

HONORS

PROGRAM

December 2007

THE VIEW FROM HERE

BY DR. MONICA HALKA

“Try to sort out what’s important.” This deceptively simple advice, offered by Dr. Frank Löffler (CEE) over dinner with a few of our students one Monday evening in November, was a response to complaints about grading policies and the difficulty of Tech’s coursework. A couple of students apparently took his counsel to heart (if conversation overheard the following morning is an indicator), asking how exactly one knows, amid a deluge of problems and reading assignments and group projects, *what is really important*. That is an excellent question. Teaching us to answer it as individuals and as societies is arguably the very essence of what a college education should do. It takes every intellectual skill we professors extol, not only to answer it, but to know that the answer changes, to have the courage to ask the question again and again. It requires observation, analysis, critical thinking, active listening, mindfulness and a will to care. It takes honest discourse among colleagues. It needs inquiry and innovation and the acknowledgement that all disciplines have something to contribute. These habits of mind don’t come naturally to most people. They take attention and practice. Honors Program courses and activities attempt to foster the will to care about and to question thoughtfully, with an open mind, what’s important in everyday life and in the world. From that the other skills should follow – with practice.



Grizzly mother with cub, Banff, Canada

Get Ready for More Wild Courses!

BY CAROLA CONCES

The spring 2008 semester features the broadest selection of Honors Program special topics courses yet to accommodate our growing and diverse group of students. These will be the first special topics courses for most of the first-years, and the third for most of the second-years. Interdisciplinary and service learning approaches continue to be emphasized. Here’s the lineup:

- CHEM 2803 HP Origins of Life – Dr. Nick Hud
- COA 4803 HP Art and Architecture in the Muslim World – Dr. Sabir Khan
- EAS 2803 HP Energy, Environment & Society – Dr. Kim Cobb & Dr. Monica Halka
- ECE 2803 HP Failures and Disasters: Exploring Society/Technology Interactions – Dr. Joe Hughes
- ECON 4813 HP Globalization, Sustainability and Economic Development – Dr. Usha Nair
- HTS 2803 HP Semester in the City: Engaging English Ave. – Dr. Greg Nobles & Andrea Ashmore
- MGT 4803 HP Social Entrepreneurship – Dr. Terry Blum & Robert Thomas
- MUSI 3450 HP Analysis, Synthesis & Perception of Music – Dr. Parag Chordia
- PSYC 2803 HP Psychology of Creativity & Arts – Dr. Paul Verhaeghen
- PUBP 4803 HP Global Communications – Dr. James White

Arts & Leisure

"I AM BEOWULF!" Pssh. No, You're Not.

BY SARAH GILBREATH

There are movies that people want to see for the cinematography and movies that people want to see for the character development. There are films that people want to see because of the celebrities associated with them. And then there are films like Beowulf – the kind that people want to see so they can find out just how far the film deviates from the original story. In this particular case, the gap between the real story and the movie is as epic as the tale itself: it's as if someone decided they liked the names "Beowulf," "Hrothgar," and "Grendel" and the general time period, and to heck with the rest of it.

The original plot, as most of the nation read in high school, begins the same way as the movie does – a monster called Grendel terrorizes a Danish town, ruled by Hrothgar, until Beowulf comes to slay the monster. Beowulf kills Grendel, then Grendel's hideous mother, and lives out most of the remainder of his days in peace until he and a dragon fight to the death and kill each other. All in all, not a great story, truth be told, but since it's so historically and literarily important, it should at least be respected and kept intact. But no, Hollywood does it no such courtesy. Instead of killing Grendel's mother, Beowulf sleeps with her – well, why not, this is America, after, all – thus spawning the entire plot of the movie: you create your own evils by sleeping with sea monsters who make you king.

