

SPRING 2009

# Saint Benedict's Saint John's MAGAZINE



CSB and SJU Grads Take the  
High Road to Promote Goodwill

COLLEGE OF  
Saint Benedict



Saint John's  
UNIVERSITY



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Cover photo: CSB and SJU grads pedal through Germany during their yearlong, transcontinental bicycle tour.

Left: Maude Cooper wears traditional dress representing Liberia, where she was born, for the fashion show at the annual Festival of Cultures at CSB and SJU. The event celebrates with music, food, entertainment and information booths the many cultures that are represented at CSB and SJU. Maude is a sophomore majoring in political science.

Photo by Michael Becker

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EDITOR: Glenda Burgeson    CONTRIBUTORS: Mike Killeen, Jane Opitz    STUDENT EDITORIAL ASSISTANT: Benjamin Besasie '12  
STUDENT EDITORIAL TEAM: Emily Bina '11, Angie Schmitz '09, Christa Schmidt '11, A. Durheim '10  
DESIGN: Greg Becker, Karen Hoffbeck

## Professor Díaz Goes to Washington

By Mike Killeen

The subway car was packed – so packed, in fact, that it sped past several stops because there was literally no room to get on.

In this cramped, crowded and highly unlikely setting some five hours before Barack Obama was to be sworn in as the 44<sup>th</sup> president of the United States Jan. 20 in Washington, D.C., Miguel Díaz was almost brought to tears.

Díaz and his wife, Marian, were riding the train with a group of African-Americans. Miguel Díaz shared with them how excited he was about the promise of change that Obama offered, that it would not be business as usual. Then he asked them, how do you feel as African-Americans?

“One of them said to me, ‘My great-grandmother was a slave. And I never thought that I would live to see this day.’ I was almost in tears with them,” Díaz said. “That was kind of like a mood setter that spoke so much in terms of what the country was about to overcome, when we inaugurated the first African-American president.”

It would not be the last time Díaz, an associate professor of theology at the College of Saint Benedict, Saint John’s University and Saint John’s School of Theology, was emotionally moved during two days of inaugural festivities in Washington.

Díaz was invited to Washington because of his work with Obama’s Catholic Advisory Council. He joined the council in June 2008, and discussed issues such as faith in politics, the specific role of Latinos and religion in the campaign, how to advance a consistent ethics of life, and the Catholic response to various other issues facing the nation.

“We tried to provide a more moderate voice to underscore that, when properly understood, faith and religion can have a very positive role to exercise in the political sphere,” Díaz said.

Upon arriving at the Capitol for the inauguration, Díaz was struck by “the diversity of peoples gathered” and the “excitement in their faces.” Obama’s speech about creating a new era of responsibility was a consistent theme in his campaign, Díaz said. And Obama’s inclusion of “Christians, Muslims, Jews and non-believers to contribute to the common good” was a call to all of us to embrace responsibility and service, Díaz added.

That message continued at the Inaugural Prayer Service Jan. 21 at the Washington National Cathedral.

“The president was sitting across from me, and so was the vice president (Joe Biden). That physical presence of Obama being so close definitely added a reality to my involvement in the campaign ... it made it real,” Díaz said.



Miguel Díaz, CSB/SJU associate professor of theology, in Washington D.C. for the inauguration.

“As a theologian, being there in prayer with Obama, and praying with his administration, for our communities and for the world was something very special for me,” Díaz said.

## Students Take Part in Electoral Politics

Bennies and Johnnies rocked the vote in 2008. From door knocking in support of a candidate to interning at a national convention, students at CSB and SJU embraced political activism with hearts and minds.

Nearly 75 students attended the first-ever debate between the College Democrats and the College Republicans in October, moderated by Matt Lindstrom, associate professor of political science and director of the Eugene J. McCarthy Center for Public Policy and Civic Engagement.

Renaë Bartusch, CSB sophomore and College Republicans treasurer, kept a full schedule of civic engagement: she participated in the debate, wrote letters to the campus newspaper, attended rallies and helped put up signs for campaigns.

“I did all of these things because I felt like this election year was really important – it was also the first election I could vote in,” Bartusch said.

SJU senior Jacob Lantry debated for the College Democrats and helped coordinate U.S. Senate candidate Al Franken’s campus appearance. He valued the political climate on campus.

“[Here] at CSB and SJU, we kind of take for granted the amount of freedom we have when it comes to political activity,” Lantry said. “I think that is the best thing about campaigning here; both sides are allowed to get out and spread their message without significant limitations.”



Kelsey Gustafson '10 strikes a pose by her home state sign while working for PBS’s “The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer” at the Republican National Convention in St. Paul.

CSB junior Kelsey Gustafson worked for PBS’s “The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer” at the Republican National Convention in St. Paul. She and four other CSB and SJU students and graduates worked for three weeks after receiving the job through the Project for Undertold Stories.

“It is connections like these on campus that give Bennies and Johnnies amazing opportunities to develop ourselves in the real world,” Gustafson said.

Two CSB students returned to campus with different perspectives of the political process after attending the Democratic National

Convention in Denver: Emily Bina worked as an intern, and Ashleigh Leitch served as a delegate from Minnesota.

In the weeks leading up to the election, students met with Senate, House and congressional nominees who visited both campuses, volunteered for candidates and participated in frequent political discussions on campus.

On Election Day, local candidates visited the campuses, and buses ran all day to transport students to and from the voting booth. As a reminder to vote, free hot apple cider, in cups with the question, “Which cider you on?” was available at bus stops. There was little need for the reminder, however, as “I Voted” stickers were as common on campus as campaign buttons.

Students celebrated their involvement in electoral politics at a non-partisan election night party hosted by the College Democrats, College Republicans, CSB and SJU Student Senates and the Eugene J. McCarthy Center for Public Policy.



John F. O’Sullivan ’08 assists with filming for PBS’s “The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer” during the Republican National Convention in St. Paul.



Dave Rice ’08 and Aimee Haag ’08 stand with Gwen Ifill, moderator and managing editor of PBS’s “Washington Week” and senior correspondent for “The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer.” Dave and Aimee met Ifill while working for “The NewsHour” at the Republican National Convention in St. Paul.

# STUDENT SNAPSHOTS from around the WORLD

## Johnnies Put Pop Bottles to Good Use

“99 bottles of pop on the wall, 99 bottles of pop! Take one down, pass it around ...”

Most everyone recognizes this catchy tune. Even now, this rather pointless song is probably repeating over and over in your mind. After all, who would really want 99 bottles of pop? A person couldn't possibly do anything productive with all of those plastic bottles ... right?

Why, then, would two graduates from Saint John's University collect over 4,000 20-ounce plastic bottles in poverty-stricken Guatemala?

Answer: To help combat poverty, little by little, in Guatemala by providing children with a small source of income; reduce the amount of litter and pollution in the city of Esquipulas; and construct a 5-by-10-meter library.

Liam Sperl and Michael Anderson – both 2007 SJU graduates--did just that last year, from March until June.

