What are the Humanities?

By David R. Shumway, Professor of English and Literary and Cultural Studies

In his essay in the last issue of FOCUS Wilfrid Sieg abjures the question “what are the humanities?” and takes up instead the question “what are the humanities needed for?” I agree with most of what Professor Sieg says about why the humanities are needed, though his view is too restricted. The humanities are needed for more than undergraduate education. I will come back to that point later, but first I want to answer the question “what are the humanities?” by taking a different historical perspective from the one that Professor Sieg rejects.

History teaches us that the divisions of knowledge are not rooted in essences. At one time, philosophy included all or most of what we now consider the natural and social sciences. In ancient Greece, mathematics was part of philosophy, but as was literature—i.e. Aristotle is to be accepted as a philosopher. By the middle ages, arithmetic and geometry were no longer part of philosophy, but became parts of the quadrivium along with astronomy and music, while grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic formed the trivium. These fields were the seven liberal arts. The humanities, however, were not to be found anywhere in the ancient or Medieval world. Humanism emerged as an ideal and an educational program in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, but even this Renaissance movement is not yet the humanities. Humanism represented the turn to secular knowledge and away from faith of scriptural sufficiency, but it treated secular texts as that knowledge. The term “the humanities” did not appear in English, according to the OED, until around 1700, and it did not become common until the nineteenth century. The reason for this increased usage is that only in the late eighteenth century did the humanities emerge as distinct fields of study.

In fact, all of the modern fields of learning, academic disciplines and subdisciplines, are no more ancient than the Enlightenment. The modern humanities disciplines emerged as a result of three conditions: 1) a shift in the conception of knowledge that demoted texts to objects of study; 2) the belief that philosophy could be brought into the sciences; 3) the invention of the disciplinary form itself. The latter entailed, among other things, the new pedagogical spaces of the classroom and the laboratory, and new practices, such as the seminar and the demanding that students write, which were especially important to the humanities. It could be argued that the humanities emerge at a very specific time and place: Christian Gottlob Heyne’s philological seminar in Göttingen in 1777, when Friedrich Wolf (who is usually said to be the father of the field) enrolled as the first official student of philology.

It is in philology that texts first lose their status as knowledge and become something about which knowledge is sought. This change will be marked by a shift in the very meaning of the word “literature.” Up through the eighteenth century, for one to “have literature” meant that one was educated, that is, to have read the texts in which knowledge resided. This was the conception of knowledge characteristic of Renaissance humanism. In the nineteenth century, “literature” increasingly became restricted to imaginative writing of a certain quality, while knowledge was now considered something discovered by those who pursue science, a term which at that time covered all modern disciplines.

The humanities are needed for more than undergraduate education. I will come back to that point later, but first I want to answer the question “what are the humanities?” by taking a different historical perspective from the one that Professor Sieg rejects.

What do we have this time? Amongst other things, we continue a discussion of the role of the Humanities on this campus, by David Shumway, and invite anyone interested to follow up. The topic of the Humanities was coupled in our last issue, by Wilfrid Sieg, with the question of what a liberal education should look like. We think that topic needs even further consideration, with particular attention perhaps to the broad question: what is an education FOR?

A related topic we haven’t heard much about in recent times is the idea that all first-year students should have a common experience, some kind of shared intellectual event. We recall some discussion of this in the past, and wish that the conversation would resume. Columbia has long had a ‘core’ known as Contemporary Civilization, the history and theory of which can be found at: http://www.college.columbia.edu/core/oasis/history6.php

We’d love to have somebody read that again and tell us why and where it is right or wrong. What steps, we wonder, have been taken at Carnegie Mellon to give our freshman class a unifying educational experience? What are the results of the complex system of requirements worked out some years back to establish something like a ‘core’ here?

If you have a grumble that should be heard on either smoking or parking, two issues that people seem to be grumbling about a lot these days, please jot down your grumbles and send them to us for our Fall issue. Till then, see you in the funny papers.

Of course, in addition, we continue to hope that people will tell us about their teaching tricks, tell us about the books they are reading, and write about any issue they want to raise about our life here together.

Happy summer –The editors

Ongoing and on-line evaluations of course management systems

By Anne Fay, Director of Assessment, Eberly Center & OTE; Adjunct Professor, Psychology

In response to OTE’s request for feedback on OTE’s approach to the Ongoing and on-line evaluations of course management systems, we conducted an evaluation of course management systems. As part of our evaluation, we identified areas for improvement and developed recommendations for future evaluations.