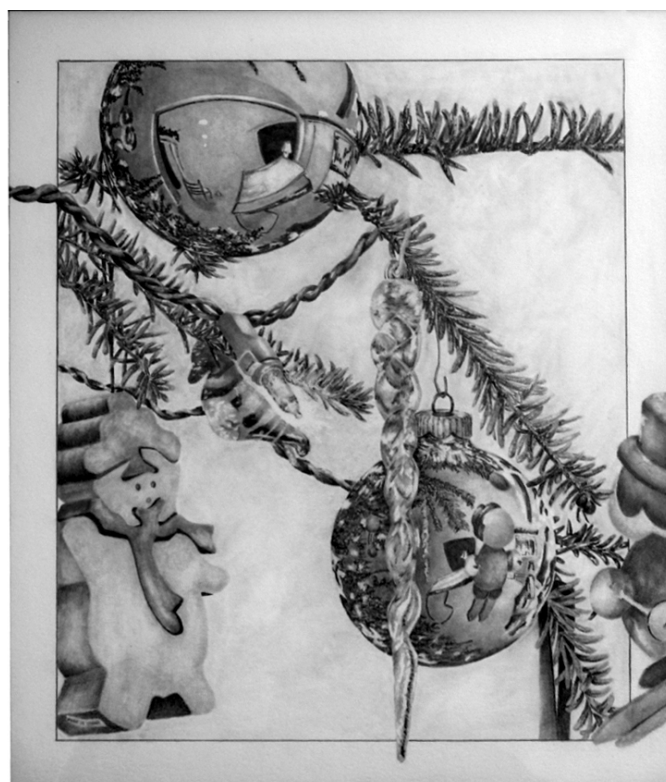
The plot is boring, stupid (she actually helps him a great deal until he breaks his promise with her) and an affront to lit majors everywhere. Besides that, the lead character repeatedly shouts "I am Beowulf!" and each time I wanted to yell back, "No you're not!" The animation, the other big draw for the movie, is also disappointing; while the characters who have been motion-captured look good, the rest look like video game animation of the worst quality. The two types look ridiculous sharing a screen. In short, this is the kind of movie that is best briefly enjoyed and then forgotten, but not analyzed. And hey, maybe someday someone will actually make a good version of this story.

Shell Culture Shock

BY CHRISTOPHER OLSON

Powerful warrior,
Do you feel out of place in my world?
Like a buoyed flame on the Dead Sea?
Or perhaps you still see yourself a soldier behind enemy lines.
Do you want to know a secret?
(Nay a fact!)
Your war is long over.
Submit!
Don a suit: cover your weathered arms and scarred chest.
Drive a Corvette: the shade is a luxury, the sun obsolete.
Get rich:
 You will be happy.
 You will be happy.
 You will be happy.

A Drawing by Cullen Welch



Applying Yoga Techniques to Finals Week

BY CAROLA CONCES

Stress levels are notoriously high on campus this time of year. Pressured by upcoming finals, many time-crunched students place studying above their physical and emotional needs. Exercise, sleep, and quiet time are more necessary than ever during periods of high stress, but ironically these are neglected most when they are needed most. Any time investment in physical well-being and a balanced mindset will more than pay off with increased efficiency during studying and improved recall of materials.

I am a huge fan of yoga as a method of fitness and stress relief. Even taking a 20-hour course load, I make time for an hour of yoga a day, and consider it one of my most essential habits. Even if you don't want to take a yoga class or do any poses, there are a few key ideas from yoga that you can incorporate into your college life.

Mindfulness:

I think the best translation of yoga is mindfulness. This just means being aware of yourself and your surroundings and not losing track of your goals. It means checking in with how you are feeling. Mindful studying is most effective: decide what you already know well, what you need to learn better, and what method works for you.

Pranayama:

Literally defined as the lengthening of the breath, pranayama is the art of breathing that is essential to yoga. Inhaling and exhaling is subconscious, but if you take the time to stop and take a few deep breaths, you will automatically feel more calm and relaxed. It's a good way to clear your head when you need to refocus. Here's a trick: before you start studying a particular subject, breathe in for four counts and out for four counts, while tapping your thumbs to each of your fingertips. Repeat that several times. Then, before your test in that subject, do it again, and it will help you remember what you studied.

SURVIVE FINALS!

