A & S News

Coming to Grips with September 11

The storm of emotions that transformed one day in September 2001 — the dread memory and the human tragedy — are still being measured, probed, lived. The repercussions of that “September 11” event are evoking, reaching out for each passing week of daily deadlines.

Attempt to come to grips with the far-flung fallout of 9/11 was the aim of an unusual interdisciplinary A&S course, taught last semester. “Humanities 161: Understanding the New Global Crisis” brought together faculty and students from all corners of the campus to ponder the post-Sept. 11 world.

In the weeks after the attacks, undergraduates had virtually demanded such a course. Students wanted a class to help them navigate through their own wrenching emotions and geopolitical confusions. The course was first offered in spring 2002, directed by Professor of English Verené Bell.

“Students were feeling an immense need to learn what was behind the attacks — why it took place, the origins of the rage, and what should our response be,” said Thomas Alan Schwartz, the associate professor of history who directed the class last semester.

“We drew from the talent of the University, faculty who are researching in history, political science, sociology, religion, communications, literary studies.”

The course was launched as an experiment in cross-disciplinary teaching, and that same spirit will guide its future. The aim is to offer students a flexible team-taught class on the pressing issues of society and the world. Untethered to any one department, the course has to make its own way financially: Plans are underway now to raise money and build an endowment to guarantee its future. Such funding would pay guest speakers and compensate faculty members, who teach the course as an overload to their regular duties.

Nearly 200 students enrolled when the class was first offered in spring 2002, taught by a team of eight or nine professors. Emotions were raw. Many students were in shock, still reeling from the notion that America could be so hated in some corners of the world.

This past semester, the course was modified to reflect the unfolding of events of the last year, notably the civil liberties legislation concerning homeland security, and later the war with Iraq. Schwartz was aided by various guest lecturers throughout the semester. Three other faculty members were assistant directors — Kate Daniels of the Department of English, James Lee Ray of the Department of Political Science and Barbara Tukuls of the Department of Classical Studies.

But basic themes still shaped the course’s identity — the roots of the crisis, the history of Islam and the Middle East, the Israeli-Palestinian ordeal, issues of American foreign policy, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and the question of how the Sept. 11 attacks have changed the political landscape.

This second time around, though, suggested that the national meaning and emotions of Sept. 11 are evolving. Enrollment was down to 45 students. The climate of the classroom was more dispassionate. A year and a half after that nation-shaking day, students felt less like American victims, and more keen to inquire deeper into the culture of Islam and Arab civilization and the political configuration of the Middle region.

“I could shift from an us-versus-them mentality and start exploring deeper into the causes of the situation and sift through who’ve been calling our enemies,” said Byron Rushing, a graduating senior in political science. “It’s a lot more complicated than I thought.”

— Ray Waddle, ’MAW

A & S alumni elected University trustees

Four A&S alumni were recently elected to the University’s Board of Trust:

• Nancy Perot Mullford, ’BA’02, of Dallas, Texas, is a contributing editor for Veranda magazine.

• Frederick B. Rentschler II, ’BA’81, of Scottsdale, Ariz., also owns and operates a working cattle ranch in Cameron, Mont. He is chairman of the board of trustees of the Salk Institute.

• James H. Morgan, ’BA’69, of Charlotte, N.C., is the outgoing Vanderbilt Alumni Association president and founder of the investment firm Morgan Semones.

• Marissa Shrum, ’BA’03, an Ingram Scholar from Chattanooga, Tenn., was elected to a fourth-term as the Young Alumni Trustee.

When the man’s tennis team captured second in the nation and won its first-ever SEC Tournament Championship this year, the question of how the Sept. 11 attacks have changed the landscape of American higher education was discussed.

Professor Schwartz,

A & S SPORTS

Vanderbilt, Brazil develop innovative exchange program

Vanderbilt and Howard universities are joining with two Brazilian institutions to help ensure that their nations’ next generation of scholars, government officials and corporate executives will be prepared for the challenges of an increasingly global economy.

A grant of $438,000 from the U.S. Department of Education and the Brazilian Ministry of Education will allow the establishment of a consortium among Vanderbilt, Howard, the Universidade de Sao Paulo, and the Universidade Federal de Alagoas.

