



Sabbatical leaves enrich classroom instruction

Eight professors bring the world back to Gustavus

by Barbara Fister

Every seventh year, faculty at Gustavus may apply to take either a semester or a year off to do scholarly and creative work that requires sustained time and the opportunity to focus. Sabbaticals are a key component of the College's Faculty Development Program. A logical question arises at a liberal arts college, where teaching is of primary importance: "That's nice, but what does this do for students?" A quick look at recent sabbatical leaves provides some interesting answers.

Mike Ferragamo, a neuroscientist in the biology department, engaged in a variety of research projects on his sabbatical, including co-authoring an article with students that



Mike Ferragamo

describes an analytical model to unravel the circuitry that shapes electrophysiological responses in the auditory system of anurans (frogs and toads). Through this experience his students not only gained a first-hand experience with research and publication—they also got a head start in careers in science. During his leave, Ferragamo also helped develop the Summer Institute for

Neuroscience, in which students from four colleges spent one week at each institution working alongside neuroscientists. This new collaboration will give Gustavus students a broader exposure to the field while giving faculty in a fast-changing area of science an opportunity to compare notes on how best to teach a moving target.

Ferragamo, incidentally, benefited from **Roland Thorstensson's** sabbatical. Thorstensson, a professor of Scandinavian studies, spent some of his leave serving as a translator and cultural ambassador, introducing Ferragamo to people and institutions in Sweden who will mentor recipients of the College's Jacobson Award. This award provides an opportunity for Gustavus premed students to spend a month abroad learning about Swedish approaches to health care. Thorstensson also traveled through Samiland in the northern reaches of Finland, Norway, and Sweden, retracing the historic travels of Carolus Linnaeus. On his return to St. Peter, he worked on several translations of Swedish and Norwegian literature. There are indications that Thorstensson didn't take the def-



Roland Thorstensson

inition of "leave" literally. He continued to work with students in the Scandinavian Studies program, serving as adviser for the Swedish house and working with the other members of the department to prepare the senior majors for the department's annual colloquium.

Cross-Cultural Insights

Paula Swiggum of the nursing department had a busy sabbatical



Paula Swiggum

year. In addition to writing articles and giving presentations on her area of specialty, trans-cultural nursing, she began a study of how Somali mothers in Minnesota care for their children. She also traveled to Cuba with a group of Gustavus faculty for a seminar on Social Justice and Service Learning funded by the Bush Foundation. She uses insights gained into Cuban culture and the human ramifications of political policies in courses that address the cultural aspects of health care. While on leave, she also found time to experience the life of a nursing supervisor, working at Children's Hospital in Minneapolis. Her role involved routing patients from the emergency department to appropriate units, taking reports on

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Teaching & Learning Together



Faculty Development

History department recognized

The College's Department of History has been singled out by the Carnegie Endowment for the Advancement of Teaching in a forthcoming book that describes the department's "Thinking Historically" project (see the Winter 2004-05 *Quarterly*, p. 13). As part of the project, the department brought Sam Wineburg of Stanford University, a leading scholar of how people think historically, to the campus last spring. He was impressed not only by the department's project but also by the history majors he encountered, so much so that he asked department faculty to recommend Gustavus students to help him with his own research. He ended up hiring **Kristen Nelson**, a senior-to-be from Edina, who traveled to Phoenix and Los Angeles, as well as Minneapolis, to ask "person on the street" questions for a study Wineburg expects to complete by January 2006.

Sabbatical leaves

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patients, and dealing with crises that arose with patients and their families. "I teach pediatric clinicals with our students in the spring semester in this hospital," she says, "and this experience has been invaluable in giving me a broader view of the workings of the hospital and the intricacies of providing safe nursing care."

Amy Seham of the theatre/dance department practiced what she teaches.

She led a six-week series of workshops for Fringe Benefits, a social justice theater company in Los Angeles, and later traveled to Bangalore, India, where she presented more workshops. These experiences have provided raw material for her new book in progress, one that will provide pedagogical theory and practical exercises to resist stereotypes about race, gender, and power in improvisational theater and comedy. Her travels also provide material for her classroom. "The enormous amount I learned about Indian culture, theater, and society (particularly about the oppressed Dalit community) will inform and enrich my teaching about non-Western theater and about theater for social justice," according to Seham.

Chris Gilbert of the political science department had another sort of cross-cultural experience. In addition to working with a former student Paul Djupe '93 on a book that breaks new ground in understanding the in-



Amy Seham



Chris Gilbert

fluence of church congregations on the political choices their members make, Gilbert sought out new ways to teach students in his First Year Seminar about the Manhattan Project, a course he used to teach with physicist Dick Fuller, now retired. As a participant in a National Science Foundation seminar, Gilbert attended lectures, traveled with other college teachers to Los Alamos and the Trinity site where the first nuclear weapon was detonated, and exchanged ideas about how to teach this material. "All the other Manhattan Project instructors are natural science faculty," he reports, "and it has been useful to hear their pedagogical ideas and to share a social scientist's perspective with them."