The HP Office, 105 A. French Bldg, will provide exam survival packs (you know, food, etc.) for our students beginning Friday, December 7th.

Come on by and pick one up!

Cleansing toxins:

Certain yoga poses, especially those that involve twisting, claim to cleanse your body of toxins. I don't know if scientific evidence can support this, but there are a few things you can do in everyday life to feel more revitalized. The easiest and most important is to drink enough water. In fact, have a glass right now. Feel better? You also want to avoid high levels of caffeine and sugary or fatty foods that can mess up your sleep cycle and lead to crashing and fatigue.

If you do want to try some poses, the easiest way to get started is to look on YouTube for demonstrations. If you like it, sign up for classes at the CRC or around Atlanta.

Good luck and namaste!

Reflections on HP S

Engineering, Manufacturing, and Service Systems for Sustainability

BY STEPHANIE LU

“This class is about how our generation messed up the world for your generation, and finding ways to fix it.” I’m paraphrasing, but that is essentially the message Dr. Govindaraj delivered to Honors Program students last spring in hopes of capturing our attention. Indeed, he did just that. We ten students chose to participate in this particular seminar not because we were required to but because we wanted to, and it has not disappointed me. Because our class is so small, we get to talk intimately about our project (designing a sustainable city as an example for other cities around the world) and hear what each student has to say about their own or someone else’s topic. Also, the class is interdisciplinary, which allows for the development of so much more knowledge and perspective. Everyone, regardless of major, plays an essential part in the transdisciplinary project, intensifying the level of detail and unity the project is able to achieve. This teamwork not only benefits our project but also ourselves. As an architecture student, I enjoy seeing a computer scientist’s approach to efficient transportation and information logistics, as well as that of a physicist or industrial engineer.

Furthermore, Dr. Govindaraj teaches us more than we ever expected about sustainability – what it is, different ways of looking at it, what issues it presents, how to solve those issues in more ways than the obvious ones, how to solve those issues in our own fields of study, how to look more holistically at issues and at how solutions are intertwined and can overlap. Last, but certainly not least, this seminar is fun. We don’t merely work in class; we spend time with each other, as friends rather than classmates, something unachievable in a regular, lecture-based class. I thoroughly enjoy working with students of different intellectual backgrounds in creating a project we can be proud of. And I will admit this class makes me want to take more Honors Program special topics courses. Seriously, it has won my attention not only on sustainability, but also interdisciplinary collaboration and the Honors Program itself. Good job, HP.

Challenges of Outer Space

BY SARAH GILBREATH

Ah, it’s that magical time of year again – that time when we all get so little sleep due to projects, finals, and so on that we begin to hallucinate dancing sugary fruits (among other things). And so, as the semester draws to a close, we invariably find ourselves evaluating which classes we’d love to take again, and which ones we wish we’d never taken in the first place. Naturally, the HP special topics are a bit more of a risk than the regular classes, but a few of them are wild successes, and I’m happy to say that I’m in one of them: The Challenges of Outer Space.

More commonly referred to by the students as “rocket class” or “space class,” this HTS course is an interesting blend of history and aerospace – after that first test, you feel like you have the right to say that yes, you really are a rocket scientist (or at least you’re on your way). The topic is interesting even if you think you don’t like history, and the professor, Dr. Krige, makes everything clear by explaining important ideas in at least two ways. Additionally, he writes the notes on the board exactly as he wants the students to have them in their notebooks, so there is no confusion. Everyone knows exactly what is expected of them, which is a welcome change at Tech.

While one might think that a class on rocketry might be very heavy and difficult, the course is surprisingly fun. Dr. Krige keeps the class upbeat while talking about missiles (no easy task) and the personality of the astronauts. Moreover, he’s a very fair teacher, and he manages to put the engineering of a rocket into terms that everyone can understand – I never thought I’d be explaining rockets to anyone, but over Thanksgiving break, I found I could.

I don’t know of anyone in the class that doesn’t enjoy it. Granted, waking up early is never fun, but other than that, I genuinely think we’re all pretty glad to be there. This is one class that I hope the Honors Program will offer again.