Inspired by a trip to an ecological park in Guatemala, Sperl and Anderson decided to pay children of Esquipulas six cents for each bottle they brought filled with trash. Local construction workers



Liam Sperl inspects the pop bottle project

built concrete pillars before the Johnnies and other volunteers took over. They added the roof and wood scaffolding. Next came the bottles, secured with chicken wire. Adding the bottles to make the walls took about two weeks. Then they covered the building with cement stucco. The project involved over 1,000 volunteers, most of them children.

“By paying for the bottles, we would give some money back to the community, as well as clean the streets, and, in the end, build a children's library,” Anderson said. “It was a good process all around.”

## Study Abroad: Not for the Faint-Hearted

CSB and SJU students document their experiences in photos.

(Left) Laura Bredeck captured Megan Hedstrom paragliding in Interlaken, Switzerland.



## Study Abroad Rates Rank No. 2 Nationally

The College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University are ranked No. 2 nationally among baccalaureate institutions with students who participate in semester-long study abroad programs, according to Open Doors 2008, the annual report on international education published by the Institute of International Education (IIE).

This marks the fifth year in a row that Saint Ben's and Saint John's have been among the top four undergraduate liberal arts colleges nationally in the international study ranking.

The two schools had 375 students study abroad in what the report called “mid-term duration” programs during the 2006-07 school year. The IIE defines mid-term duration as study abroad programs that take place during one semester, one quarter or two quarters.

The report also found that:

- CSB and SJU ranked No. 5 nationally among baccalaureate institutions for total number of study abroad students, with 495 students who studied abroad in 2006-07;
- CSB and SJU ranked No. 16 among baccalaureate institutions, with 216 international students for the 2007-08 school year.
- Fully 62 percent of CSB students and 55 percent of SJU students from the class of 2008 studied abroad.

(Below) CSB and SJU students learn to hunt crabs for dinner from their Aboriginal hosts in Broome, Western Australia.

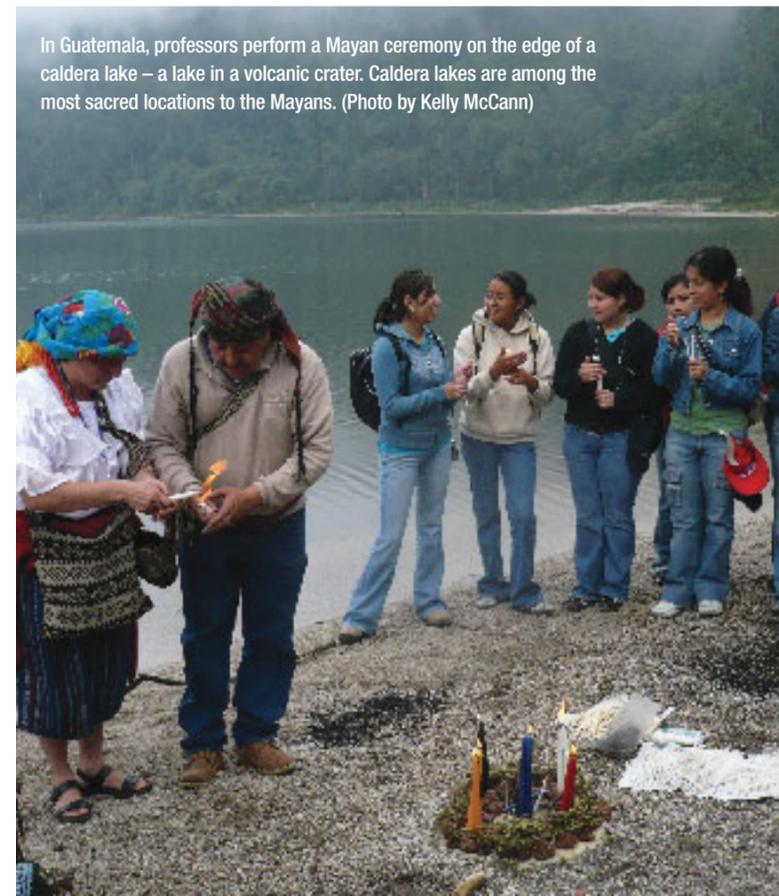
(Photo by Jenny Temes. Students in photo: Emily Simone, Tonya Nelson, Chris Schultz, Mike Windler)

## London Blog: One Student's Experience

Each year, CSB and SJU rank among the nation's top liberal arts schools in study abroad participation. Those rankings represent a campus culture that values global study, but they don't tell the whole story. Each study abroad experience is unique. Here is a snippet from CSB junior Jennifer Richter, a theater and communication double-major from Sartell, Minn. Richter wrote this entry in a blog about her experiences in London during the 2008 fall semester:

“It's amazing how much you learn about a country by living there, not just its history, but its current state, too. In my experience, when you visit a place for a day or two, you see it and get a taste of its flavor. But by studying and living in a place for the semester, you experience its daily rhythm, and it becomes a part of you. I have fallen into a routine in London, but not a monotonous one like most routines I have experienced in my life previous to being here. Instead, my schedule features class and then the opportunity to explore the places and the culture I am learning about in the classroom. My routine is also one with more tedious tasks like grocery shopping and doing an internship. But those aren't anything like back home. Shopping for food abroad is a new adventure as you never know what new item you'll discover among the aisles of a grocery store or food stand along the street or within a local farmer's market. My internship has also been very unique. I have been working at a talent agency representing West End theatre, television, and movie actors and creative professionals, and although it has been the “typical” internship at times, filled with filing paperwork, responding to e-mails, and making tea and coffee, it has also allowed me the opportunity to sit in on auditions for a West End musical and meet people directly working in the theatre industry in the UK.”

In Guatemala, professors perform a Mayan ceremony on the edge of a caldera lake – a lake in a volcanic crater. Caldera lakes are among the most sacred locations to the Mayans. (Photo by Kelly McCann)



# Welcome to the Agora!

By Benjamin Besasie, SJU '12

*“Let us move forward with certainty and conviction in the promise of a great and prosperous Athens provided by ending once and for all the destruction of the past and looking toward the image of a grand Athens”*

-Moderate Democrat, fifth century Athens.