We believe that the quality of products now available make it productive for us to commit substantial resources toward conducting a full-scale evaluation.

A second part of our mission is to regularly assess and monitor the educational technologies we support so that we can provide the most effective and efficient service to the university community. Our assessments are designed to help us identify strengths and weaknesses in the design, implementation, and support of educational technologies at Carnegie Mellon. This data not only guides our improvements but is also forwarded to the developers, to inform them of our requirements and problems and issues we experience with their products.

Selecting Technologies: Open Source vs. Commercial Products

OTE is often asked about our preferences on open source educational software as opposed to closed commercial products, like Blackboard. Our primary criterion for investigating, recommending, and providing educational technology is whether that technology meets the requirements at Carnegie Mellon for supporting teaching and learning. We strongly believe that the decision to adopt any educational technology should be based on evidence that it supports or improves teaching and learning.

Our collective experience is that sometimes the right tool for a task is a commercial closed source tool, sometimes it’s an open source tool, and sometimes it’s a tool the university builds itself. Anyone supplying information technology knows that one advantage to having access to the source code of a product is that it enables problems to be solved more quickly. Many users think another major advantage of open source is cost. However, we have learned over the years that there is rarely a substantial cost difference between operating open source and closed source solutions. OTE trades licensing and maintenance fees in the case of a commercial product for staffing costs to manage the open source solutions, often making them comparable in actual costs for an institution of our size. Therefore, to meet its mission, OTE focuses first and foremost on the ability of educational technologies to provide what Carnegie Mellon-Qatar is Absolutely Worth Doing, Page 4

Investing in Our Students, Page 5

FOCUS — in seven issues a year—is a publication of the faculty and staff of Carnegie Mellon University. Volume 36, No. 6, May 2007

INSIDE: Carnegie Mellon-Qatar is Absolutely Worth Doing, Page 4

FOCUS—ins a year—is a publication of the faculty and staff of Carnegie Mellon University. Volume 36, No. 6, May 2007
Ah, Spring. It’s time for daffodils, rain, and Take Your Sons and Daughters to Work Day. It’s time for a new crop of future students to ramble through our offices, to run across the Cut, and to wonder at the scientific and artistic prowess of our professors and students. Somewhere in there, I hope, will be the message that staff moms and dads work pretty hard to bring home the tofo, and work to make Carnegie Mellon one of the best places to learn about these marvels.

It’s also time for Staff Council to elect a new roster of officers. We chose Jennifer Cox as Vice-Chair, to serve after Wayne Oglesby’s term is up. Jennifer Cox says, “I have worked at Carnegie Mellon for almost four years. I spent my first three years as a Senior Accountant in Sponsored Projects Accounting and was promoted to Postals Services Manager this past July. I have been a member of Staff Council since 2005.” Jennifer has served as the Meditation Coordinator and as Benefits Committee chairperson. She also worked on the Food Drive committee as a member and co-chair, and organized Cans Across the Cut, a student activity that brought in over 3,400 cans this past fall.

Jennifer says, “As Vice Chair of Staff Council, I would work diligently to assist the chairperson and also to ensure that the annual elections run as smoothly as possible. In addition, I would continue my involvement in the Food Drive and act as a strong voice for any staff concerns.” Which leads me to the following point – if you have anything you’d like to discuss with your Staff Council representative, please find them and let them know. Your issues are why Staff Council exists. Your questions and problems might be the primary target of one committee, or might be a totally new concern that Staff Council should tackle. But we’ll never know unless you talk to us.

In other election news, Susie Cribbs (Advancement Writer) was elected Secretary, and Audrey Portis (Sponsored Projects Accountant) was elected Treasurer. Congratulations, thanks, and best wishes to them all!

And in the Things You May Not Know category: Staff Council meetings are open to any staff person who wants to attend. Meeting dates are on the Staff Council website (at http://www.cmu.edu/staff-council/documents/ec_meetings_06_07.pd), and meeting times are always 10:00 – 1:00 p.m. You can attend and participate in the dialogue, but only elected representatives can vote. You can, however, eat the delicious lunches.

While you’re on the Staff Council website, you might want to take a look at the PEA Summer Amusement Park discounts listed on the homepage http://www.cmu.edu/staff-council/. Most places you’d think to take the kiddies and yourself this summer are listed, from Cedar Point to White Water Adventurers, Inc. You don’t want to be in line at Kennywood or Sandcastle or the Pittsburgh Zoo and have a “Darn – I could have had a Staff Council discount!” moment, do you?