Special Topics Courses

Soccer...and Political Economy?

BY MADDIE STODDART

I knew nothing about soccer. Scratch that, I mean I knew nothing about football. I know soccer... It's the most popular recreational sport in America, absorbs the weekends of countless suburban families across the nation and created the images of the "soccer mom" and the overzealous parent on the sidelines. Like many going into Dr. Kirk Bowman's class this fall - soccer, I knew.

Football, however, is another story. And in Bowman's HP special topic class examining the "International Political Economy of Soccer," we learned quickly that football is not a sport, but a lifestyle. From its savage beginnings as a mob activity kicking a head around a town square, it evolved past a mixture of the sports we know today as rugby and international football into multimillion dollar corporations that influence the politics and economics of states and FIFA, an organization that currently is arguably more powerful than the United Nations. Using a combination of film, books, discussion, and one fateful trip to the CRC's top floor, the class really allowed students to study the potential of football as an agent of civil society, especially as a method of creating support for (or a voice against) oppressive regimes like those of Franco and Mussolini, not to mention determining the breeding ground for the world's best players. Some in our class claimed that, like Pelé and Ronaldinho, the best come from Brazil. Others – namely Dr. Bowman– vehemently support Argentine footballers like Diego Maradona and Lionel Messi.

So if there are two things I learned in class, they are the following: like FC Barcelona is more than a team, football is more than a sport. And the best team, the very best team in the whole world of international football, is Argentina's Boca Juniors.

We'll see.



Homes before the Holidays

BY CAROLA CONCES

What is a home? What does it mean to dwell? The field of dwelling studies, which explores these types of questions, was the theme of Colonel Hugh Crawford's Honors Program English 1102 class last fall and this fall. Both courses began with readings from a selection of scholars in the field, and then took an unexpected direction at the initiative of the students. Last year, when I was in the class, we created a documentary video called "An Experiment in Modern Knowledge Spaces: the Library East Commons." This year's class took a new approach by focusing on homelessness and getting involved with a group called the Mad Housers.

The Mad Housers began in 1987, near the time that many of Crawford's students were born. Homelessness was already prevalent in Atlanta, and Georgia Tech College of Architecture students Michael Connor and Brian Finkel set out to build shelters, essentially "huts," to protect homeless individuals from the elements and give them a place to store their belongings. They did not intend

to eliminate homelessness, but to help people improve their situations. In fact, they assumed that society or the government would find a fix for homelessness within a decade or two and make the Mad Housers unnecessary. Unfortunately, their efforts are still very much needed twenty years later.

An article about the Mad Housers in the Atlanta Journal Constitution sparked the interest of Crawford's class. The students had already read essays such as "Building Dwelling Thinking" by Martin Heidegger, which gave them a framework for deeper investigation of the concept of homelessness and marginal



Setting up house outside Skiles

housing. "Everyone started narrowing in on the Mad Housers idea," says Victor Lesniewski, a first-year Honors Program student in the class. Their hands-on, multimedia approach to the topic involved song lyrics, poems, projects, video interviews, and a Mad Housers hut build.

They built the 6' x 8' x 10' frame-and-plywood hut on a Saturday, and left it on public display near the Skiles building during Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week. It has been partially disassembled and will be reassembled in the library in early January for a longer term exhibit with multimedia additions. Eventually it will be donated to the Mad Housers to be used wherever they see fit.

This service learning experience taught students that a home is much more than just a physical structure. Many communities have been formed around Mad Housers huts, complete with socio-political structures and unofficial mayors. The ability to lock up their belongings during the day gives homeless people the opportunity to look for work. Explains Lesniewski, "Homelessness is a huge problem in Atlanta but individual efforts do make a difference. If you can get \$40 and people to work for an afternoon, you can give a person shelter, a place to lock up their belongings and a sense of place...It's not only a shelter but forms a sense of identity."

