Alfred Wallace, and HRH Prince Charles of Wales.

Additionally, Lambert was named a fellow of the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). She was selected for her scientific or social efforts to advance science and its applications. Specifically, she was honored for her significant contributions to the field of primat e feeding biology at evolutionary and ecological scales. AAAS, established in 1848, is the world’s largest general scientific society.

Ethan Wickman, Assistant Professor of Music Composition & Theory, had a major compositional work premiere at the National Presidents Day Choral Festival at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington D.C. The commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the assassination of President Kennedy included Wickman’s 23-minute work, titled “Let the Word Go Forth,” which took its text from important presidential speeches of JFK.

Wendy Barker, Professor in the Department of English, had a poem, “Books, Bath Towels, and Beyond,” chosen to be included in Best American Poetry 2013, published by Southern Review.

Joel Christensen, Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Classics, was selected to serve as a fellow of the Center for Hellenic Studies for the 2013-2014 academic year. The fellowship provides access to Harvard University’s online resources, a travel allowance, and guidance and consultation from senior fellows.

Jill Hernandez, Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Classics, was awarded the Robert Papazian Annual Essay Prize. The prize was established by the International Journal of Philosophical Studies in memory of a young man executed for his ideas and political ideals. The topic that Hernandez won the prize is Integrity.

Raquel Marquez, Professor in the Department of Sociology and Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Studies, was included in the Online Schools Texas list of Top 14 Hispanic Professors in Texas. The goal of the list is to highlight post-secondary educators who have been recognized recently for excellence in the classroom or in the community.
MARY PAT STUMBERG
Mary Pat Stumberg and her family have touched lives across the San Antonio community and region through their philanthropy and generosity. Mary Pat and her late husband, Louis, have been longtime advocates of liberal and fine arts education in San Antonio. They have provided leadership that has been instrumental in moving UTSA towards its current status of an emerging Tier One research university. Most recently Mary Pat participated in a dollar-for-dollar matching opportunity from the H-E-B Faculty Research Fund and made a commitment to create the Stumberg Distinguished University Chair for the Dean of Liberal and Fine Arts at UTSA. Mary Pat said that she made this gift to ensure that the liberal and fine arts remains a strong aspect of a UTSA student’s education because she believes that they are key to preparing students for the workforce and providing skills that help them adapt to the ever-changing needs of society. When presented with the opportunity to create an endowed position in the College of Liberal and Fine Arts, Mary Pat said, “Dan Gelso has been a great dean, so if this [endowment] can help him leave a good mark on the university and provide for quality leadership into the future, while at the same time honoring his family, I then welcome the opportunity.” Mary Pat is an inspiration to the entire COLEA community as she brings innovative ideas and approaches to solve real issues in San Antonio and the greater society. It is comparatively easy to quantify giving in terms of amounts given or events chaired. What is much more difficult, and in many ways more important, is calculating the effect such giving has on the lives of those benefited, and on future generations. Mary Pat Stumberg has not only given at extraordinary levels, but has committed herself to showing leadership in philanthropy. She has given in such a way as to inspire and challenge others to give. Her contributions cannot be measured, only commended.

JOHN AND BOBBIE NAU
President and CEO of Silver Eagle Distributors John L. Nau III and his wife, Barbara “Bobbie” Nau, have pledged $1 million over the next five years to establish the Nau Scholars Program Fund. The fund will help UTSA recruit and support talented undergraduate and graduate students in history. The Nau Scholars program will support undergraduate students in history by creating scholarships that will help them focus on their education. Additionally, it will create fellowships and teaching assistantships for master’s students in history. The fellowships, one focusing on Texas history and another on the U.S. Civil War era, will provide UTSA graduate students with valuable teaching experience. The gift also will allow UTSA to introduce new instructional technologies in the history curriculum, preparing students for matriculation into top doctoral history programs.

WING CHING LAM
When Wing Ching Lam retired after a long career working as a mechanical engineer on five continents for Carrier International, he moved to San Antonio to be near his son Victor and daughter-in-law Mary, and their family. Life had not always allowed for family to be in close proximity, as Wing Ching and Wai Ching Lam were married during World War II while students at MIT, and found themselves stranded by the war and isolated from their families in the far east. In retirement, coming closer to family was a priority for Wing Ching, as was turning his focus towards his passion for history. They made many friends in the San Antonio Asian community as faithful participants in the San Antonio Asian Festival and several Chinese societies. Because of his keen interest in world history, particularly the migration of the Chinese peoples, they established the Wing Ching Lam Endowed Award in History at UTSA. Wing Ching Lam, age 95, passed away March 30, 2012. He was known and loved by all who knew him, revered as a loving husband of 67 years, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, brother, uncle, friend to many, and community advocate. He kept in touch with dear friends and relatives over the years and delighted in his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. Their tribute to him in return was to provide memorial contributions to the Wing Ching Lam Award at UTSA. For more than one year, the gifts kept coming in from all over the country which ultimately allowed the Wing Ching Lam Award to be upgraded to an endowed scholarship for the Department of History. Wing Ching Lam’s legacy will now forever be a part of the history and fabric of UTSA and will support students and their love for history in perpetuity.
COLFA at a Glance 2012–2013

NEW PROGRAMS
The Bachelor of Arts in Global Affairs offered by the Department of Political Science and Geography is the first of its kind at a public institution in Texas. Additionally, a new Master of Arts in Philosophy will be offered by the Department of Philosophy and Classics in Spring 2014.

Faculty HIGHLIGHTS
Nearly half of the 42 UTSA faculty members who earned tenure, promotion, and emeritus status in Fall 2013 are in COLFA. The number of endowed faculty in the college increased from six to nine.

GIFTS
The college received $2,481,575 in gifts during the 2012-2013 academic year, an increase of 22% over the previous year.

MAJORS CONCENTRATIONS CERTIFICATES
24 undergraduate degree programs with 12 concentrations, 2 undergraduate certificates in music, 15 graduate degrees and 5 graduate certificates are offered in the college.

ENRICHING the Community
COLFA faculty delivered numerous guest lectures throughout the community. Among them, Jill Hernandez lectured on the philosophical implications of evil to members of the Roseheart community, and Kat Brown and Jason Yaeger presented a talk titled “Maya Archaeology and the Revolutionary Technique of LiDAR Survey” to the Rotary Club at the Dominion.

Graduation Rates
Of the 416 incoming UTSA students tracked beginning in 2010, 55% of those who graduated in 3 years were COLFA students.

Another A for UTSA on the American Council of Trustees and Alumni’s “What Will They Learn?” report, which grades public and private universities on core curriculum instruction. UTSA received the top grade for the third year in a row and was one of only 22 out of 1,091 graded institutions to do so. COLFA provides four out of the university’s seven core subjects.