

ARTS AND SCIENCES



PUPPY LOVE

PETE'S PET POSSE
PAWS WAY INTO HEARTS



ARTS AND SCIENCES



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On the Cover

IF YOU LOVE DOGS, you won't find the amazing success of Pete's Pet Posse too surprising. Still, the posse is expanding, with several members of the College of Arts and Sciences joining the Dean Bret Danilowicz, his wife, Kay, and their dog, Sandy D., in the cadre of canines. (Photo by Gary Lawson/University Marketing)

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YEAR INDICATES OSU COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES GRADUATES.



Bret Danilowicz, dean, College of Arts and Sciences

From the Dean ...

Preparing Students by Liberating Learning

I have observed news outlets proclaiming that the liberal arts do not lead to careers for their graduates, thus encouraging students to enroll in professional degree programs instead. The liberal arts include every major in the college, from English to mathematics to multimedia journalism. Such statements about these degrees are utterly misplaced.

Studies regularly demonstrate that rates of employment and salaries are equitable among liberal arts and professional graduates; studies also demonstrate that liberal arts majors learn more than their professional degree counterparts. Isn't learning why students attend university? Not only are liberal arts degrees alive and well, they remain the best-suited majors for learning at universities.

What is true — yet not covered by the media — is that students learn more when their coursework is paired with experiential learning opportunities: Research and internships are critical for student success. During a research experience, a faculty member mentors a student one-on-one on the research process. During an internship, a working professional mentors a student on applying degree-based skills in a work environment.

Not so long ago, companies readily offered unpaid internships for students. However, policies have changed, and many companies will accept only students who receive a stipend to participate. Similarly, students often volunteered to conduct research alongside faculty members, but the financial pressure

of increasing college costs is driving those students toward part-time jobs instead.

This is where you come in.

Alumni and friends of the College of Arts and Sciences have started to provide funding for our students to participate in internships and research experiences, changing excellent degree programs into transformational ones. Replicating this support will be the primary goal for the College of Arts and Sciences over the next few years.

Supporting one Cowboy at a time, you can make an incredible difference at Oklahoma State University. I encourage you to reach out to me or to the OSU Foundation to learn how to become involved in this effort.

Sincerely,

Bret

Going

Photos by Phil Shockley

Story by Brian Petrotta



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Emily Fekete (from left), Alyson Greiner and Dale Lightfoot developed a new degree program to arm geography majors with the tools they need to succeed in fields as diverse as tourism, academia and the state department.

Global



New geography degree program has worldwide options — and appeal

Nearly everyone who attends college expects the time to serve as a map to employment. While this might be literally true for geography students, the department knows some people let misconceptions keep them away.

“A lot of people just don’t know what geography is,” says department head Dr. Dale Lightfoot. “They had it in third grade and haven’t looked at it since.”

In response, the department has developed a new degree called Global Studies to complement existing programs. Geography is inherently multi-disciplinary but the new degree program should be even more attractive to future students.

“I think it fits the needs of today’s students,” says Dr. Emily Fekete, clinical assistant professor and student adviser for geography. “They have a lot of different interests, and this degree gives students the option to make a lot of their own choices.”

The Global Studies degree is divided into three thematic areas: culture, arts and humanities; geopolitics and the global economy; and sustainability. Each group requires core geography courses, along with selected courses from anthropology, art, history, philosophy, political science and other departments.

The wide range of subjects helped Christina Giles decide to pursue the Global Studies degree.

An employee with OSU’s Learning and Student Success Opportunity (LASSO) center, Giles devoured the university’s course catalogue until she found her path.

“I’m really looking forward to it,” she says. “I’ve always been interested in different cultures, history, geography and the way it all mixes together.”

That is precisely what Dr. Alyson Greiner had in mind when she took the lead on developing the degree.

“After looking at what we offered, it felt like we were already in effect doing global studies, but we could repackage it in a way to broaden its appeal and make it really, truly interdisciplinary,” Greiner says.

Big ideas like Greiner’s go beyond the perception of geography as just “maps and counties,” as described by Lightfoot. OSU faculty members are eager to help students move on to graduate programs and possibly pursue careers in academia. They also point out that the discipline has broad, valuable applications elsewhere, including in positions with the U.S. state department, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international corporations, and travel and tourism, among others.

Geography also offers plentiful study abroad opportunities, including an option for students to incorporate travel into their senior capstone project. Greiner says experiences abroad are priceless. Fekete agrees: “The more you

see how other people live and solve problems, the more opportunity you have to come up with solutions to your own daily problems.”

Lightfoot regularly heads study abroad courses at OSU, including recent trips to Cuba. He finds many students appreciate the structure of a class because it makes them feel more comfortable visiting a country, rather than doing so on their own. Just as often, he finds that once they have traveled with a group, they are more likely to travel again.

“Study abroad will break down that initial barrier for a lot of people,” Lightfoot says. “If they can partner that with a good grounding in Global Studies, they’ll have a greater depth of understanding what they’re seeing and experiencing.”

“Students are really fascinated by globalization,” Greiner says. “It raises a lot of interesting questions and dynamics they experience.”

That is certainly the case for Giles, who has worked with countless international students at the LASSO center. Now that she has found a program that captured her imagination, she is more excited than ever to be in Stillwater.

“I’m so happy to see OSU doing things like this.”

Giles will join the first cohort of Global Studies students this fall. Many who join her may never have considered a degree in geography prior to learning of the Global Studies degree. And while very few of them will be known by the title of “geographer” after they graduate, each of them will know and appreciate how the discipline guided them to their respective careers. 📍

Bringing Language to Life



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PHOTO: ISTOCK BY GETTY IMAGES



Curriculum modifications allow more students to explore language through culture and food

By Karolyn Bolay

A new course in Oklahoma State University's Department of Foreign Language and Literatures brings language to life by studying French foods and culture.

"We were just thinking about ways to get more students in, and a colleague threw out the idea of having culture classes that would get more people inspired in the culture and inspire them to then take the language courses," says Dr. Laurielle Turcat, who is teaching the French Culinary Staples course.

A class focused on culture will bring a lighter touch to the art of learning a language.

"Having a constant grammar language class can get really exhausting," Turcat says. "There are a lot of ways to lighten up a classroom and talking about culture is definitely one of them."

Turcat enjoys baking in her spare time and had the idea of a culinary course in the back of her mind. Now was the perfect time to launch her idea.

"I thought, 'Everybody loves French culture for its culinary staples,'" she explains. "So I will be teaching a little bit of language in terms of vocabulary words, but having it just be about culture and taking away the language barrier by having it just be about culture is really useful in terms of a broad education."

Students participating in the new course will discover the French culture and language through different food groups. The main units will focus on cheese, wine and bread, and shorter units will include spirits, pastry, candy and meat spreads.

"Depending on who is counting, there are between 300 and 1,000 French cheeses that are all distinct," says Turcat, lecturer of French in the department.

But the class will also talk about how marketing is different in the French culture.

"There are going to be sections that are focused on food, but there is also going to be marketing and what French culture values are seen through the marketing of food," Turcat adds. "We will also discuss the habits they have — such as they have two-hour lunches, and you don't talk about business until the last 10 minutes of the meal, so it is not just about food."

The French Culinary Staples course will include a social media aspect, as the course is strictly online. The social media part allows students to share their projects on a different platform.

"The students will be required to do nine or 10 different posts throughout the whole semester," Turcat says. "They will also have a tasting project. ... They will have to post some videos of their tasting experience onto Instagram."



Turcat and Shestokat have worked together to make foreign language courses more accessible for students. One way they have done so is by shifting first-year language courses from a five-hour format to a three-hour format.

“The hope is that we can get more students to take foreign language early in their career so that they hopefully like it and continue on to a minor or major in foreign language.” — Karin Schestokat

The course is open to anyone interested in the French culture.

“It is a lower level class, and students don’t have to be 21,” Turcat says. “They don’t have to have any experience with French. It is really wide open, and anybody can take this and hopefully benefit from it.”

This course is just the start of the department’s efforts to make foreign language courses more accessible for students.

“We realized that for too many students our courses would overlap,” explains Dr. Karin Schestokat, head of the Department of Foreign Language and Literatures. “We are going to go to the three-hour instruction for the first year, down from the five-hour instruction. I heard from many students that the five-hour courses are somewhat scary. But it also affects grade-point average.

“If you do well [in a five-hour course], your grade-point average will go up, but if you don’t do as well, then it really pulls it down.”

This change will also help students who are interested in foreign language courses and must meet certain grade requirements.