The grant was one of only 10 awarded nationally through the U.S.-Brazil Higher Education Consortia Program. Faculty from all four schools will develop an innovative interdisciplinary curriculum that will allow students at each school to explore themes of race, economic development and social inequality in both the United States and Brazil. In addition to faculty and student exchanges between the U.S. and Brazilian universities, the program will allow students to earn a graduate-level certificate recognizing their concentrations.

Included in the curriculum development will be a three-week intensive, electronically delivered core course.

“Brazil and the United States share a number of common problems deriving from a long history of slavery and resulting social, political, economic and regional trends,” said Associate Professor Jane Landers, principal investigator of the Vanderbilt effort and associate professor of the College of Arts and Science.

“At the same time there are significant differences in our two countries in terms of economic growth, income distribution and international relations. This program will give advanced undergraduate and graduate students an international and interdisciplinary perspective that they would otherwise lack,” she said.

Student exchanges will begin during the 2003-2004 academic year.

A&S students win major competitive scholarships

More Vanderbilt students have won major national and international scholarships this year than ever before, according to Paul Elledge, director of the year-old Office of Honors Scholarships. Nine of the 13 are A&S students or alumni.

• Stefan Bird-Pollan, a graduate student in philosophy, has received a scholarship from the German Academic Exchange Service for a year of study in Germany. Daniel Bowes, ’BA’03, will also study in Germany next fall on a Fulbright grant. A German language major, Bowes also has received a full scholarship to study for his Ph.D. at Harvard after his year in Germany.

• Sam Chase, the 2002 A&S Founder’s Medalist, has won a Fulbright grant for a year of research and writing in the Czech Republic. Chase will use it to write a major work on modern Czech history.

• Rachel Cohen, a music major, has won a Fulbright grant to study in India for a year. She will study Hindustani music, and the keyboard and theory of the Carnatic system.

• Marissa Shrum, ’BA’03, an Ingram Scholar from Chattanooga, Tenn., was elected to a fourth-term as the Young Alumni Trustee.

• Thomas Williford, a graduate student in history, has won a National Ambassadorial Scholarship to study in Oxford, England, at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais to complete a master of fine arts degree in theatre at the Federal University of Minas Gerais.

• Matt Hangauer, ’BS’03, is one of 114 scientists and eight chemists nationwide selected for the National Defense Science and Engineering Graduate Fellowship (DOE). He will use it to pursue a Ph.D. in chemistry at the University of California at Berkeley next year.

• The first time in a decade, Vanderbilt students have won Truman Scholarships. Ingram scholar Jessica Herson, a recent graduate in international relations, and international studies major Iana Koryak, a rising senior majoring in political science, will use her scholarship to attend law school and graduate school in public policy.

• Benjamin Ogles, a rising senior majoring in English and classical studies, is one of only 22 students nationwide to receive the Beinecke Scholarship for Graduate Study in the Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences this year.

• Lauren Leigh Parker, ’BS’03, a chemistry major from LaVerigne, Tenn., was the 2003 Founder’s Medalist in the College of Arts and Science. Although she won a Bill and Melinda Gates Scholarship and a National Science Foundation Award, she declined those in favor of an award from the Medical Research Council Laboratory of Molecular Biology at Cambridge University in England, where she will pursue a Ph.D. in structural studies.

• Michael Ryan Williams, ’BA’03, received a Rotary International Ambassadorial Scholarship to study in Oxford, England.

• Thomas Wilford, a graduate student in history, has won a Fulbright grant for a year of research and writing in Columbia, South America.

American Repertory Theatre program at Harvard.

The 114 students and 8 chemists were selected through a competitive process that involves a number of national and international scholarship organizations.

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Looking ahead...
New center tackles thorny issues from many perspectives

Imagine what could happen if a group of distinguished scholars from diverse disciplines joined forces to tackle the pressing issues of religion and terror. What would be the impact if they could develop practical solutions to current global problems? This is precisely the idea behind the new interdisciplinary center at Vanderbilt University, Study of Religion and Culture.

“The center will bring together top scholars from across the university,” says Professor Volney Gay, who has been involved in the project since the beginning and helped to secure the initial funding. “It will provide a unique opportunity to bring together people from different fields to work on a common project.”