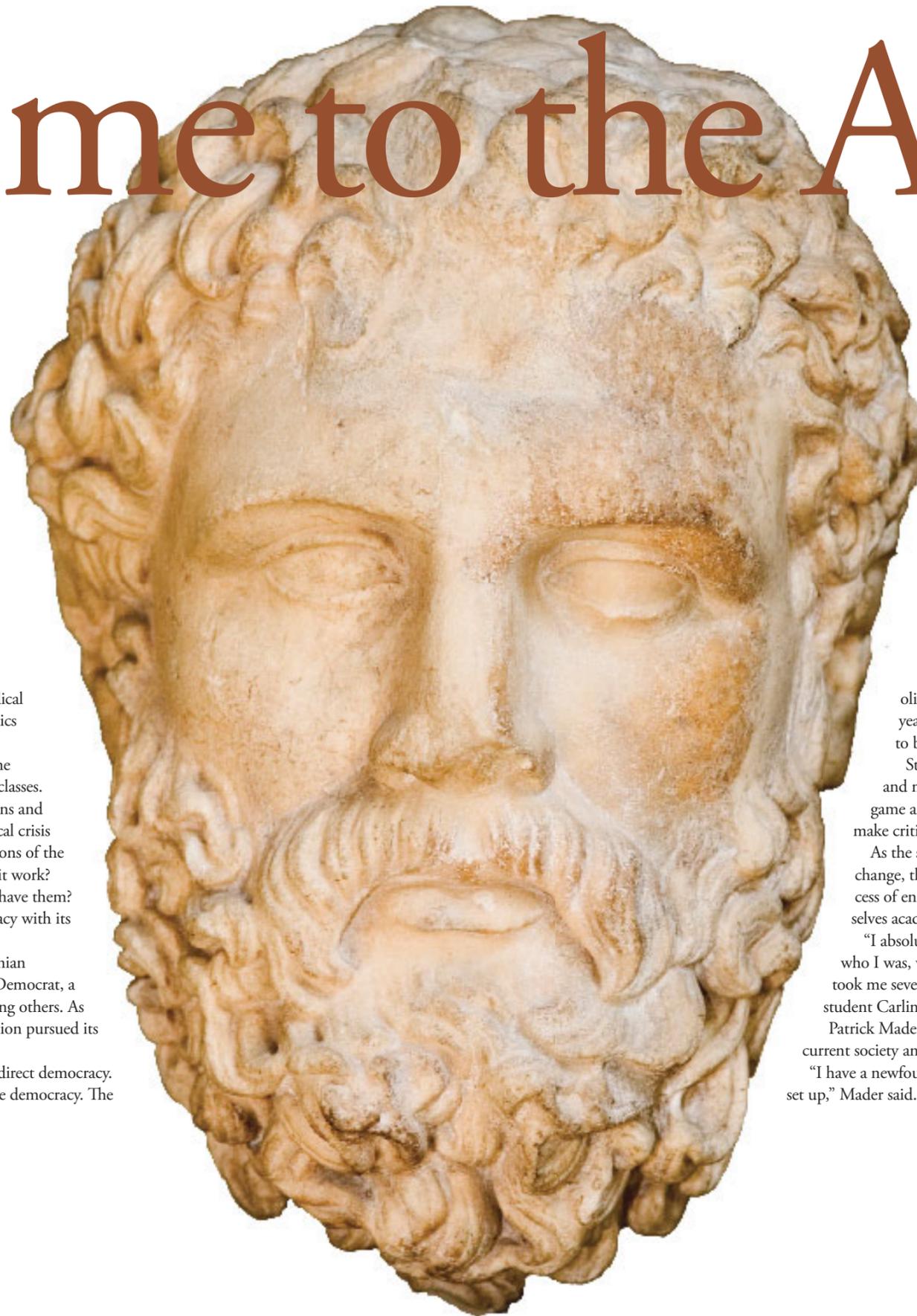
After the speech, chaos ensues: the rich athlete speaks out of turn; a radical Democrat issues a threat; the oligarchs count their money; and the Socratics question each other and laugh at the injustice of men.

Will Athens advance amid such disorganization and division? That is the challenge facing 21<sup>st</sup> century students in five CSB/SJU first-year seminar classes.

The students assumed the roles of fifth century Athenians and immersed themselves in historical moments of political crisis and social change. They wrestled with the big questions of the day: What is a democratic society, and how should it work? What are the rights of citizenship, and who should have them? How should society balance the promise of democracy with its dangers, particularly in a time of war?

For three weeks, students assumed such Athenian identities as a radical Democrat, a moderate Democrat, a Socratic, an oligarch and a rich athlete, among others. As they split along political divisions, each faction pursued its own objectives.

The radical Democrats desired a radical direct democracy. The moderate Democrats wanted to restore democracy. The



oligarchs sought to maintain their high political status. The Socratics yearned for utopia. Meanwhile, the rich athlete deceived all in an attempt to become a heroic tyrant.

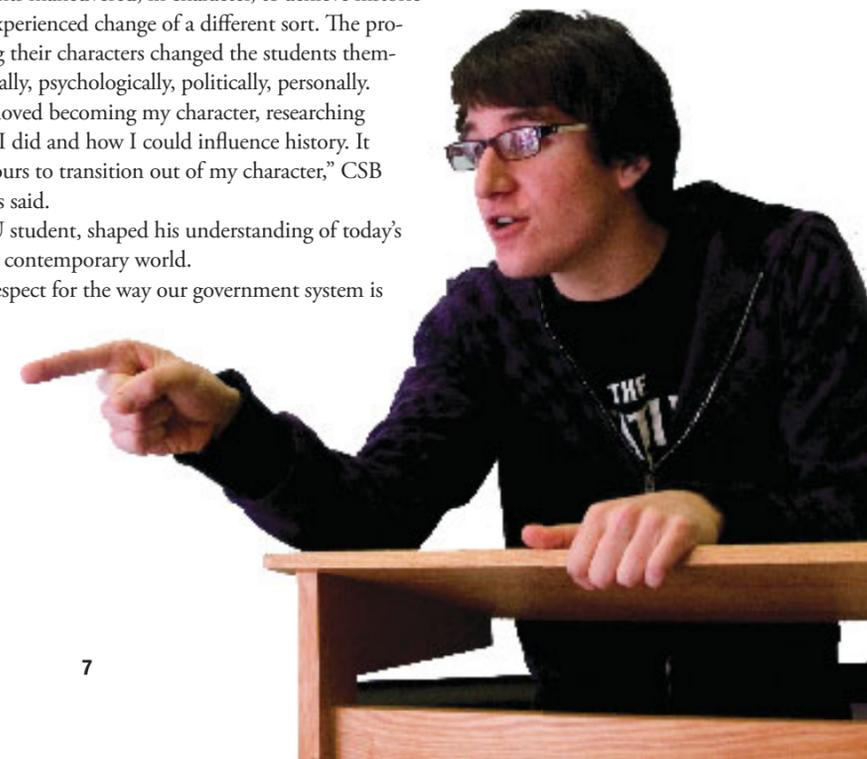
Students read and analyzed historical texts, adopted historical personas, and made oral and written arguments from their characters' personas. The game allowed these students to get inside the heads of people from the past, make critical decisions, and shape the course of western history.

As the students maneuvered, in character, to achieve historic change, they experienced change of a different sort. The process of enacting their characters changed the students themselves academically, psychologically, politically, personally.

“I absolutely loved becoming my character, researching who I was, what I did and how I could influence history. It took me several hours to transition out of my character,” CSB student Carlin Stiles said.

Patrick Mader, SJU student, shaped his understanding of today's current society and the contemporary world.

“I have a newfound respect for the way our government system is set up,” Mader said.



# One World, Two Wheels

## Five CSB/SJU Grads Pedal for Peace

Start with five CSB and SJU graduates. Add some bikes, 16 countries, 10,500 miles, 13 months, and throw in some musical instruments for good measure. What do you get?