“I especially heard that from students who were on scholarships and needed to maintain a certain level of GPA, that even if they wanted to take the class it is just too scary to have a five-hour course,” Schestokat added.


The department expects that the change in curriculum and different culture classes will encourage students to take more foreign language courses.

“The hope is that we can get more students to take foreign language early in their career so that they hopefully like it and continue on to a minor or major in foreign language,” Schestokat says.

Of course, the changes in required hours means a change in the amount of homework.

“It is going to be a big change for instruction because all of a sudden, they are going to have to fit a lot of material into fewer contact hours, which probably means we’re going to have more homework,” Schestokat says. “Materials will need to be shifted around, and we are in the process of that.”

Schestokat anticipates this will allow courses to branch out and offer more in-depth, focused curriculum.

“With more students and more interest and more students voicing interest, instructors will be able to think of different courses to offer,” she says. “At one point, they have to do the vocabulary and grammar to get the basics, but once you have the basics, you can branch out in either literature or culture or business or maybe even more specialized courses.” 

Building Futures by



Looking to the PAST

History degrees can be misunderstood and undervalued. But Dr. Anna Zeide is leading the fight to change that with career opportunities.

When Zeide joined the Department of History at Oklahoma State University in 2015, she accepted a unique faculty position that gave her a chance to focus on improving the undergraduate experience.

“When I was hired, we really wanted to emphasize undergraduate program development,” she

says, smiling. “One of the ways I hoped to do that was by developing career opportunities for our students.”

A history degree is often misunderstood by many outside the program — and even a few within it.

“History is often undervalued as a major because students or

parents have a harder time making connections between the content learned as a history major and the applications of that knowledge in the workplace,” Zeide explains. “I wanted to put students in places where they could use the skill sets and knowledge they acquired here, even if it wasn’t in specifically history-related careers. And



Students in the Jobs in History Practicum use classroom learning in their hands-on experiences in real-world settings, such as the OSU Museum of Art. Student Lydia Perez says, "This is, by far, the most interesting class I have taken at OSU." PHOTO COURTESY OSU MUSEUM OF ART

I wanted to help them develop the people skills so crucial to success in future employment."

Over the past few years, Zeide and the history department, led by Department Head Dr. Laura Belmonte, have recognized a growing need to better prepare graduating seniors for the working world.

"We found that some students were finishing with a history major and having a hard time figuring out how to translate the deep skills of researching, writing, managing information and critical thinking that they had gained into specific career opportunities," Zeide says.

To meet this need, she designed the Jobs in History Practicum Course. The course is intended to equip students with the tools needed to secure employment, and connect with other institutions on campus and within the community. By pairing outstanding students with local organizations for hands-on learning experiences, OSU history students have worked with the OSU Museum of Art, the Oklahoma Oral History Research Program, OSU's Special Collections and University Archives, and the Sheerar Museum of Stillwater History.

"They come in, they ask questions, and they are very dedicated," says Sarah Milligan of the OOHHP. "We look for curiosity, flexibility and passion: traits

that all of our History Practicum students have demonstrated. If it comes down to education versus passion, we will hire the applicant with passion every time. As long as the program continues to produce such high-caliber students, we will be more than happy to continue in the program."

In fact, one of the practicum students, Laurel Henagan, recently secured a paid internship position with the oral history project, due in no small part to the skills she acquired in the History Practicum course.

"Overall, I thought the practicum was a great experience," Henagan says. "The oral history office helped me learn a little bit about the whole cataloging process of the interview, really following it from beginning to end. Overall, I can't praise this program enough. It was the first time I had any exposure to careers in history."

Practicum students have been able to ground their classroom knowledge in the workplace as well as develop additional marketable skills. Along with time at their partner institutions, they also meet in class to read and discuss ways of identifying jobs that will fit their strengths, the value of experiential education, skills of networking and community-building, and specific paths into history-related careers.

“Overall, I can’t praise this program enough. It was the first time I had any exposure to careers in history.” – Laurel Henagan

Throughout the semester, students write weekly journal reflections to process their work and gain instructor feedback, and conclude the course with an oral presentation that brings their practicum experience to a close.

“These students also get an opportunity to become an essential part of our educational programs,” says Carla Shelton of the OSU Museum of Art. “They assist in giving tours, facilitate conversations with visitors in our galleries, and have helped run artists’ workshops. We love having them take part in creating new curriculum and write lesson plans. They are always eager to help us come up with new ways to reach out to our vast audience, whether that be to our parents and their small children, K-12 students, college students or adults of any age.”

“The program is built to show history majors there are other paths to take rather than going to graduate school,” student Lydia Perez says of her experiences at the OSU Museum of Art. “This course is vital for people who are not sure what they want to do after receiving their bachelor’s degree and also gives them field experience. This is, by far, the most interesting class I have taken at OSU.”

“I am very grateful for all the opportunities this practicum course has given me for more hands-on history learning,” Christina Schrantz says. “This will definitely be a class I will not forget. I think this history practicum course is a great class, and I think other students should be encouraged to take it or other courses like it. It offers a unique and important experience that is difficult to get for many students, and I am very blessed to have been able to participate in the course this semester.”

The program is still in its early stages, with 12 students in total. With glowing reviews from both students and employers, Zeide and the OSU Department of History are looking to expand the programs.

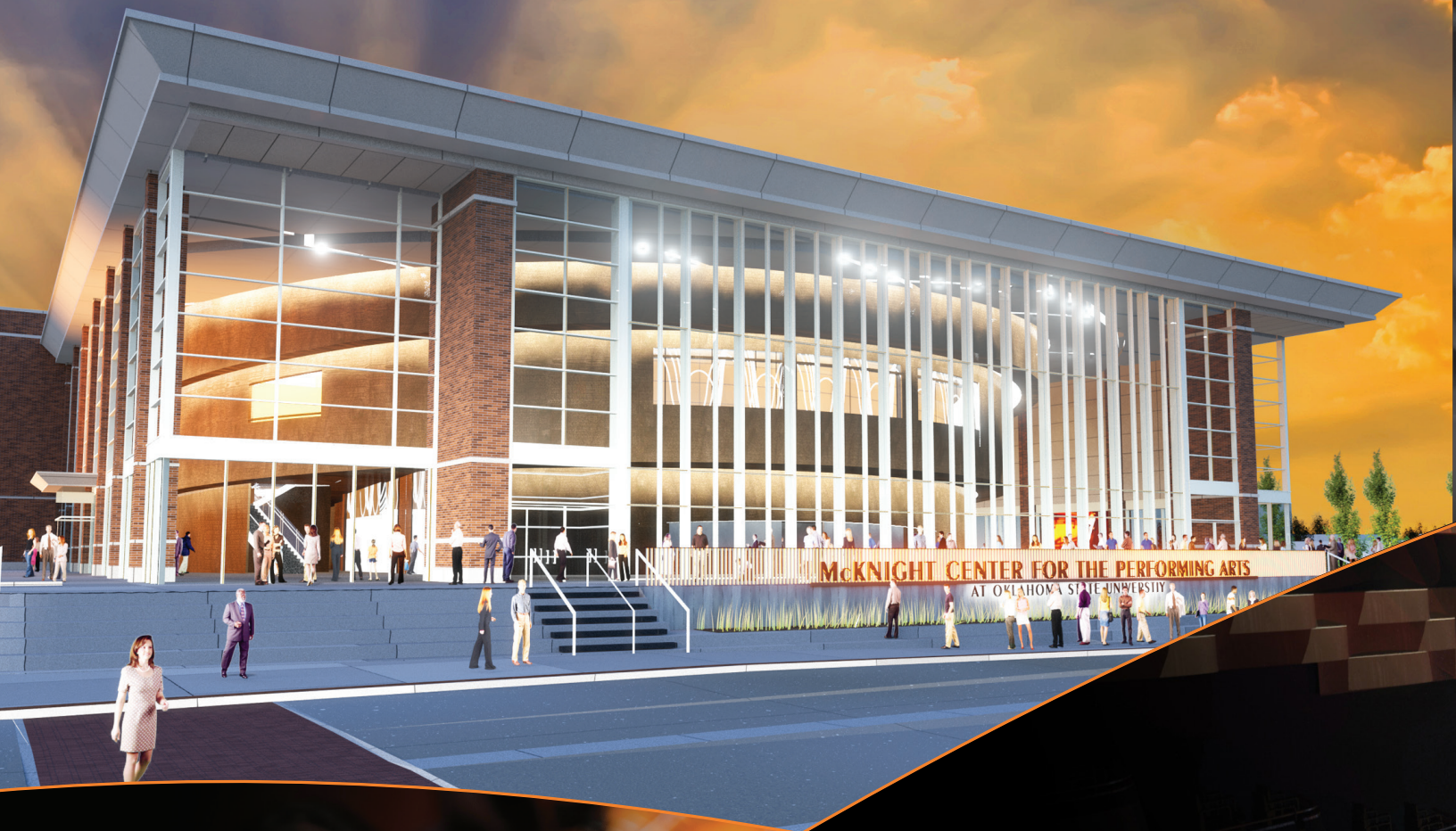
“We at the history department have deepened our relationship with campus and community partners,” Zeide says. “We are excited to continue to develop this course in the years to come.” 🏛️