And speaking of Kennywood, if you haven’t been there for a couple years, why not take the kids, or somebody else’s kids, or get together with your favorite bunch of coworkers at the Annual Kennywood Staff Picnic. Take out your job frustrations in that funny little rinky-dink shooting range, snuggle with your honey in the Old Orchard, or watch your colleagues get slightly green in the Pittsburgh Plunge. Put your most annoying co-worker on that bungee jump thing. (Just kidding. But it would be funny.) At sunset, have a relaxing rest on the benches as the little twinkle lights come on, and listen to the merry-go-round music, the rumbling wooden rails of the Thunderbolt, and the cheerful giggles and screeches of those you don’t have a funnel cake. I love Kennywood. I’m ready to go right now.

In the Upcoming Staff Council Events category, watch your e-mail and snail mail for news of the next Open Forum. We’re hoping to host speakers on various transportation and pedestrian safety issues. As always, we would love to hear your questions and opinions!

And lastly, if you’ve made it through this far, I know you’ve thought of things you could say in these pages better than I can. Much as I would love to be the only staff voice of FOCUS, I couldn’t, and I shouldn’t. FOCUS is looking for submissions (any length, pretty much any topic) from staff on our experiences here at Carnegie Mellon. You can contribute articles, editorials, book reviews, reci- pes, pet peeves, or praise – be creative! Tell us what you do at Carnegie Mellon, and not just your job title. As Denzel Washington’s character says in “Phila- delphia,” “Explain to me like I’m a four-year-old.” Interview an interesting co-worker. Tell your life story. What do you love about Carnegie Mellon? What could be improved? Contact Lynn Berard at iberard@andrew.cmu.edu for more info. I’m looking forward to reading your contributions!

It was a day to stay in the shade, to sit behind the typewriter and add a page or two to one’s thesis. But a point needed to be verified, and that meant a trip to the Library. I never made it. It was Austin, Texas, it was August 1966, and it was 90 degrees at midday. Inside the air-conditioned Student Union, we became 90 degrees at midday. Inside the air-conditioned Student Union, we became 90 degrees at midday. Inside the air-conditioned Student Union, we became 90 degrees at midday. Inside the air-conditioned Student Union, we became 90 degrees at midday. Inside the air-conditioned Student Union, we became 90 degrees at midday. Inside the air-conditioned Student Union, we became 90 degrees at midday. Inside the air-conditioned Student Union, we became 90 degrees at midday.

It was the mega-university. Money was pouring in, and with it talent. “These days everyone was sneaked laboriously up the thirty flights of thousands kept at bay by a deranged creature with a weapon, on a balcony with a view.

They got him, of course. Two cops sneaked laboriously up the thirty flights of steps. Cornered him in his gallery, was the story came up on him from each side, shot him to death. We watched the bloody melodies of the good old days

Staff Council
Teaching Tricks and Tips
By Marian Aguiar, Assistant Professor, Department of English

The first course I taught went terribly. I was a graduate student teaching “Society and the University” at my university offering a shape into my own course. I could not get the discussion going. I would ask what I thought were thought-provoking questions, only to be met with a wall of stony silence. Invariably, after one tortuous minute, Patricia, who sat front and center, would slowly raise her hand to answer. Later she told me she felt compelled to talk because she felt so sorry for me. I was appalled, and I vowed to find ways to foster discussion in my classes.

Cultivating discussions is crucial to teaching. Students do not learn in textbooks, in formal lectures, or by reading from prominent authors, and asked to memorize important dates. Every student, to the credit of their professors, has had to organize the literature by theme to discuss nation, what the dialogue has already begun before class time. I find that students are often eager to continue the debate in class.

Tip 1: Break the Ice
You cannot get a class talking mid-semester. In fact, you should get the class talking the very first day. I use one trick to break the ice, get students laughing, and create memorable impressions. In a small class (under 25), I ask them to go around and try to guess which is which. This can lead to different discussions connected to the themes of the literature class, for example, about the nature of fiction or about the performance of identities.

Tip 2: Cultivate a discussion climate early
Of course one cannot have a discussion if people are not talking. The discussion climate has to be fostered in that first part of the semester. I’ve often noticed that students talk a lot the first day, and then little after the class after. Working in smaller groups helps students overcome the fear of speaking from other people. I ask them to think about the implications of this, and then ask them to participate in small groups.