Fueled by Rice, an experience of a lifetime.

CSB graduate Nakia Pearson '03, and SJU graduates Andrew Spidahl '03, Jim Durfey '04, Adam Wolf '05 and Peter Ehresmann '04 rode bikes from Beijing to Paris from September 2007 to October 2008, playing music at stops along the way.

They called themselves Fueled by Rice, to express the goals of their trip.

"We want to encourage people to bike and show people that biking is a reasonable form of transportation. We are fueling



Photo © Louise Chiu / Ignacio Aronovich / LOST ART



ourselves with rice, not petrol," Jim said.

They also wanted to experience a big cross-section of the world, build bridges of understanding with people they met and advocate deliberate, simple, low-impact lifestyles.

Along the way, they developed their own "bike band." They brought two guitars, a bongo, egg shakers, a harmonica and a Chinese instrument, the erhu. They played after lunch and during breaks, combining musical elements from folk, gospel, soul and experimental, and sometimes drawing crowds up to 60 people.

"Music became a good way to connect with people when we didn't know the language, like in Southeast Asia," Nakia said.

Group members tell their stories with blogs, photos and musical clips on the FBR Web site [www.fueledbyrice.org](http://www.fueledbyrice.org). Information also is available on the Web about a CD the group has recorded, featuring music they wrote and performed during their travels.

Transcontinental travel by bicycle gives new meaning to life's ups and downs as our adventurers encountered the challenges of terrain, weather and fickle bureaucrats. In their blogs, they describe how they met people with wide open hearts and minds, and people whose life stories dramatized some of the 20th century's historic conflicts.



On a park bench in Hanoi, Adam meets Mr. Lee, 67, a former Vietnamese resident who has been living in Canada for the last 28 years.

**Mr. Lee**  
(Adam's blog, Jan. 9, 2008)

"Mr. Lee grew up in Southern Vietnam, and in 1976 when the North fully integrated with the South to form the Socialist Republic of Vietnam life changed for him rapidly.

"He explained to me how there were no freedoms, how people were issued one shirt per year, all the same color. 'People were forced to live off of 3 kg of rice a month, terrible. Even if you wanted more there was no way to get it.' He told me how his brother, a former presidential pilot was forced to go to a 'reeducation camp.' He himself was spared because he was a water works engineer and was needed. ...

"With a tone of self disbelief he told me that in 1980 he and his brother took a boat from the southern coast of Vietnam to Thailand. He claims his brother's navigational skills he used as a pilot allowed them to correctly make their way over the five-day journey. The boat was 6 ft wide

and 106 ft long. 'There were 103 people in it, and you could reach out and touch the water, 103 people!' They had to be very careful and skirt the international waters because there were Thai pirates known to seize the ships. The boat had one single-block diesel engine and would not restart if it was ever shut off; he knew this because once they reached shore they tried to restart it but could not. 'I don't know how we did it' Mr. Lee exclaimed.

"Once in Thailand he made his way to Victoria, Canada where he now resides. He lives there with his whole family, and spoke fondly and often of his grandson who likes to kayak, camp, and wants to someday spend more time in Vietnam to better understand it.

"... Of Vietnam today Mr. Lee has a very different outlook than he did 20 years ago. He thinks things are much better, as indeed for many they are, but still thinks people lack freedoms. He also told me that social mobility is a challenge and that for poor to become rich is very difficult." –

How much rice does it take to fuel a bike ride from Beijing to Paris? Although no one kept track of caloric intake, their blogs are filled with accounts of dining. Jim provides a list of the foods they ate:

**China:** Rice, veggies, peanuts, a bit of pork and beef, one rat, apples, oranges

**Vietnam:** Rice noodles, rice and vegetables, pork, pears, banh my (sandwiches made with vegetables on French bread -- from the Francophile influence)

**Laos:** Sticky rice, sweet bananas, lahp (spicy pork dish), bread, canned fish

**Cambodia:** Rice, bananas, pre-cooked vegetables and some pork, lots of French-style bread

**Thailand:** Fried rice, Thai noodles

**India:** Rice, potato curry, dahl (thick lentil soup), chapahti (tortilla-like pancake), lassi (curd drink)

**Nepal:** same as India (with momoes, chinese-style dumplings)

**Turkey through Hungary:** Lots of light, fluffy bread, tomatoes, yogurt, pasta, jam, butter, various vegetables, sausage, one pheasant (found on the road), some beer, wild plums and black berries

**Austria through Germany:** Darker, heavier, bread, fewer tomatoes as people didn't sell them off their stoops anymore and in the supermarkets they were more expensive, whatever veggies were cheap, chocolate spread (off-brand Nutella), occasional beer, lots of apples we picked ourselves

**France:** French bread, cheese, wine, jam, butter, pasta, bread that we made ourselves when we had an oven, apple pie, apples that we harvested from the side of the road

Just for fun, the bikers added one more travel leg. After they returned to the United States, they biked from Chicago to a welcome reception in Minneapolis. Jim describes their diet this way: "basically just American food: disgusting American sandwich bread, way more meat and ethnic food (when friends cooked for us), a few apples we picked ourselves but most had already frozen."



Meet Gergely Pongratz, an aging revolutionary who challenged the Russians in the 1956 Hungarian uprising, who waved down Jim and Pete as they passed by.

**The Revolutionary**  
(Jim's blog, Aug. 30, 2008)

"He retreated slowly but hurriedly into his house, which was next to a building labeled '56 os Muzeum.' Tanks and artillery pieces crowded the lawn. I realized that this must be a museum commemorating the 1956 uprising in Hungary against the occupying Russians. When our friend hobbled back and gave us a bag of sweets, I thanked him and couldn't help asking, 'Were you in the revolution?' His eyes glimmered and he motioned us inside the compound...

"Gergely (or Edmund) Pongratz not only participated in the revolution, but helped lead it. He first showed us a huge artillery piece. He retreated behind a bush, ordering 'Now watch!' He pulled a rope behind the bush that was attached to the firing lever of the weapon. The Hungarian rebels used this method to fire captured canon back at the Russians from a safe distance. The Hungarians, while superior in numbers, were completely outgunned by the Russians. Almost all of their weapons were captured from the enemy. ...

"I asked Edmund why he decided to fight the Russians and pro-Soviet forces. 'They wanted to make everything Russian,' explained Edmund, 'our agriculture, our economy, our culture. We wanted to be free.' Hungary was free, for a while...

"The Museum doesn't cover the aftermath of the failed rebellion. Instead, it focuses on the spirit of independence and heroism demonstrated by rebels. That is perhaps the most important part of the story."