The Oklahoma Oral History Research Program (OOHRP) looks for curious, flexible and passionate students to reach its goal of preserving the oral history of Oklahoma for future generations. PHOTO / GARY LAWSON, UNIVERSITY MARKETING



the McKNIGHT CENTER

FOR THE
PERFORMING ARTS
AT OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY



— COMING IN 2019 —

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC



The McKnight Center for the Performing Arts will **ENCOURAGE** discovery, **PUSH** educational boundaries and **REDEFINE** Oklahoma State's influence in the arts with world-class programming unique to the region.

Being built on the southwest corner of campus, The McKnight Center will be a modern venue for OSU's talented students, accomplished faculty and members of the community to enjoy.

The Center will open in October 2019 with a grand celebration that includes masterclasses for OSU students and joint concerts with the New York Philharmonic, as part of its previously announced residency partnership with Oklahoma State.

The grand opening and additional programming for the inaugural season are being planned by Mark

Blakeman, the Marilyn and Carl Thoma Executive Director for The McKnight Center. Blakeman arrived at OSU in April 2017 and has an impressive resume with leadership positions at the Tucson Symphony Orchestra and the Nashville Symphony Orchestra.

Fundraising for the project and a new music building is ongoing. By helping us advance these projects, The McKnight Center will also become a long-lasting expression of you — a reflection of your belief that art on the Oklahoma State University campus, in this community and in our world, is valuable and worth supporting.

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McKnightCenter.okstate.edu



CONCEPTUAL RENDERINGS
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A VISION



PHOTO / PHIL SHOCKLEY / UNIVERSITY MARKETING

A student participates in an evening pottery class led by local artist and instructor Buck Dollarhide in May 2017 at the Multi Arts Center.

“Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain



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COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Students experience a free painting workshop led by award-winning artist and illustrator Mike Wimmer in September 2014 at the Stillwater Multi Arts Center. The workshop was offered by the OSU Museum of Art in connection with its *Framing History: Highlights from the Oklahoma State Capital Senate Collection* exhibit. PHOTO/OSU MUSEUM OF ART



FOR THE ARTS

OSU drawing new plans in partnership with city center

By Shelby Holcomb

an artist once he grows up.” — Pablo Picasso

The arts can affect us economically, emotionally, physically and cognitively. They bring us together; promote creativity, critical thinking and adaptability; broaden world-views; and ignite change.

Last summer, Rebecca Brien, Vennerberg Chair of Art and head of Oklahoma State University’s Department of Art, Graphic Design and Art History, proposed a partnership between OSU’s art department and the local Multi Arts Center.

“I thought, wouldn’t it be great if we were able to step in and provide the kind of administrative and financial support that could make this facility really flourish?” Brien says.

Thus, a stretch of extensive discussion began. In the end, following a stream of opinions, perspectives and supporting evidence, the notion of change won.

In mid-April, the City of Stillwater approved Brien’s request, and as of July 1, the center’s management shifted from that of the volunteer Friends of Multi Arts group to that of the Art Department.

“I am excited for the Multi Arts Center partnership between Stillwater and OSU,” says Mayor Gina

Noble, who is also associate director of undergraduate studies and a professor in OSU’s School of Media and Strategic Communications. “I’m impressed with Dr. Rebecca Brien’s vision and leadership because she plans to expand classes offered, and she’s going to involve more OSU faculty and master’s students in the classrooms. It’s a win-win situation, and it enhances our community and quality of life. Stillwater City Council and Stillwater administrators appreciate OSU’s partnership.”

OSU has already been modestly involved with the center, renting its darkroom for the last few years and holding free public workshops with visiting artists there each semester.

Brien and her daughters joined Multi Arts when they moved to Stillwater in 2013, which is also the year she became a Friend of Multi Arts. Shortly after that, she noticed a lack of community awareness and participation in the center and found herself longing for change. She wasn’t alone.

“I think there is so much potential,” Brien says. “I want this to be vibrant, exciting, fun and a really great learning environment. I want it to be used, and I think it will be.



Brienen and her two daughters.
PHOTO/REBECCA BRIENEN

“I really resonate with OSU’s land-grant mission idea that you’re giving back to the

community — and it actually goes back to the motto of my undergraduate institution, which is ‘not to be served but to serve.’ So there’s this idea that I don’t just serve OSU but that I’m also a member of the community, and I serve the community.”

Brienen’s vision for the center revolves around the intersection of community development and cultural programming. Building on some of the existing foundation, her plans include:

- Bringing in more students, teachers and artists;
- Implementing more workshops and camps;
- Working with local retirement and homeschool communities;
- Revamping the space;
- Creating new jobs;
- Paying artists more for teaching; and
- Applying for various grants and fellowships.

“Art is often treated as not being worth as much as a STEM field, for example, and art takes a lot of training, a lot of hard work, and we should respect that,” she says.

The center will also get a fresh start with a new name: Stillwater Center for the Arts.

As center director, she intends to work with other local organizations, such as schools and the public library, because she thinks there’s a place for these dynamic relationships throughout the community. She’ll also be teaming up with the OSU Museum of Art, which will run a number of future programs and bring in guest artists. Many events will be free or inexpensive.

“I just want stability to ensure growth,” she says. “I have tremendous support from the OSU administration, from [Vice President for Administration and Finance] Joe Weaver in particular, and a number of people in the community have reached out to me in incredibly positive ways.”

“I believe that this new approach, with the help of the OSU Art Department, will be a good thing and will encourage longevity for the Multi Arts Center,” says Gayla Foster, secondary education program coordinator and a professor in OSU’s College of Education. “This building is a true jewel for Stillwater and needs to be enlivened for both

community and university participation. I look forward to working toward that goal in whatever capacity I can.” Foster has been involved with the center in various capacities since 2005 and served on the Friends of Multi Arts Board for several years.

As for instruction, Brienen wants to involve a combination of advanced OSU students and visiting and community artists, which includes some current and former teachers. She’s also open to letting artists use the space in exchange for volunteer hours.

“I’m happy to have Multi Arts be a venue for my students to gain experience, but I want us to deliver a really high-quality resource,” she says. “So I want us to be involved as mentors to make sure what we’re offering is at an appropriate level for our community.”

The first program, “Around the World in 10 Days,” a summer arts enrichment camp for ages 9-12, ran in July. Liz Dueck, who recently graduated from OSU with a bachelor of fine arts degree in studio art as well as coursework in education, will be leading the camp and has been developing a curriculum under the oversight of Brienen and Foster.

“I think this new partnership will be a great gateway for arts students at OSU to investigate various careers in the arts in relationship to community work,” Dueck says.

While so much is still in the works, Brienen’s robust vision seems to just get better and better. “The impulse to create art is fundamental to all human beings, so having this resource open and accessible to all is absolutely essential,” she says.

“A strong community arts center can provide many positive things for our community. At the most basic level, a community arts center provides supplemental arts education for public school K-12 and home-schooled students, a venue for creativity and art experimentation for adults and retirees, and a place where people with special needs can take classes that allow them not only to develop their imaginations but can also help strengthen things as fundamental as fine motor skills.

“We really want the Art Department to support what’s happening in the community. I’m really interested in developing a place where people not only learn something but develop a life-long appreciation for the arts,” Brienen says. “I’d like this to become a model ... one of the leading art centers in Oklahoma. It’ll take some time, but it’s all totally possible.”



PHOTO BY JASON WALLACE

CULTURING CREATIVITY

Teens get a college experience with Summer Art Academy

By Kevin Karaki

15
Connect.
Achieve.
Succeed.

It seems kids always want to grow up faster.

The Summer Art Academy (SAA) at Oklahoma State University gives students 13-18 years old a taste of that.

The program allows junior high and high school students to experience designing and creating art projects at the college level.