Returning to the Classroom

Colleen Jacks spent her sabbatical in the functional genomics laboratory of J. Stephen Gantt in the Department of Plant Biology at the University of Minnesota. There, investigators use the information obtained through the sequencing of genomes to understand how the coding in an organism's

genome results in specific cellular function. In addition to conducting original research, Jacks became a student again, learning unfamiliar laboratory techniques. But she



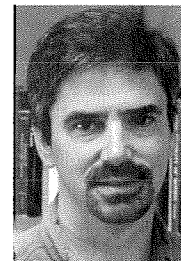
Colleen Jacks

never lost sight of her role as a teacher. With her colleague, Pam Kittelson, she is integrating the process and results of her research into a laboratory sequence for Gustavus undergraduates.

While on the far side of the globe, one Gustavus faculty member found a way to involve a student in cutting-edge research.

Tom

LoFaro of the mathematics and computer science department



Tom LoFaro

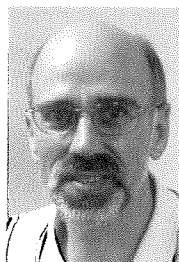
traveled to Massey University in Palmerston North, New Zealand, to conduct research at the Allan Wilson Centre for Molecular Ecology and Evolution, where mathematicians, computer scientists, and biologists work together on problems of ecology and evolution. The New Zealand research team wanted to understand a bifurcation in their model of genomics imprinting. One of LoFaro's students, Tim Dorn, focused his honors thesis on the problem and discovered, after doing the math, that it was a Hopf bifurcation. LoFaro had at least one other memorable breakthrough during his sabbatical: "I caught the biggest brown trout of my life."

One of **Tom Huber's** sabbatical goals was to develop some new opportunities for on-campus faculty-student research in acoustics. A professor of physics, Huber traveled to an Acoustical Society of America conference in Texas to present results of a project measuring vibration in reed organ pipes. There he attended a presentation by researchers from the Mayo Clinic who were inves-



tigating new medical imaging techniques.

"After meeting them at the conference and touring their lab at the



Tom Huber

Mayo Clinic in Rochester, we decided to collaborate to adapt their technique to allow for vibration testing of small objects in air," Huber reports. "In our first tests during my sabbatical year, we used their technique and apparatus to show that it was possible to use ultrasound interference to produce vibration of the reeds in our organ pipes. This ex-

periment was very successful for a number of reasons: It established a valuable research collaboration between Gustavus and Mayo, it was an important cross-check of some of my results with the organ pipes, and it demonstrated that it was possible to use this method to vibrate a small object like a reed without any physical contact."

Huber has gone on to involve many students in refining this technique, using it to do vibration testing of several small objects, most recently the suspensions that are part of hard drives in computers. This past summer, Huber learned that the National Science Foundation had awarded the College a \$150,000 grant to

purchase equipment and allow six Gustavus students to work on the project over the next three summers. Huber traces this new direction in research to a serendipitous encounter in Texas with Mayo Clinic researchers during his leave. "This is an obvious example of the important role that faculty development, including the sabbatical, faculty travel funds, and support for on-campus research, has had in successfully developing a promising new direction for faculty-student research." ■

Barbara Fister, an academic librarian at Gustavus since 1987, also serves as a coordinator of the Faculty Development Program.

Erratum

In reporting faculty promotions in the last issue of the *Gustavus Quarterly*, the name of one of those promoted to the rank of professor was inadvertently left off the list. **Michele Rusinko**, theatre and dance, who joined the faculty in 1988 after earning her M.F.A. from Arizona State University in 1984, was one of six faculty members promoted to full professor last spring. The *Quarterly* regrets the omission.

Fall Poetry Classic

ive well-regarded

Minnesota poets shared the Jussi Björling Recital Hall stage on Oct. 3 at the Poetry Fall Classic. The event brought together (from left) **Bill Holm '65**, storyteller and pianist who was nominated for a Minnesota Book Award for his most recent poetry collection, *Playing the Black Piano*; **Phil Bryant '73**, associate professor of English and author of *Sermon on a Perfect Spring Day*; **John Rezmerski**,

professor emeritus and former writer-in-residence at Gustavus who has earned the Devins Award and the Rhysling Award for his work; **Joyce Sutphen**, associate professor of English whose recent volume, *Naming the Stars*, won the 2005 Minnesota Book Award in poetry; and **Phebe Hanson**, a St. Paul poet who helped found The Loft, a center for writers in the Twin Cities. The event was sponsored by the Department of English and the Gustavus Book Mark, who are hopeful that it will become an annual occurrence at the College. ■



SHAWN WACHSMEIER '70