**Stuck in Turkey**

Trouble obtaining Nakia's Bulgarian visa results in a week of frustration and suspense. But these folks are musicians, after all, and they improvise, meet new people and debut their street performance. Here is an edited version of Drew's account:

**June 26, Thursday** — After spending the night on the sidewalk with other would-be travellers to Bulgaria, Nakia waits in line while we wait on the curb until 12 p.m. when they tell us there will be no more people admitted today. "Come earlier tomorrow," the guard says. Peter doesn't appreciate that comment and

points out clearly that it would be difficult to come any earlier as we SLEPT OVER THERE ON THE SIDEWALK! His persuasive techniques coupled with Nakia's threat to get her money back finally allow Nakia to get in to apply. We sigh with relief and celebrate with ice cream and pizza – we have to wait for a week.

**June 27 - July 2** — We spend the weekend hanging out with our new Turkish friends and playing music on the street in Taksim Istanbul without complaining when people throw coins in our open guitar case.

We meet a student named Fatih who hears our music and tells us we have to play on the street!

We are staying in a house full of artists and musicians for the week, who introduce us to their friends who are also street musicians. We play with them on Saturday night and watch how it's done.

Our first attempt to play on the street yields genuine interest, good conversations, and around \$100 USD in change and bills!

**July 3, Thursday 12 p.m.** — We go to pick up Nakia's Bulgarian visa only to find out they have denied it...

We sit with thick anxiety as we brainstorm our options over lunch. After making several calls and spending some



Street Performing in Istanbul (Pete's blog, Aug. 29, 2008)  
"Istanbul marked our biggest transition – in living standards, culture, and continents, ... And for the first time on the trip, we earned money... more than we ever thought possible from street performing... we have been earning enough money from our music to pay for all of our food..."



Photo © Louise Chin / Ignacio Aronovich / LOST ART

With Louise and Ignatius in Istanbul  
 “Ignatius and Louise, two professional photographers from Brazil, found us our first day on Istanbul’s famous pedestrian street, Istiklal Street, in Taxim, when we were brand new to European street performing.” — Pete, Aug. 29

time online, we decide to leave Istanbul for the border town of Edirne at 5:45 p.m. By 7:30 we are out of the city and shopping in a small town for our usual bread, yogurt, and jam dinner with tomatoes and cucumbers when we are invited to stay at a house. Doa, a twenty-eight year old career woman with great English, invites us to her beautiful country home suggesting we can camp

in the garden. We have a hot shower, tea, pleasant conversation, and breakfast with the Dad (an uncommonly proud Turk with a warm heart) before we continue into a beautiful sunny summer day.

**July 4 - July 7** — We pedal up and down big hills. The first day we are hailed by some construction workers while we

stop to gaze out across the Black Sea. They give us three of the “construction worker lunches” — chicken, yogurt, peach juice, bread, rice pilaf — and big smile. We eat with a couple of them and are on our up-and-down way.

**July 9, Wednesday** — Nakia and Peter manage to get in to the Bulgarian Consulate (a significant achievement in itself in our experience) and apply for the “quick” visa—2 days— for 120 Euro. Ouch. But this is our path and time now is of the essence.

**July 11, Friday (a.m.)** — I finish up this blog in the apartment of the Kahya’s as we wait for breakfast and wait for 12 noon to find out about the elusive Bulgarian Visa. We have been treated as family here, having a place to wash clothes, sleep, shower, and sharing traditional Turkish meals with the family twice a day.

It has been emotionally draining turning through hope and uncertainty like the pages of the latest Harry Potter novel, but there is this thread of glistening hope and direction and blessing— as strong as steel— leading us along the way. Whatever happens today, I am grateful to be a witness and recipient of such generous providence and unexpected adventure here in Turkey.

“Time and Time again I have seen God provide for us, showering us in blessings through people we meet, people who invite us in for coffee or to sleep, those who show us the way, and through those who put money in our erhu case upon hearing our music on the street to buy us enough food for a few more days... God’s provisions are most obvious when we put ourselves out there in vulnerability and uncertainty; things always work out... it is always OK... and we are again and again provided for.”

— Pete, Aug. 2, 2008



“Overall I believe this trip has changed not my view of the world as a whole as much as my view on my own home. I live, grew up, and am now sitting in one of the most unique cultures the world has ever known. Midwest America will never look ordinary or boring to me again, it provides something that no other place in the world can offer.”

— Adam, Feb. 12, 2008



Nakia Pearson

### Nakia’s Home Away from Home

*Editor’s note: At CSB and SJU, the Benedictine ideal of community can take many forms. In this reflection, Jane Opitz, director of the CSB/SJU Writing Centers, tells how Nakia Pearson became a member of the family.*

In the fall of 1999, the name “Nakia Pearson: Nassau, Bahamas” showed up as the international student assigned to us in the CSB/SJU “Friendly Family Program.” Then we met the person herself: diminutive stature, bright eyes, chocolate-milk skin, quick sense of humor, strong and academically curious student, infectious laugh, marvelous singing voice and a knack for mischief.

Like most of our international students, Nakia is extraordinary. She is a poet and writer, a vocal performer and teacher. Finding it hard to narrow her interests, she spent her time at CSB/SJU earning an individualized liberal studies degree, taking mostly English, communication

and peace studies classes—but she also squeezed in as many courses as she could in theater, political science and women’s studies. She speaks two languages fluently and “gets by” in a couple others. She spent her after-college years teaching English abroad, and has recently completed her biking/music making trek from Beijing to Paris. Now she wants to go to graduate school to prepare for a career that supports women’s advancement efforts in developing countries.

After our first meeting, Nakia settled easily into our lives. Being the youngest in her family, she liked having a younger sister here; being the same age as our middle child, she fit right in. She loved new experiences and that meant doing almost everything that came her way. She energized us because we enjoyed sharing with her the things that we love: pizza and movie nights, plays at the Guthrie, the Renaissance Festival, the MN Zoo and Como Conservatory, camping trips “up North.” And how were we to know, in that first month after meeting her, when she jumped so eagerly into the back of the van without even asking where or what “the North Shore” was, that we were already feeding the fledgling long-legged travel monster that had hatched inside her?

In addition to living in our home when the residence halls closed or when she wanted a break from them, Nakia spent a couple summers with us and worked for me in the CSB/SJU Writing Centers as her on-campus job. Her lasting legacy to these campuses from that job is the yearly Poetry Slam. When Nakia graduated, her mother and older sister came from Nassau and stayed with us; it was like meeting old friends for the first time. When we heard that Nakia’s mom had cancer, we found a

way to visit Nassau before her death.

We were so proud of Nakia’s volunteer teaching in Japan, but when we heard about the ridiculous plan to bike from Beijing to Paris, my husband Jeff and I said to each other, “Maybe she’s kidding.” When we found ourselves listed as an emergency/death contact on her international travel forms, we shook our heads and said, “Okay, maybe not. Only Nakia!”

I detail these things because I want to highlight the depth and wealth of this relationship that began with the simple decision to sponsor an international student. People often think that an international student is the recipient in a sponsorship situation, but that’s only the obvious part of the story.

The international student allows us to see with new eyes. Sometimes it’s simple: Hawks’ Ridge never looked so high, the autumn leaves never looked so colorful, the stars on a cold October night never looked so vast or so bright, as the first time Nakia camped on the North Shore with us. Other times, it’s more complex: When Nakia was with us, we became aware that different people looked at us and different people talked to us—or didn’t talk to us—than we were accustomed to; because of her presence, the ordinary world we knew changed slightly.