Art professor Chris Ramsay has been involved with the SAA since its organization three years ago, and he is excited to see the expansion of the program.

“I have always believed that we’ve needed a program like this

here at Oklahoma State University,” Ramsay says. “It’s been wonderful to see this program take shape and expand.”

For the past three years, OSU faculty and students have instructed various classes, from computer-generated graphic design to working with hammers and anvils to craft jewelry (Ramsay’s class). The range of classes in the Summer Art Academy reflects the breadth of OSU’s art classes as well as the creativity of the SAA students.

“They accomplish amazing things in such a short and concentrated period of time. I have had to re-evaluate my expectations for the fall undergraduate students after working with Summer Art Academy students,” Ramsay says, a huge grin on his face.

Both of Ramsay’s parents were educators: One taught elementary school, the other at the university level. With K-12 teaching certification of his own, to say nothing of his experiences with twin teenage children, programs such as these are very close to his heart.

CONTINUES



A few examples of the artwork created by students of the SAA jewelry making class.

PHOTO BY CHRIS RAMSAY

“It’s been great to have younger students come here onto a college campus, into the classroom, and experience this kind of learning environment that will prepare them for their future education,” Ramsay says.

It’s not just the SAA students who are receiving an education. OSU art students volunteer to assist instructors, gaining valuable experiences of their own. For many OSU students, this is what they would like to do as a career — teach art. At the Summer Art Academy, they learn teaching techniques and instructional methods in a classroom setting. Teaching junior high and high school beginners and teaching undergraduate college classes are not so different, according to Ramsay.

“When you show students something that they didn’t know before and as they practice, gain confidence and technical knowledge, it’s a night-and-day transformation in the classroom,” Ramsay says. “You can see the joy in their eyes as they realize, ‘I’m getting this.’”

One of the SAA courses, “Around the World in Ten Days,” introduces students to the art of various global civilizations, utilizing exhibits within the OSU Museum of Art, the Gardiner Art Gallery and the Stillwater Center for the Arts.

“The course is a great opportunity to share resources and create a stronger collaborative effort within the Stillwater community,” Ramsay says.

Art and science are both about observation and developing technical skills, according to Ramsay.

“When you are shown how to properly accomplish basic technical skills or processes, the result is confidence, which then leads to an opportunity to make observations about the world and express it through that medium,” Ramsay says. “If you are a scientist, it is critical that you learn how to operate precision instruments with confidence to record your observations, to know if you are truly making a new discovery.”

Often the most amazing stories are not discovered until after the SAA ends.


“I had a student in the course who was not very socially adjusted,” Ramsay says. “Over the course of the week, I spent just a

little extra time devoted to helping this student succeed. And to be honest, when the class ended only five days later, I had no idea what kind of impact I had made, if any.”

But a few weeks later, Ramsay ran into a mutual acquaintance in the supermarket and heard the rest of the story.

“[The student] has so much more confidence,” the acquaintance told him, “and has been so proud of the work accomplished in the class and has gone on to make more art projects!”

“That right there sums up what’s it’s all about,” Ramsay says.

“Empowering the next generation to be bold, to create, and to feel free to express themselves artistically in practical ways, and applying that creativity and boldness into their own lives.” 

“I have always believed that we’ve needed a program like this here at Oklahoma State University. It’s been wonderful to see this program take shape and expand.” – Chris Ramsay



Ramsay has been teaching full time at OSU since 1990.

GOING *to the* DOGS



 *Pete's Pet Posse picking up members in CAS*

The dogs of Arts and Sciences: (from left) Sandy D (Bret Danilowicz), Huxley (Keith Garbutt), Darwin (Christine Garbutt), Cooper (Holley Hansen and Stephen Nemeth), Roscoe (Leslie Baldwin), Logan (Bobbi Kay Lewis), and Chunk (Tyrell Conway)



By Brian Petrotta

Photos by Jason Wallace

One of Oklahoma State University's primary traits is the cultivation of a friendly campus that helps students feel as if they are part of a family. For many, family includes pets. Through a cross-campus, collaborative effort, Pete's Pet Posse (P3, for short) was established in Fall 2013 to introduce pet therapy dogs in hopes of making the OSU campus feel even more like home.

In four short years, eight dogs associated with College of Arts and Sciences' faculty and staff have earned their "barkalaureates," and more are on the way. The popularity of the program has grown by traditional word-of-mouth as well as hand-to-fur.

"We have two dogs, Sandy D. and Chunk, in Life Sciences East, where I work," Assistant Dean for Outreach Bobbi Kay Lewis says. "Their owners told me about the program and what great experiences they've had in the program, which inspired me to get on board."

P3 owners and their dogs must first submit an application in August and September. If the program accepts them, complete extensive training begins in January. Graduation from the program includes obtaining the Canine Good Citizen (CGC) certification and national registration with the

Alliance of Therapy Dogs. They collaborate with their department to develop a work schedule and participate in special P3 events

"It is incredible to see the stress just melt off people while they are petting your dog."

throughout the year. It can make for a significant time commitment, but it reaps bountiful rewards.

Bret Danilowicz, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, recalls one student who burst into tears upon seeing his dog, Sandy D. She laid down with Sandy, hugged her and cried for several minutes. Then she stood up, smiled and said, "I really needed that," before walking away.

"We never exchanged names or greetings — but in that moment, we didn't need to," Danilowicz says. "She just needed Sandy."

TAKING NOTICE

Most interactions involve smiles and laughter. As the program enters its fifth year at OSU, students have come to look for dogs wearing the orange P3 vests. Even prospective students who visit the campus have taken notice.

"I remember one freshman during a visit who told me she decided to come to OSU because of P3," says Leslie Baldwin, undergraduate

adviser for the Department of Communications Sciences and Disorders.

Pet therapy is quickly growing in

popularity everywhere. Hospitals, retirement homes, nursing homes, schools, hospices, people with learning difficulties and stressful situations such as disaster areas have taken advantage of this approach. The OSU Pet Therapy Program was designed to contribute to the America's Healthiest Campus® initiative.

"Mental health often gets overlooked, and petting a dog one day

CONTINUES



Pete's
PET POSSE
OKLAHOMA STATE PET THERAPY PROGRAM





Darwin

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may be all the student needs to change their attitude,” Baldwin says. “I am often reminded that it’s the little things in our daily lives that add up to the big things, and I think P3 is just that.”

Baldwin also shares her dog, Roscoe, with her department’s Animal Assisted Intervention program. This allows Roscoe to interact with children with autism and clients who stutter. They have found a “marked difference” when dogs like Roscoe participate in the sessions.

Holley Hansen and Stephen Nemeth (both in political science) have noticed how their dog, Cooper, has the power to bring people together.

“During visits, you will often see a circle of students who have never met each other, all from different backgrounds, social groups and majors, talking about themselves or their dogs back home,” Hansen says. “These may be temporary or little connections, but they can help students feel a lot more at home.”

DOGS AT WORK

While the primary beneficiaries of the P3 dogs are stressed-out students, faculty and staff, the owners enjoy the perk of taking their dogs to work. Lewis says her favorite days are when she brings her lab mix, Logan, to Life Sciences East.

“You not only get to build a better relationship with your dog and bring him/her to comfort you and others on campus, you get an opportunity to connect with so many different people and students,”

she says. “It is incredible to see the stress just melt off people while they are petting your dog.”

Baldwin concurs. She felt guilty leaving Roscoe at home every day, and the more she learned about the program, the more she realized how much it helped the dog.

“It is a symbiotic relationship,” she explains. “Roscoe is always excited when we put the vest on and we go to

campus.”

Roscoe is not the only P3 dog to get excited. Some may even get too excited. Hansen and Nemeth discovered Cooper could strain his tail from wagging too much. In fact, he did so twice.

“He *really* loves his job,” Hansen says.

The owners love the job, too. While the entire P3 group feels like a family, in some cases it is literally true, for many campus couples share P3 duties (and rewards).

Danilowicz and his wife Kay (Communications Sciences and Disorders) share Sandy D., for instance.

Hansen and Nemeth handle Cooper.

Tyrell Conway, microbiology and molecular genetics, and his wife, Sharri, bring Chunk.

Darwin and Huxley belong to Keith Garbutt, dean of The Honors College and professor of plant biology, and his wife, Christine Garbutt.

The popularity of the program has grown by traditional word-of-mouth as well as hand-to-fur.

Toby is shared by Michael, geology, and Susan Grammer, OSU Fire Protection publications.