The center has been charged to advance the understanding of the relationship between religion and terror; religion and law; religion and human rights; religion and culture; religion and displacement; religion and psychiatry; and religion and post-traumatic shock in refugee populations.

“I think it’s important to look at religion from different perspectives,” says Gay. “We want to understand how religion shapes our lives and what role it plays in shaping our societies.”

The center will be housed in the Department of Religion and Culture and will be led by a team of scholars from various disciplines, including anthropology, psychology, and sociology. The center will also draw students from the Divinity School and the School of Law, as well as graduate students from other departments.

The center will organize conferences, workshops, and seminars on a variety of topics related to religion and terror. It will also support research projects and provide funding for scholars to conduct fieldwork in regions affected by conflict.

“We want our research to be relevant and impactful,” says Gay. “We want to make sure that our findings are grounded in real-world situations.”

The center will also work to develop new courses and curricula that integrate a religious perspective into the study of politics, economics, and social sciences. It will also offer graduate students an opportunity to study religion in a multidisciplinary context.

“By bringing together scholars from different fields, we hope to create a new generation of thinkers who are able to think critically about religion in the world today,” says Gay.

The center will be funded through a combination of grants and endowments, with a goal of becoming self-sustaining by 2008. The initial funding of $3 million will go towards establishing the center and funding the first research projects.

“We are excited about the potential of this new center,” says Gay. “We believe that it will have a significant impact on the way we think about religion and terror.”
The events of Sept. 11 added to the economy's troubles by creating more uncertainty about the business climate, and this uncertainty made consumers wary as well. The economy has not been the same since. The end of the conflict with Iraq may allow the economy to recover, but some of its momentum will be lost as the war continues to weigh heavily in the minds of both consumers and investors.

The economy will improve when investors regain confidence in the strength of its technological fundamentals. These fundamentals remain strong despite the sharp fluctuations in the stock market that we have seen. It is my view that this confidence will be restored and that prospects for the markets in the early 21st century are still bright, but it might be a year or two before we see a sustainable turnaround.
For the first time this year, the College of Arts and Science joined with Parents’ Weekend to showcase its faculty and students in March. In addition to parents of current students, members of the College Cabinet — donors who provide significant support for A&S — and other friends of the college were invited to spend a weekend on campus. They attended regular classes by some of the most interesting A&S faculty members, as well as special events, such as

• a luncheon where a panel of scholarship students discussed their Vanderbilt experience  
• a special lecture by Professor Vivien Green Fryd on her new book “Art and the Crisis of Marriage: Georgia O’Keeffe and Edward Hopper  
• breakfast and a gala dinner hosted by Dean Richard McCarty 
• a special “Conversation with Chancellor Gee”  
• “Live on the Lawn” with music by Barefoot Manner, and  
• the Chancellor’s Accolade Dance.  

Here is a look at some of the people involved in this special event.

A) Many parents attended class with their students.
B) Nancy Bell visits with A&S sophomore Sharman Wilson and her mother, who is also Sharman Wilson.
C) Rising senior John Ross Stringham, recipient of the Turner Scholarship, with his benefactors Cathy and Bill Turner, BA’54
D) Professor T. ony Earley, right, read from his book, “Jim the Boy,” following the dinner, which was also attended by his wife, Sarah.
E) Bernard Mitchell, father of Tiffany Mitchell, a rising junior, was among many parents of A&S students attending the weekend.
F) Sandy and Wayne Killon attended the gala dinner with their son, David, a rising senior.
G) Attending the A&S breakfast was Larry M. Smith, father of A&S alumna Ta’Nisha Chantel Smith, BA’02, and of Larry Marion Smith, a rising junior in engineering.
H) Dean Richard McCarty welcomed guests.
I) Joe Williams is the parent of Lauren Melissa and Erin Lynn, both rising A&S juniors.

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Celebrating Arts and Science

Save the date, Oct. 10-11, 2003, for the second annual extraVUganza weekend, the largest alumni celebration on campus, combining Reunion with Homecoming. Classes ending in “3” and “8” will reunite, but everyone is invited to attend the all-alumni events. Watch the mail for more details. For more information, go to www.vanderbilt.edu/alumni/homecoming.htm

PHOTOS BY DANIEL DUBOIS