We could see and understand things to which we would not normally have access. When we traveled through Southeast Asia with Nakia & company via e-mail and blog and Web site photos, she gave us an intimate person-to-person peek at a world we’ll never visit for ourselves.

So what have we given Nakia? Love, support and more than a few prayers. And what has she given us? Another daughter and sister and a new world. We are grateful.

# Will You Keep Your Promise?



By Glenda Isaacs Burgeson

*“There’s this man who said you promised to pay his tuition. He’s now a janitor at our school and wants to know if your promise is still good.”*

More than a quarter of a century ago, Tom Sibley made a promise to a young African boy in Liberia. But civil war broke out and decades passed before he could fulfill his promise to J. Menaikpeh Kollie to pay for his education.

Tom, a CSB/SJU professor of mathematics for 25 years, met the child in 1980, while teaching at Cuttington University, then the only private liberal arts college in sub-Saharan Africa. Menaikpeh was in grade school and also cleaned Tom’s house.

Tom helped him with a small tuition for grade school, then paid for him to attend a private junior high. In 1983, when he left Liberia, Tom promised to pay Menaikpeh’s tuition through college, and he continued to pay as Menaikpeh progressed through junior high, high school and his first year at Cuttington.

Then, in December 1989, civil war erupted. Cuttington, only five miles from rebel headquarters, was shelled in the conflict and closed its doors.

“I lost track of him,” Tom said.

In 1997, a small window of opportunity opened. He received a letter from the Red Cross that Menaikpeh was in a refugee camp and in desperate shape.

“I tried to send money but the money was returned, and I lost track of him again,” he said, explaining that, for security reasons,

the Red Cross does not handle cash transactions.

Years later, he received an e-mail from a vice president at Cuttington.

“It said, ‘There’s this man who said you promised to pay his tuition. He’s now a janitor at our school and wants to know if your promise is still good,’” Tom recalls.

“I said yes!”

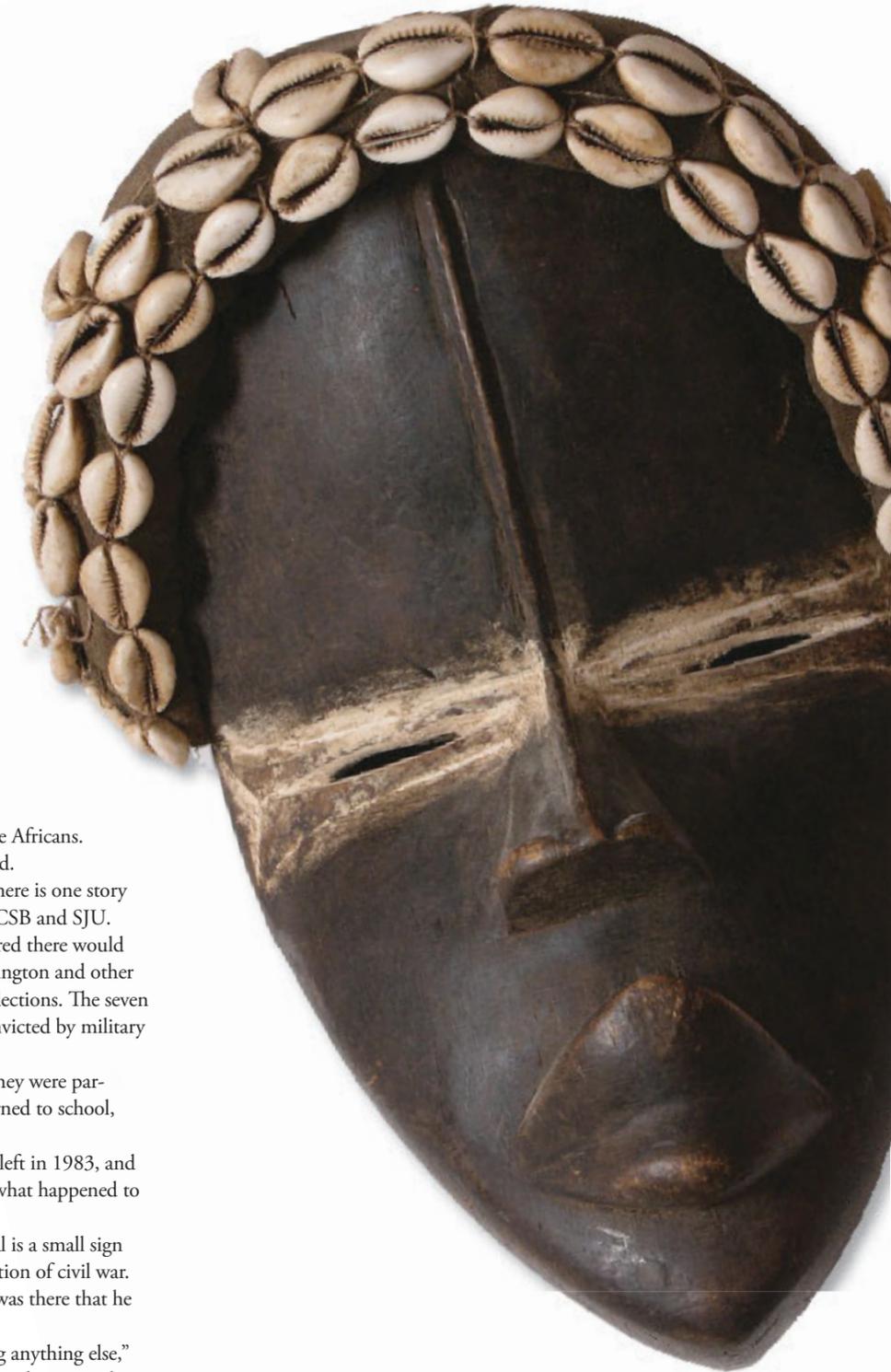
Menaikpeh is now in his senior year, studying agriculture and on track to graduate this spring.

Tom expresses amazement that Menaikpeh managed to survive the war that killed more than 200,000 and produced 1 million refugees. “He’s got tenacity.”

As a young man in Africa, Tom witnessed firsthand the impact of injustice in the developing world.

Liberia had been resettled and ruled by the sons of African American slaves and their descendants until a coup in 1980. Four months after the coup, Tom arrived in Liberia, and he recalls the euphoria among the students.

“It was the first time in decades they had had freedom of speech.” The school served students from throughout Africa, including refugees from Zimbabwe, Kenya and S. Africa, and he remembers the students debated endlessly about which social,



political and economic direction would best serve Africans.

“They were always talking about issues,” he said.

Of his many experiences in Africa, Tom said there is one story he shares each election year with his students at CSB and SJU.

After the coup, the military government declared there would be no elections. Some student leaders from Cuttington and other schools wrote an open letter asking for student elections. The seven students were arrested, charged with treason, convicted by military tribunal and sentenced to death.