Rebecca Sheehan, geography, adds Goose as a P3 pet in the College of Arts and Sciences.

Danilowicz could not be happier so many dogs have joined Sandy D. in the program.

“Since this is purely a volunteer program, it is wonderful to see so many of our faculty and staff from the college supporting our campus this way.” 🐾



Interns THUNDER UP

As fans of the Oklahoma City Thunder enjoyed seeing superstar Russell Westbrook become the “face of the franchise” and the NBA’s most valuable player last season, seven OSU undergraduates worked behind the scenes to help the organization manage and capitalize on the media attention that his feats drew.

The veteran guard set a league record for single-season triple-doubles (10 or more points, rebounds and assists in a single game), gaining attention and fame locally, nationally and even globally.

All the while, the seven OSU undergraduates earned paid internships, easily becoming the largest class of OSU students working for the Thunder in such a capacity. Considering the Thunder received thousands of applications for these positions, it was no small feat for OSU to command so many of the openings.

“You have to be exceptional just to land an interview with what is one of the best-run organizations in professional sports,” says Dr. Ted Kian, professor and Welch-Bridgewater Chair of Sports Media.

The seven OSU students were: Logan Butler (Ottawa, Kan.), Thomas Chapman (Tulsa), Jordan Glover (Oklahoma City), Addison Plank (Oklahoma City), Addison Skaggs (Perryton, Texas), Corinne Simpson (Lincoln, Neb.), and Matt Valdez (Fort Worth,

Texas).

While the majority of these students worked under the supervision of Matt Tumbelson and John Read in the basketball communications (media relations) office, Butler and Plank served their internships in the corporate office. So while they would occasionally work with the athletes at community events, they spent the bulk of their time interacting with supporters of the team, particularly through social media.

“I learned a lot about the difference between social media styles and the different voices you have to take on,” Butler says.

Adapting different voices to different audiences became particularly challenging for the interns, especially with an international audience. China is eagerly engaged in the NBA, so Butler and Plank learned to write for Weibo, a popular Chinese social media app. While they did not have to do their own translations, they still learned to connect with that audience through the use of emojis, bold text and exclamation points. It proved to be a successful approach.

“I feel like we got more engagement on

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OSU students seize opportunity to work with OKC's NBA team



Addison Plank (left) and Logan Butler earned valuable experience from their paid internships with the Oklahoma City Thunder's corporate office.



Corinne Simpson (from left), Jordan Glover, Thomas Chapman, Matt Valdez and Addison Skaggs helped make up an impressive class of paid interns from OSU for the Oklahoma City Thunder.

“Weibo than on Twitter,” Plank says.

Both Butler and Plank earned their internships, in part, through Gina Noble’s Advanced Public Relations course. As part of the final project, students are required to create a finely tuned personal portfolio and cover letter, then apply for an internship. Butler applied in the spring of 2016 and secured her internship for the fall of 2016. Plank followed and picked up where Butler left off early in 2017. They each survived the first round of cuts through a phone interview and then interviewed in person with Karina Henderson, director of corporate communications for the Thunder. In Henderson, the OSU interns found a female role model.

“Karina is the most commanding presence in the room,” Butler describes.

The Thunder’s coordinator of corporate communications, Erica George, also provided guidance.

“I think having two really strong women to look up to, especially in the NBA, is really impressive,” Plank says.

They are quick to point out they were exposed to successful women at OSU, as well. Not only did they receive instruction from Noble (“the best teacher in the School of Media & Strategic Communications,” Kian declares) but they had the opportunity to interact with guest speakers from all over the country through the Association for Women in Sports Media organization. Still, their first sports media classes were as male-dominated as might be expected.

“I was one of only three girls in my sports reporting class,” Plank recalls. “It was intimidating.”

Butler had a similar experience.


“I think I was one of four women in my first sports media class, but you learn to hold your own,” Butler says. “Women have to work harder

in the workforce anyway, so I feel like working in sports prepared me for anything.”

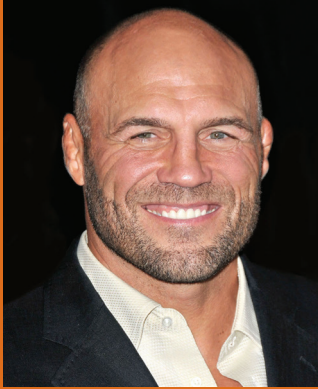
To that end, Butler, who graduated in May 2017, accepted a corporate communications job with a Kansas City engineering and construction firm — another male-dominated industry. Plank is taking advantage of the SMSC’s 4-plus-1 program, which will allow her to finish her master’s degree just one year after obtaining her undergraduate degree.

Their success stories are two of many from the relatively new sports media program at OSU. A combination of high-level classroom instruction and practical experience has proven to be a winning recipe.

“Our program is truly multimedia, and that is a large part of why our students have been so successful in landing internships and jobs,” Kian says.

“I want to be the best,” Plank says. “I don’t want the boys to take my position, and I am not going to let them.” 

CAS honors five alumni



Before dominating the octagon, **Randy Couture** was a three-time All-American wrestler at Oklahoma State University who graduated with a bachelor's degree in German in 1992. Now retired from fighting, the three-time UFC World Heavyweight Champion and two-time UFC World Light Heavyweight Champion is an accomplished actor, author and businessman.



Dr. Bob Blackburn came to OSU to earn his master's degree in history in 1976, followed by his doctorate in 1979, after earning his bachelor's degree in history at Southwest Oklahoma State. Since 1999, Blackburn has been the director of the Oklahoma Historical Society, joining the organization in 1980 as the editor of *The Chronicles of Oklahoma*.



In 1999, **Sarah Coburn** took the stage at OSU to receive her bachelor's degree in music education. Today, Coburn is world renowned for her "precision placement, mercury speed and a gorgeous liquid gold tone" as she headlines musical performances with organizations such as the Seattle Opera, the Atlanta Opera, Opera San Antonio and the Copenhagen Philharmonic.



While at OSU, **Dr. Gregory Quarles** was a recipient of the Carl & Gladys Herrington President's Distinguished Scholarship, helping him earn dual bachelor's degrees in mathematics and physics in 1983, followed by a master's in 1985 and a doctorate in 1987, both in physics. An accomplished physicist, CEO and board member, Quarles has been honored for developing new laser devices for medical, military and industrial applications.



Dr. William Hua, the 2016 CAS Rising Star, received his bachelor's degree in psychology from OSU in 2006. Since earning his medical doctorate from the University of North Texas in 2012, Hua has become a clinical health psychologist at the San Francisco VA Medical Center and a clinical professor at the University of California, San Francisco, and the University of San Francisco.

In the Name of Science

Retired OSU chemistry professor has yet to leave the lab

By Shelby Holcomb

Although he officially retired in 1996, Paul Devlin still spends the majority of his days in the lab, continuing an experimental program that's been funded by the National Science Foundation since the early '60s.

"The NSF has been good to me since 1962, and I don't think things could've gone any better," Devlin says.

A professor emeritus of physical chemistry and chemical physics in Oklahoma State University's Department of Chemistry, Devlin has the longest chain of continuous funding in his department — and he's still not sure when he'll completely call it quits.

"I always look at the present NSF grant as the last one," he says and laughs. "The first 16 years of retirement under the present program ... most enjoyable I've ever had.

"In the last few years, there have been some big life changes that have affected my outlook, but my own approach is that if my mind is adequate in a year, I'll go back for another three years ... but I'm not sure it's going to work out that way for a couple reasons — my mind is number one, but number two is that federal funding of grants is dropping rapidly. We need to do something pretty spectacular if we're going to go

back in hopes of getting more funding."

From the early '80s to about 2002, Devlin's research centered on ice, specifically the nature of the surface of ice nanocrystals and the mobility of defective structures within ice and ice-related systems.

After that, his focus shifted to gas hydrates, or clathrate hydrates, with a system based on two methods: catalysis — the acceleration of a solid state formation by a substance or catalyst — and an all-vapor approach to that formation, as gas hydrates are basically ice with small guest molecules encaged.

What's the importance of all this time spent on one project?

In a nutshell, there's been a long-term view that clathrates can be used in numerous ways, such as with technology, water purification, bulk transportation of molecules and more.

"One of the possible uses that's been largely unrealized is in storing carbon dioxide," Devlin says. "Potentially, they'd be useful in attempts to control carbon dioxide concentrations in the world — that's a very big subject. The problem hasn't been anywhere near solved in regards to that use, but as of 10 years ago, we weren't using a practical system."