Nellie Mae Cosby's Sweet Potato Pie

from Nicole Leonard

(first published in the AJC)

Makes 8 servings

Hands on: 30 minutes

Total time: 2 hours

2 large sweet potatoes
1 egg, lightly beaten
1 c granulated sugar
2 Tbsp unsalted butter, melted
½ c milk
1 tsp vanilla extract
Pinch of fine salt
1 prepared pie crust

1. Preheat oven to 350°. Place sweet potatoes on a baking sheet. Bake until tender, 45-60 mins.
2. Remove potatoes from oven. Return empty pan to oven leaving the oven on 350°.
3. When cool enough to handle, peel the sweet potatoes and place in bowl. Using handheld mixer, whip until smooth. Add egg, sugar and butter and whip until well combined. Add milk, vanilla and a pinch of salt and continue whipping until smooth.
4. Pour mix into prepared pie crust and place directly on the baking sheet.
5. Bake until set, about 60 mins. Remove from oven and let cool slightly before serving.

Kugel

from Sarah Gilbreath

5 c cooked egg noodles
2 c low fat cottage cheese
½ c brown sugar
1 tsp salt
½ tsp ground cinnamon
½ tsp vanilla
¼ tsp pepper
8 oz vanilla lowfat yogurt
4 oz ricotta cheese
2 egg whites, beaten
2 eggs, beaten
2 c dried cherries

Preheat oven to 375°. Combine all ingredients except noodles. Mix with hand mixer or in a blender. Add cooked noodles and dried cherries (mix noodles in with fork). Grease a 9" x 13" pan. Pour mixture in the pan. Cover with tin foil and bake for 45 mins. Uncover and bake for 10 additional mins.

"Nobody cares if you can dance well.
Just get up and dance."

- Dave Barry

Message from the Director

BY DR. GREG NOBLES, DIRECTOR

In my line of work, we call it a “teachable moment” – one of those sudden and usually surprising occasions when something happens that gives students the kind of simple impact and clarity that no planned lesson can.

My most recent teachable moment occurred a couple of weeks ago, when a dozen or so HP students and I took a chilly stroll down to the corner of Peachtree and Pine, where the Task Force for the Homeless has its headquarters in an old fixer-upper building that used to be a 1920s-era car dealership. Now it’s home to programs for homeless men and women, ranging from basic shelter to transitional housing to computer training and job readiness. It’s also a building going through a transition of its own, with the construction of a coffee shop/art gallery on the Peachtree side – an encouraging attempt to make a space that homeless folks and other folks can share, and to make the building a better asset for the whole neighborhood.

That was the scene of the teachable moment, and our teacher, so to speak, was a very engaging and energetic guy named Troy, who used to be homeless himself but, after coming to the Task Force for help, had gradually moved through the various stages of the Task Force’s program and was now a member of the staff – living and very emphatic proof of the ways people can turn themselves around when they get a second (or third or whatever) chance in a supportive environment.

Troy was very generous and honest in telling us his own story, but he also wanted to be sure we heard

the whole story of the Task Force and its plans, and for that reason he took us out to the front of the building on Peachtree Street, so we could see the ongoing renovations of the coffee shop/gallery space. Going onto Peachtree, though, meant heading right into a cold, blustery wind blowing straight down the street, and we all had to lean into the wind and pull our jackets around us, almost freezing in the space of a few feet.

What a change, then, when Troy unlocked the door and let us into the coffee shop area – no wind, no cold, just a calm, quiet, and very welcome warmth. “Feel the difference?” Troy said. “That’s what it feels like to go from the street to shelter.”

That was the remarkable teachable moment. Ask any of the students who went with me that day. Everyone did feel the difference, and no one had to be told – by Troy, by me, by anyone – why basic shelter is so essential to addressing the issue of homelessness. All the soup lines, all the support programs, all the self-help efforts can start only when people get off the street and get into the peace and safety of inside.

And that’s the reason we try to get HP students outside, as it were, off campus and into the community, so they can feel the wind that other folks feel, so they can know the cold and get a bit uncomfortable before coming back inside to the classroom. We like to have lots of teachable moments in the classroom, to be sure, but some of the best ones can take place in the street, and not always with a professor, but sometimes with a teacher like Troy.

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