The day before they were to be put to death, they were pardoned. When the student from Cuttington returned to school, Tom said it was obvious he had been tortured.

“Freedom of speech died that day,” he said. “I left in 1983, and things got worse. It breaks my heart to think of what happened to Liberia.”

For Tom, the discovery of Menaikpeh’s survival is a small sign of hope in a land still emerging from the destruction of civil war. Africa holds a special place in Tom’s memory. It was there that he discovered his calling as a teacher.

“I just loved teaching. I couldn’t imagine doing anything else,” he said. Years later, he is still doing what loves – teaching – and keeping a promise he made to a young boy.

# Discovering the **art** of Scientific Observation

By Glenda Isaacs Burgeson



*Dragonfly*

As a scientist,  
he considered himself  
a good observer.  
Now, as an artist,  
he noticed he was  
seeing details he  
hadn't spotted before.



*Dragonfly Larva 2*



*Wildflower Sampler*

When the wife gets fed up, good things happen.

For Jim Poff, CSB/SJU professor of biology for 33 years, those good things happened first in his private life, then in his professional life.

Over 25 years ago, Jim's uncle took up painting with watercolors. Inspired by his uncle, Jim used to say, on more than one occasion, "I would like to do that."

He said it one too many times. Nine years ago, his wife Chris surprised him on Father's Day with a set of watercolors and a gift certificate for classes at the Paramount Theatre and Visual Arts Center in St. Cloud.

"I loved it," he said. He decided not to paint people, focusing instead on still life, landscapes, buildings and flowers.

At first, he considered watercolors a hobby, something separate

from his day job. Over time, however, as he developed his skill, the two interests would collide with unexpected benefits in the classroom.

With the arrival of grandchildren, Jim decided to tackle the challenge of painting people, thinking he might want to do portraits.

Once again, he went to class, as a student in a figure drawing class taught by Br. David Paul Lange, CSB/SJU associate professor of art.

He discovered that drawing people, while hard, can be done, with patience and practice -- lots of practice.

"I wasn't an instant success," he recalled.

Still, he found the hobby relaxing, and he discovered the rewards of practice.

"The more I practiced, the better I got," he said.

To his surprise, he realized that he started seeing differently in his biological fieldwork. Jim specializes in insect and animal behavior, and teaches a course for non-majors in fieldwork, focusing on local plants and animals. As a scientist, he considered himself a good observer. Now, as an artist, he noticed he was seeing details he hadn't spotted before.

"I thought, if it works for me, maybe it will work with my students. One of the fun things about teaching at CSB/SJU is I have the freedom to try nontraditional methods in the classroom."

Jim prepares much of his text. If he wanted to use art as a learning tool, he knew his artwork would need to be specific for his text.

With funding from a faculty development grant, he attended a

biological illustrator workshop at Cornell University.

It was an intensive workshop that gave him the skills to introduce illustration in the lab. When he assigns a drawing exercise, he hears a common refrain from students: "I can't draw."

With a little prodding and a minimum of instruction, he convinces the students to try.

"The advantage is I now have a better idea of what they're seeing," he said.

Within a few weeks, Jim said he sees improvement in their observational skills, a difference he plans to start documenting systematically.

"Students are looking more carefully and seeing more detail," he said.

"Without Chris, it wouldn't have happened."

# media wise

## FACULTY SHARE THEIR EXPERTISE

By Mike Killeen

### DEREK LARSON

Pick an environmental issue, and Derek Larson has probably addressed it.

The CSB/SJU associate professor of history and environmental studies is the co-founder and chair of the Upper Midwest Association for Campus Sustainability, a member of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education Advisory Council, a founding member of the recently established Association for Environmental Studies and Sciences and a member of the Council of Environmental Deans and Directors of the National Council for Science and the Environment. He writes a monthly column for the *St. Cloud Times* newspaper, and writes for several blogs. He also chairs the CSB/SJU environmental studies department, one of the fastest-growing majors at the schools and one of the leading environmental programs in the region.

Larson was asked about local and national efforts by college campuses to go green.

**What inroads are CSB and SJU making to become more environmentally friendly?**

“The current emphasis at CSB and SJU is on sustainability in general, and energy/climate issues in particular. Both presidents have signed the American College and University Presidents Climate Commitment, which requires us to develop a program to make both campuses carbon neutral. The most important initial steps in that process have been the completion of comprehensive greenhouse gas audits

on each campus (in summer 2008, with the help of student researchers) and the establishment of presidentially-appointed stewardship committees on each campus. These committees will spend 2008-09 developing coordinated plans to bring each campus to carbon neutrality in a way that is economically and socially sustainable and in keeping with our core missions. Among the first visible steps on each campus will come in the form of new construction: a 3kW photovoltaic solar array was installed on SJU's New Science Building in November, and the new Flynntown Community Center—currently under construction—will be Saint John's first green building. Saint Ben's has committed to a green building standard for all future construction and is in the process of selecting a firm to design a new academic building that will be the first of green design on campus. Both schools have also established Green Funds that will allow donors to directly support sustainability projects by contributing to endowed funds, the returns on which will be used to fund projects that otherwise might not be possible. Education of our students and the campus communities in general will be a big part of the shift toward sustainability as we understand it not as a technical challenge but a cultural change that will reflect our Benedictine values of stewardship and community.”

**If you look around the national landscape, many schools are doing some good things for the environment. What kind of overall progress is higher education**

**making in these areas?**

“The campus sustainability movement is booming nationwide. New graduate programs are appearing in sustainability-related fields and the higher education sector has taken the lead not only in research but in implementation of cutting-edge sustainability practices, turning their campuses into living laboratories. Harvard, for example, got on the green building bandwagon early and now has 51 projects completed or awaiting certification. At the other end of the scale, tiny Unity College in Maine has written sustainability into the job descriptions of everyone from the president down to the student workers in the cafeteria. The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, the national organization coordinating the movement, was created in 2006. Its second biennial conference in November sold out; more people wanted to attend than the conference center could accommodate. Minnesota schools are among the national leaders in this movement, especially on energy issues (the University of Minnesota-Morris will soon be one of the only campuses in North America to be completely self-powered by renewable energy). CSB and SJU have played an important role within the region by serving as models for certain types of sustainability initiatives, notably land management through the Saint

Legendary New York sports writer Red Smith once said, “Writing is easy. All you do is sit down at a typewriter and open a vein.”

Writing can be painful at times, but CSB and SJU faculty members prove that any pain they go through at a computer keyboard can be informative to the public. We asked two faculty members who have written commentary pieces for publications to share their thoughts on environmental issues.

John's Arboretum, and by providing leadership through the creation and continued support of the Upper Midwest Association for Campus Sustainability, which held its first regional meeting at CSB in 2006. Both schools are currently participating in a pilot of a new sustainability assessment tool called STARS. Developed by AASHE, this instrument is intended to replace the many ‘green campus’ ratings published by various magazines and organizations with a transparent, externally verifiable standard that will allow people to compare campus sustainability practices on an even playing field when it is released in 2009.”