Others agree that findings by Devlin and his associates

along with more general progress over the last few decades are critical and perhaps profound.

Roughly 10 years ago, Devlin says standard practice was to force gases, such as carbon dioxide or methane, into the hydrates by using tremendous pressure — think 60 atmospheres of pressure for hours at a time — but then, something clicked.

"What we found was a way to form these systems on a sub-second time-scale at atmospheric or lower pressures and moderately low temperatures," he says.

With so many years spent in the lab, Devlin has had the opportunity to work with many students, particularly graduate students, and he feels this might be the area he has the greatest impact.

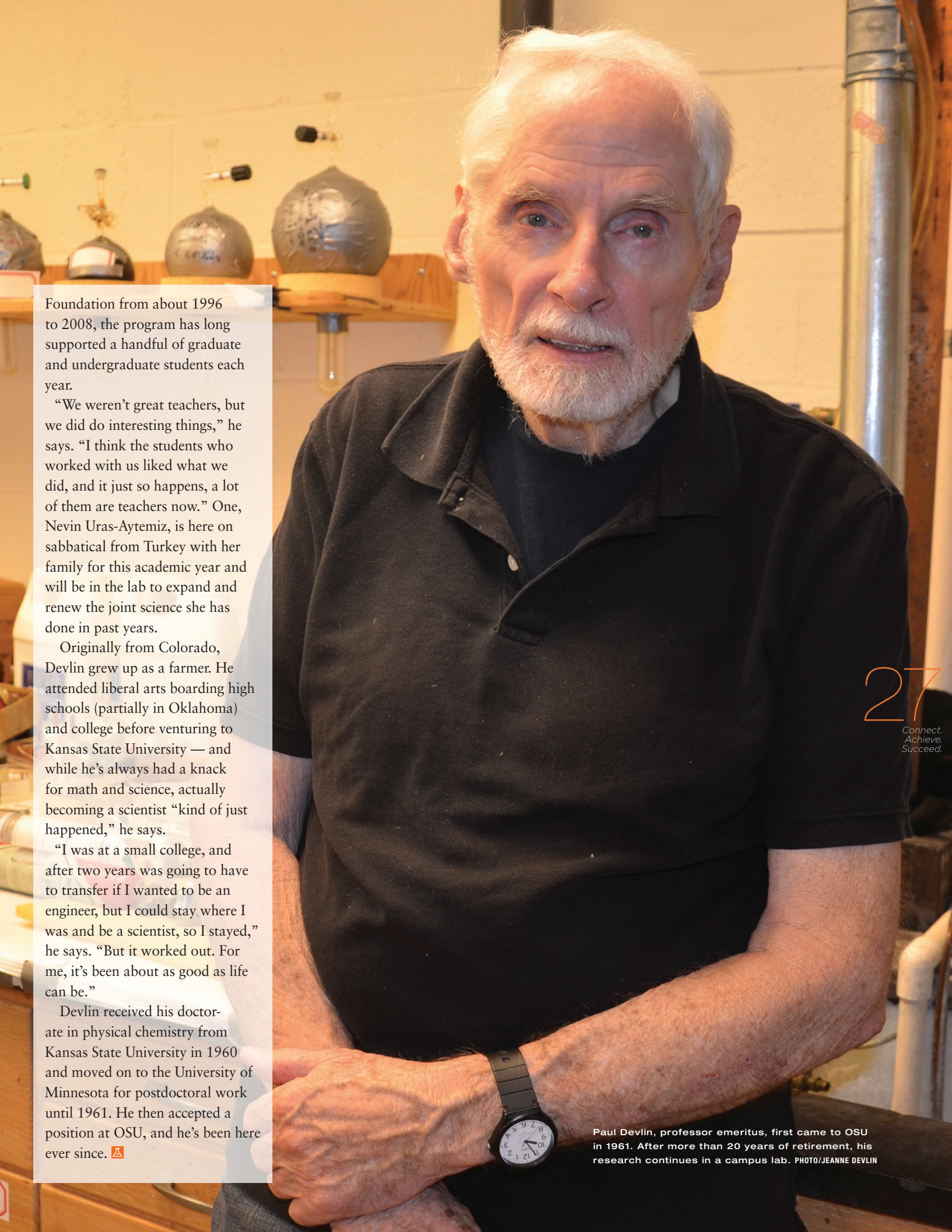
"Dr. Devlin is a high-quality scientist and person," says Brad Rowland, an assistant professor in OSU's Chemical Engineering Department, who worked with Devlin as a graduate student in the '90s. "He is a man who makes people question and think, whether talking about science or any other topic."

Through NSF funding, along with advanced computational support acquired through a collaboration with the United States-Israel Binational Science



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A photograph of Paul Devlin, an elderly man with white hair and a beard, wearing a black polo shirt. He is standing in a chemistry laboratory, with various glassware and equipment visible in the background. The lighting is warm and focused on him.

Foundation from about 1996 to 2008, the program has long supported a handful of graduate and undergraduate students each year.

“We weren’t great teachers, but we did do interesting things,” he says. “I think the students who worked with us liked what we did, and it just so happens, a lot of them are teachers now.” One, Nevin Uras-Aytemiz, is here on sabbatical from Turkey with her family for this academic year and will be in the lab to expand and renew the joint science she has done in past years.

Originally from Colorado, Devlin grew up as a farmer. He attended liberal arts boarding high schools (partially in Oklahoma) and college before venturing to Kansas State University — and while he’s always had a knack for math and science, actually becoming a scientist “kind of just happened,” he says.

“I was at a small college, and after two years was going to have to transfer if I wanted to be an engineer, but I could stay where I was and be a scientist, so I stayed,” he says. “But it worked out. For me, it’s been about as good as life can be.”

Devlin received his doctorate in physical chemistry from Kansas State University in 1960 and moved on to the University of Minnesota for postdoctoral work until 1961. He then accepted a position at OSU, and he’s been here ever since. 

Paul Devlin, professor emeritus, first came to OSU in 1961. After more than 20 years of retirement, his research continues in a campus lab. PHOTO/JEANNE DEVLIN

OSU's Own Nobel Nominee

Alumnus Dambach could win Peace Prize vote in October



Oklahoma State University alumnus Charles “Chic” Dambach gave a TEDx talk earlier this year in Washington, D.C., sponsored by Johns Hopkins University, entitled “Exhaust the Limits: Why Not Peace?” Dambach, an adjunct professor at Johns Hopkins and a former president of the Alliance for Peacebuilding and National Peace Corps Association, began by quoting Pindar, an ancient Greek poet.

“O my soul, do not aspire to a mortal life,” he told the audience, “but exhaust the limits of the possible.”

It’s Dambach’s work exhausting those limits that has earned the OSU graduate (bachelor’s degree in speech communication and rhetoric, ’67) a nomination for the 2017 Nobel Peace Prize.

“I got involved in peace activism at OSU back in the 60s, but what I do now isn’t quite activism; it’s what we call peacebuilding,” Dambach says. “What we do is go into active conflict environments, where the adversaries on both sides are all tied to a conflict. We try to work with them, to help find a non-violent way to resolve whatever the differences may be.”

Dambach’s journey began in Stillwater, as a lineman on scholarship for Cowboys head coach Phil Cutchen. Being drawn to OSU for football ultimately kept Dambach out of the draft: He earned a medical exemption after separating his shoulder five times during his playing career.

“I played a little, but I was never any good,” Dambach jokes. “I like to say that the biggest mistake the Cowboys ever made back then was giving me a scholarship.”

Dambach eventually left the team after events opened his eyes to social justice issues and racism, spurred by a career-ending injury. He rebounded by becoming involved with the debate team, in student government and in anti-war activism.

As a member of the OSU debate team, Dambach participated in a debate concerning U.S. foreign policy, leading him to research the beginnings of the Vietnam War.

“Chic” Dambach came to OSU to play football. He left searching for non-violent solutions to conflict resolution. PHOTO COURTESY OF OSU ATHLETICS

“[I] discovered what a disaster [the Vietnam War] was,” he says. “It was based totally on a misunderstanding on what was happening in Vietnam, false pretenses in the Gulf of Tonkin, and I realized that people were killing and being killed over a stupid mistake. You just can’t justify that.”

As he researched more wars and other conflicts, he concluded that most wars are “colossal mistakes.”

“I just started thinking through the whole concept of using violent force to resolve differences,” he says. “I’m not a total pacifist; I am willing to defend myself and this country when we are legitimately threatened. All too often, we get war when we are not threatened. There are peaceful ways of resolving these differences.”

Dambach’s path to the Nobel nomination began with two young African men he mentored: Maikel Nabil, an Egyptian blogger, activist and political

prisoner; and Victor Ochen, a Ugandan peace activist and founder of the African Youth Initiative Network.

Both men have also been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Ochen holds the current record as sub-Saharan Africa’s youngest nominee and Uganda’s first. Ochen has also been named one of the 10 most powerful people in Africa by *Forbes* magazine.

“Maikel was one of the key leaders of the youth uprising in Egypt in 2011. ... Victor was born and raised in a displaced persons camp in northern Uganda, and was attacked by Joseph Kony’s Lord’s Resistance Army,” Dambach says. “These two young men went to members of Congress to convince them to nominate me for the prize.”

The final vote on the 2017 Peace Prize recipients will take place in October, with the awards being presented in December in Oslo, Norway. 🇺🇸



Decker stepping up to lead English department

Dr. William M. Decker never planned to take on the role of department head. His dissertation director's caution about research taking a backseat to administrative duties lingered for decades in the back of his mind.

But having published books and articles on a range of American authors, Decker concedes his scholarly record is sufficiently established for him to take on the new challenge of being department head of English at Oklahoma State University. A recipient of a 2016 OSU Regents Distinguished Research Award, he firmly believes that he can administer while maintaining momentum on his current book project.

"The faculty was unanimous in wishing to promote from within their ranks rather than recruit a head from outside," Decker says. "Nobody really campaigned for the position. I gave permission to two people to nominate me. That pretty much decided it."

Taking this step makes perfect sense for Decker. He brings more than 20 years as a faculty member at OSU as well as experience as associate department head and director of Graduate Studies to the

position. He also has been a Fulbright Scholar in Belgium and a DAAD guest professor in Germany.

As head, Decker plans to uphold the department's longstanding reputation for outstanding classroom instruction and internationally recognized scholarly achievement. Mentorship of junior faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate majors also counts as a chief priority for Decker.

"Mentorship is really important to this department," he explains. "Twenty years ago, we began to assign senior faculty mentors to incoming faculty. We tell our new colleagues, 'We want you to have a career here, and we want to do everything we can to support your scholarly agenda as it flourishes and expands.'"

by Dr. Jeffery Walker, who is my fellow American Literature scholar, and his mentorship was invaluable to me while I was getting my legs set."

Working at OSU has also provided opportunities for collaboration, which Decker has first-hand experience with through his participation in the OSU Cambridge (United Kingdom) Summer Program.

"One of my outstanding memories has to do with being on the Cambridge campus and teaching a course with my colleague from geography, CAS Associate Dean Tom Wickle," Decker recalls. "Together, we taught a course on travel writing. We had 20 really gifted students who were excited about the whole course. A few of them had been abroad before, but some of them had never boarded an airplane before




Dr. William Decker

Decker says his own OSU career has been mentored and otherwise supported.

"There have been a lot of positive influences here at OSU," he says. "I was hired

flying to Dallas for the transatlantic flight.

"It was so much fun, and the students were intensely motivated. That was definitely a high point in my career." 



Dr. David McIlroy

McIlroy leaves Idaho to lead OSU's physics

A challenge is defined as “difficulty in a job or undertaking that is stimulating to the one engaged in it.”

And after 21 years at the University of Idaho, Dr. David McIlroy was looking for a new one.

McIlroy found just the challenge he was seeking with the open position of department head in the College of Arts and Sciences Department of Physics at Oklahoma State University.

“I decided I could either stay here for another 12 to 13 years and cruise to retirement, or I could find something new and interesting to do,” McIlroy says. “The position as it was advertised looked really interesting to me.”

McIlroy is already familiar with the challenges that come with leading a physics department, which he did at the University of Idaho for four years.

“The main goal, as I see it, is to continue to build the undergraduate physics major enrollment, continue to bring in higher and higher quality graduate students ... help guide the department and reinvigorate its research,” McIlroy says. “Part of the goal is to take the department to what I view a modern physics department to be, which is a lot more student-inclusive, especially with the undergraduates, and have a lot more undergraduate research, which is what the department wants to move toward as well.”

In fact, McIlroy sees undergraduate research as one of the most important parts of the department.

“It is the main thing that is critical to any physics program,” he says. “In these days, the students are so much more knowledgeable on what they want to do. If you can answer their questions and

it matches with what they had in mind, you start to attract the best students, which is really what physics is all about because it is a difficult subject.”

OSU's physics department is larger than Idaho's, which McIlroy says allows for more opportunities — and taking more risks.

“There is not a lot of room for error [at the University of Idaho], so we have to be really careful with our strategy,” he explains. “At somewhere like OSU, the department can take more chances, which means we can pursue different opportunities.”

McIlroy is looking forward to the changes and challenges of his new position.

“It is a new beginning,” he says. “Just the excitement of working with people who want to see change and want to bring the department up to a different level.” 📧

— Karolyn Bolay

Time Out for

Research team developing quick, easy test for lung cancer

In the race to detect lung cancer, there are several weapons in a medical professional's repertoire. While imaging tests such as X-rays or CT scans can reveal lesions, one of the most common methods of detection and assessment of a malignancy is a biopsy.

A team of bio-analytical chemistry researchers hope to soon offer an alternative to this painful,

we want to use their properties in this test. By determining the biomarker levels, and seeing if the patient has the signs and symptoms of lung cancer, then they don't have to initially go through painful procedures," Premaratne says. "Our focus is to give an early diagnosis and predictions, so patients can seek medical professionals to further confirm their status."

Instead of a painful and invasive surgical biopsy, the process makes it possible to diagnose possible lung cancer within three hours.

The process relies on detecting biomarkers through surface plasmon resonance imaging. The technique measures the adhesion of molecules to a thin surface layer of gold, using the resulting refractive index changes. It is the team's hope that the technique can be further developed to assist in early detection of multiple kinds of cancers.

invasive surgical procedure, assessing the presence and risk of developing lung cancer when it is easiest to treat.

Gayana Premaratne, a Ph.D. candidate in chemistry, is one of a small team of researchers developing a method that could help diagnose the presence of lung cancer by detecting appropriate biomarkers, even if a tumor has not developed yet.

"We started working on this idea somewhere around the end of 2015," Premaratne says.

"Initially, we started hunting for the things that were available, and we noticed a gap that has not been addressed, where people are not being diagnosed early for lung cancer because all of the techniques that are available are for middle to late stages. This makes it very difficult to be cured."

Premaratne, along with teammates Zainab Al-Mubarak, Asantha Dharmaratne and adviser Dr. Sadagopan Krishnan, began developing the diagnostic technique in 2016, focusing on developing a sensor array to detect biomarkers through a minimally invasive blood test.

Instead of a painful and invasive surgical biopsy, the process makes it possible to diagnose possible lung cancer within three hours.

"Since our lab works with nanochemistry,

The project has been generating a buzz within the College of Arts and Sciences, earning Premaratne a second-place finish in the college-level Three Minute Thesis competition last spring.


A native of Sri Lanka, Premaratne is a soft-spoken man with a perpetual smile on his face, and a passion for chemistry and biosciences.

After graduating in 2010 from St. Joseph's College in Bangalore, India, with a degree in science, Premaratne went to work for SGS group in Sri Lanka for three years, before earning his master's degree in analytical chemistry from the University of Colombo in 2014. The work of his adviser, Dr. Krishnan, drew him to Stillwater.

"I really knew I wanted to work in bio-analytical chemistry," Premaratne says. "I was pretty excited about Dr. Krishnan's diverse profile of research, and I knew it was something I would really fit in with the background that I have."

With Premaratne on course to graduate with his doctorate in 2018, he looks forward to taking his expertise to wherever he can do the most good for society at large.

"I don't mind being anywhere, as far as where my efforts will help to serve the society," Premaratne says. "Ph.D.s are universal.

With that goal in mind, I would like to work at any institution or organization that uses my expertise well." 



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Diagnosis



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Gayan Premaratne (center) noticed a “gap” in lung cancer research. Along with Zainab Al-Mubarak (left) and Asantha Dharmaratne (right), Premaratne found a willing advisor in Dr. Sadagopan Krishnan at OSU to pursue this research.

Doctoral student discovers unidentified plant species found only in a corner of Texas

While doing research at the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis for her dissertation, Oklahoma State University graduate student Angela McDonnell came across a mystery. A botanist there showed her a pressed, dried specimen of a milkweed vine plant from Texas unlike any of its closest relatives. The plant hadn't been described or named since first being collected in 1903.