**If President Obama tapped you on the shoulder and said, “Derek, I'd like you to be in charge of environmental issues in my administration,” what would your first three priorities be?**

“This is the ultimate enviro-geek fantasy. To me there is only one priority: climate change. Wrapped into that single issue are all the core elements of sustainability:

ecological, economic and social justice challenges that are so deeply interconnected they simply must be approached as a package. A rational response to climate change will require major changes in consumer behavior, massive investments in conservation and renewable/alternative energy programs, and a renewed focus on the equity of global resource distribution. My

priorities for the Obama administration would be to reduce per-capita American energy consumption by 25 percent in 10 years, to shift 50 percent of our energy production to renewables in 10 years, and to challenge corporate America to develop the systems and technologies necessary to make those changes possible and then export them to the world. Climate change offers opportunity - and challenges - for every sector of the American economy and every segment of our society. But if we don't address it soon, none of those things will matter.”

### CINDY MALONE

As faculty director of the Literary Arts Institute (LAI), Cindy Malone has more than just a passing interest in books. After all, the LAI has organized events and discussions that focus on the future of book in all forms: printed, electronic forms and artists' books.

Malone, CSB/SJU professor of English, wrote a commentary in the April 11, 2008 *Chronicle of Higher Education* that stressed that faculty can play an important role in making publishers more environmentally responsible.

Malone was asked about her commentary and the future of printed books.

**What were your goals in writing the Chronicle article?**

“My aim in the *Chronicle* article was to highlight the environmental issues at stake in the choice of online and printed

course texts. Others with greater expertise in the area will, I hope, serve as advisers; I'd simply like to call attention to environmental issues. Perhaps colleagues in environmental studies could develop a means of calculating the carbon emissions and other environmental costs of printed and online course texts. That calculation is extraordinarily complex, of course, but a formula that helps faculty make comparisons between printed and electronic text would help all of us make informed decisions about the format of required readings for our courses. Until we have a means of making informed comparisons, it may be useful to engage our imaginations in the consideration of these decisions. We've grown accustomed to thinking of paper as felled trees; perhaps we could also begin to see printed books as little packets containing several pounds of carbon (generated primarily from trips around the country on trucks). When we turn on our computers, we could perhaps begin to picture a little chimney popping up and pumping out coal smoke.”

**Do you ever see a time when students will have all their course materials available online?**

“Despite the many voices prophesying the demise of the printed book, I remain convinced that students will continue to use both printed and electronic course texts. More extensive comparative research into reading practices associated with printed and online material would help writers and the publishers of course texts to determine the optimal format of particular course texts.”

**Are more faculty becoming aware of the environmental cost of material?**

“Like the larger population of the U.S., faculty seem more aware of forest management issues than any other environmental costs of printed or online material. Tools like a general formula for comparing the environmental costs of printed and electronic texts would increase awareness of the other, less visible costs (including water pollution, emissions from coal-fired generation of electricity, etc.).”



In Memoriam

**Br. Dietrich Reinhart, OSB**

May 17, 1949 – December 29, 2008



Br. Dietrich Reinhart served as the 11th president of Saint John's University from July 1, 1991 to October 21, 2008.

A Tribute to Br. Dietrich has been scheduled for April 17 at Saint John's. All are welcome. Details will be posted at [www.csbsju.edu](http://www.csbsju.edu). Visit [www.caringbridge.org/visit/brotherdietrich](http://www.caringbridge.org/visit/brotherdietrich) to read the many messages from alumnae, alumni, students, staff and friends sent to Br. Dietrich during his illness as well as his letters to his online community of support.



Br. Dietrich and CSB President MaryAnn Baenninger celebrate 20 years of CSB/SJU education in China.



Abbot John Klassen and Br. Dietrich with renowned art commentator S. Wendy Beckett at a reception at London's Victoria and Albert Museum marking the opening of the international exhibition tour of *The Saint John's Bible* at the museum.



Br. Dietrich and S. Colman O'Connell, former CSB president, share a laugh.

# Afterthought

## Students Get "Cheeky" in the Lab

By Benjamin Besasie '12

Have you heard of the Human Genome Project? Maybe you have watched forensic scientists on "CSI" use DNA analysis to solve a murder. These two applications of DNA analysis are only a few grains of sand in a biological playground.

Last fall, CSB/SJU biology students analyzed DNA not to find a murderer, but to look at evolutionary relationships among other human individuals.

During a series of four laboratories, students collected mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) from their own cheek cells. They then isolated their mtDNA and amplified it by making many copies. Later, they analyzed their DNA sequence to find possible ancestral origins.

"These are complex and challenging techniques that are at a very early stage of the students' biology career," said Carol Jansky, CSB/SJU biology lab coordinator. "DNA sequencing is just the beginning, because there are a lot of applications of DNA analysis."

In the last lab of the sequence, students loaded their DNA in the CEQ8000 Genetic Analysis System, which was purchased recently with a \$60,000 grant from Beckman Coulter. Barb May, CSB/SJU assistant professor of biology, secured the grant. CSB and SJU provided an additional \$47,000 for the equipment.

"This shows the support that the schools have for continuing research and introducing new research technologies to students," May said.

Students used large databases to analyze their results. *National Geographic*, in cooperation with other groups, started a five-year study, the Genographic Project, evaluating ancient human migration worldwide using DNA analysis. Students interpreted their results through the Genographic Project to identify their most probable ancestral groups.

"The neatest aspect of these labs is that the students get to use this complex technology while they have a personal attachment to the project. To be able to look at your own ancestral lineage makes it that much more exciting," May said.

## Dear Dad, Send Money

By Angela Schmitz '09

Each year, college students from around the country come together to send letters to their families and friends the old-fashioned way, by snail mail.

Their letters are not the usual requests to mom and dad asking for money. These are requests of a different sort. Members of Up 'til Dawn write their loved ones to ask for donations to St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tenn.

Last year, the CSB/SJU Up 'til Dawn chapter raised \$78,000, giving them the seventh highest donation to the hospital among

250 other colleges with Up 'til Dawn programs.

The donations that Up 'til Dawn members collect go toward operating expenses for St. Jude's.

"The great thing about St. Jude's is that families don't have to pay for bills that insurance doesn't cover," said CSB/SJU Up 'til Dawn chapter president Rachel Horn, a CSB student. "The hospital covers transportation, hotel bills and other essentials for families."

This year, Up 'til Dawn members held their letter sending event Nov. 13. The event provides members with a time to get together and write letters asking for donations. The chapter will throw an even bigger party this spring to announce and celebrate the donations they collect.



St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

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**CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED**

*A Thousand Cranes* was performed last fall on the CSB campus. The play is based on the true story of Sadako Sasaki, who at the age of two survived the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, only to develop leukemia at the age of 12. Inspired by an old belief, Sadako tried to fold 1,000 origami cranes to recover her health. During production, CSB/SJU Japanese students taught students in the Amnesty International club how to fold the paper cranes.

Photo by Michael Becker