"Dr. [Peter] Stevens [a botanist at the Missouri Botanical Garden who specializes in milkweed vines] thought it was the species *Matelea decipiens*, but he wasn't positive," says McDonnell, a doctoral student in OSU's Department of Plant Biology, Ecology and Evolution. "He asked me to look at it, and it definitely wasn't *Matelea decipiens*."

McDonnell began a search to identify the mystery milkweed. That led to new plant species and, as is the scientific custom for the discoverer, she gave the plant its scientific name, *Matelea hirtelliflora*, and its common name, the hairy-faced spiny pod.

"She cast a broad net over this group of plants that she specializes in, and that led her to an inkling that this could be a new species," says Mark Fishbein, an OSU professor and McDonnell's advisor.

Confirming that the plant was indeed something new became a side project as she worked to complete her Ph.D.

"I study plants that belong to a lineage of around 500 species of milkweed vines called *Gonolobinae*. Within that lineage, I have focused on a smaller group of around 20 close relatives in the genus *Chthamalia* that occur in Oklahoma, Texas and throughout Mexico," McDonnell says. "I use genomic information to estimate relationships among different species that allow me to better understand how different traits, like growth form, fruit shape and flower shape, have evolved over time."

How does a botanist study plants? McDonnell utilized dried, pressed plant specimens held in museum collections, or herbaria, and borrowed samples from institutions across the U.S., including the botanical garden in Missouri, the University of Texas in Austin,

While Angela McDonnell (left) worked on her Ph.D. under advisor Dr. Mark Fishbein (right), she discovered a new species of milkweed – the hairy-faced spiny pod.

A MILK-WEED BY ANY OTHER NAME

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the Botanical Research Institute of Texas and the New York Botanical Garden. Fishbein says McDonnell borrowed hundreds of dried and pressed samples of milkweed species. The specimens are measured, such as flower petal length and width, and described in detail. With *Matelea hirtelliflora*, the flowers are smaller and have hairs not found on related species.

“I had specimens of this unknown species and specimens of what I thought were the closest relatives from mostly the eastern and southeastern U.S., and they were florally pretty different,” McDonnell says. “The flowers are really what differentiates it. Within the first hour of looking at it, I had a pretty strong suspicion. Then you just have to take measurements and mount up the evidence.”

McDonnell says she most enjoys the fieldwork required in her research. She visited a state park in Texas where the plant was collected in 1903 and 1998. Its location further revealed the plant’s uniqueness because of geographic separation from relatives. Its range is limited to the piney woods of Northeast Texas, a tiny area compared with related milkweed vines that prefer oak-hickory forests across the eastern and southeastern U.S. It’s not known why the range of this species is so limited.

“It might be something like the soil, or it might be reproduction that limits it,” McDonnell says. “It could just be doing a bad job dispersing itself.”

With the collection of evidence and assistance from Fishbein, also an expert on milkweed vines and director of the OSU herbarium, McDonnell was ready to write a journal article to announce and provide evidence for her conclusion. She was the lead author with Fishbein on a paper published in *Systematic Botany* in August 2016. The authors described the characteristics and distribution of the plant and made the case for why it was a new species.

But what difference does it make to the world at large if a previously unknown plant or animal is discovered? In the case of hairy-faced spiny pod, McDonnell says describing the plant provides information about the evolution of milkweed vines and how this new plant relates to its lineage and its environment. What feeds on it? What other plants and animals (including humans) depend on it or threaten it? Describing a rare plant alerts people to something that may need protection or simply tells people about a newly discovered plant right under their noses.

This is not the first plant McDonnell has identified. She also discovered a previously unknown milkweed vine in Mexico.



McDonnell studied milkweed in OSU’s herbarium, run by Dr. Fishbein. She earned her Ph.D. in July 2017 and earned a post-doctoral fellowship at Bucknell University.

“I think this kind of work is a cornerstone of biodiversity research,” McDonnell says. “This seems to be a species that’s rather rare, and you can’t really communicate about it or conserve it if it doesn’t have a name.”

With the completion of her dissertation this summer, McDonnell is preparing for a post-doctoral research position at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania, where she has been named the Burpee Post-Doctoral Fellow in Botany. For now, her work with hairy-faced spiny pod is over, but she hopes other scientists will pick up where she left off.

Fishbein says the work of botanists like McDonnell is important because it helps people understand plants around them and realize what could be lost. In modern history, countless plants have disappeared before they were identified. Often, they’re found later as specimens in herbaria but no longer found in the environment.

“We’re still discovering what plants grow in the U.S.,” Fishbein says. “It’s surprising to people that we haven’t identified all the plants that grow here.”

Story by Jeff Joiner | Photos by Gary Lawson

No Coincidences

Blessings abound in OSU alumnae's life

By Brian Petrotta

Dani Welniak has encountered too many coincidences to believe in them.

From winding up at Oklahoma State University because of her mother's boyfriend to meeting her future husband in western Kansas to landing her dream job as a sideline reporter for the Kansas City Chiefs, Welniak believes her journey has been blessed with more than mere serendipity.

"In the end, it's a combination of a lot of prayer and giving 150 percent in every aspect of what I am doing," Welniak explains.

If that statement sounds like it could have come from a professional athlete, well, Welniak did play women's professional football in Dallas for four years. She took the same field as the NFL's Dallas Cowboys, feeding her competitive spirit. As she played, she took notice of the reporters around.

"I fell in love with the idea of being a sports journalist because those who covered my games seemed so happy to be doing their jobs," Welniak says.

At the same time, Welniak's mother began dating a former OSU football player (Walt Garrison, who also had played for the Dallas Cowboys and who would become Welniak's stepdad). And the School of Media and Strategic Communications at OSU hatched plans for a program in sports media.

Welniak says she "absolutely fell in love" with the campus. She soaked up classroom knowledge from professors such as John McGuire and Dave Hunziker while becoming active in student media. Her time at *The O'Colly* helped forge her writing skills, while her involvement in such organizations as the Sports Media Club and Association for Women in Sports Media led to opportunities in broadcasting.

Football may have been her first love but at OSU she also tackled basketball, wrestling, OSU's Olympic sports, and even mixed martial arts events. She worked Friday night high school football games and eventually freelanced for Fox Sports and ESPN television broadcasts.

All of that experience beefed up her résumé, and the connections she made at OSU resonated even more deeply with Welniak.

"You are close friends at OSU, but you almost become closer when you graduate," she says. "We experienced so much together, and now we're experiencing it at another level."

Part of the experience included paying her dues. Very few people leap from college to gigs in markets the size of Kansas City (the 33rd largest in the nation — vs. Oklahoma City's No. 43 ranking and Tulsa's No. 60). To reach that level, Welniak had to get into Dodge first.

Out of the 16 stations she sent a tape, the one in Dodge City, Kan., was the only one to offer her a job. There, she gained critical professional experience — and met the man who would later become her husband.

Together they moved to Wichita, Kan., when Welniak was offered an opportunity there. She continued to hone her skills but after a few years in Wichita, the station faced budget cuts.

KCTV in Kansas City "came out of nowhere" and approached her just as her Wichita contract was expiring. That would have been enough. Fast-forward to the fall of 2016, though, when Len Dawson, a Hall of Fame former quarterback for the Kansas City Chiefs, decided to cut back on travel in his role as color analyst for the Chiefs' radio broadcasts. That opened up a spot for a sideline reporter, and Welniak was only too happy to step in.



Football was Welniak's first love, and in 2016 she landed a dream job as sideline reporter for the Kansas City Chiefs. PHOTO BY JOHN RIEGER

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COLLEGE OF
ARTS AND
SCIENCES

“I fell in love with the idea of being a sports journalist because those who covered my games seemed so happy to be doing their jobs.” — Dani Welniak

Never one to get too comfortable, however, Welniak still keeps a detailed binder of every résumé, letter, and demo tape she has ever submitted for a job. Last fall, she returned to OSU to speak at a reunion of O’Colly staffers and opened her binder for any student to view.

“When I first got to college, I had no idea how to put together a résumé or a demo reel,” she explains. “That was one of the things the professors and guest speakers helped me with. The binder has not only been good to have for myself but for others.”

Paying forward the generosity she received from others while simultaneously feeding her drive to succeed has Welniak traveling an ever-growing road of success. She has been fortunate, but it is no coincidence. 📁

Welniak keeps a binder filled with all the material she has ever submitted for job openings. She uses it as motivation for herself and as a guide for others. PHOTO BY DAVE EULITT/KC STAR



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