Meeting the Wall of Silence
By Michele DiPietro, Associate Director, Eberly Center & Instructor, Department of Statistics, and Marie Norman, Teaching Consultant and Research Associate, Eberly Center & Adjunct Professor of Anthropology, History Department

Many of us probably resonate with Aguiar’s description of asking students questions she considered thought-provoking, “only to be met with a wall of stony silence.” Aguiar provides a set of suggestions for breaking the ice, cultivating a discussion culture, getting students to think about their learning (and the questions themselves), and something about students to prepare. To these excellent suggestions we add a few thoughts we, as instructors, might move an abstract discussion to a concrete level, either by asking for examples or illustrations, or move a concrete discussion to a broader level by asking students to generate a generalization or implication.

Determining in advance a set of well-formulated questions based on your objectives can go a long way towards ensuring a productive and energetic discussion. No matter how much you plan, though, discussions are unpredictable: to many, that’s their beauty. While this unpredictability, and the control we have over the class when we opt for discussion over lecture, is exciting and important, it can be a bit nerve-wracking for instructors. Our anxieties that a discussion might flounder can lead to several common questioning errors. First, we may ask a question and immediately try to answer it ourselves. This is a common error in different questions simultaneously: “What do you think of this author’s argument?” Was the evidence convincing? Did you like the reading?” Asking questions all at once can confute different kinds of information and confuse students, inhibiting discussion. Students succumb to the temptation to answer our own questions, jumping in before students have had adequate time to think. Allowing some silence (~10 seconds is a good rule of thumb) gives students time to compose a more thoughtful answer.

Just as important as the types of questions and the way we ask them are the reactions and responses to student answers. We often shape, encourage or limit future student participation – the participation of the student whose comment we are reacting positively, or the response of every other student in the classroom who extracts lessons from that exchange. Aguiar is well aware of this limitation, and mentions several key techniques to respond to student comments. In addition to the ones she discusses, educational theory and research have identified several other instructor behaviors that positively influence student participation.

For instance, asking students to expand on their answers – to clarify a nebulous
Carnegie Mellon-Qatar is absolutely worth doing

A Report from Faculty Senate

By Vivian Loftness, Chair of the Faculty Senate; University Professor, School of Architecture

The benefits of building a CMU campus in Qatar extend well beyond financial gains for the main campus. CMU-Q offers important cultural contributions for CMU and for Qatar students, reducing fears and stereotypes. Moreover, with Qatar as the 2nd fastest growing city in the Gulf after Dubai, CMU has the ability to catalyze change, excellence, and leadership in that region building on several of our sister campuses. With the Emir and Sheikh’s commitment to democratizing education to transform the country and the region, CMU has the ability to create cutting edge knowledge in the places it will be practiced.

To understand the context:

Qatar has a booming oil based economy with 60% guest workers typically from Muslim nations. Although a small state, Qatar is a leader with Dubai in the Gulf region for education, tourism, and business. Open to the west, Qatar supports women in leadership positions.

Education city is unique as a full 4 year Bachelor Degrees - a private university offers many opportunities for students and guest workers. Five universities share a growing campus, with some cross registration for elective classes. CMU-CS/Business, Cornell PreMed and medicine, Texas A&M Engineering, Georgetown Foreign Service, and VA Commonwealth for art and design. There are negotiations underway for the Qatar Foundation to build a new primary and secondary school.

The Qatar Campus of CMU only offers undergraduate degrees, in Business and Computer Science, with electives in other disciplines. CMU-Q is now considering an IS degree to raise student numbers while building on existing courses in both degree programs. CMU-Q is in its 3rd year with 127 students across three years (60% women), with a goal of 400 maximum. 40 students are from Qatar, others are from the Gulf region, or children of middle class guest workers (still not citizens even in 2nd or 3rd generation). CMU-Q is a real CMU experience with CMU faculty, the same course materials and assignments, and an all-nighter pace (a bit of a culture shock for every undergraduate).

The CMU Qatar program, faculty, students, buildings, operations is at no cost to CMU.

Indeed, the CMU-Q was established with an initial grant to CMU in the tens of million dollars. The very next year in “management” fees are sent to main campus, based on the number of students, with income rolled into CMU general operating funds. The Qatar Foundation also provides forgivable loans so there are no financial barriers for students. In May 2008, a new building of 475,000 sqft will be completed by the Qatar Foundation for the CMU program.

My biased recommendations for further development of the program:

CMU Qatar needs more of the most qualified applicants

While the number and quality of applicants is improving, student preparation is not yet at the level of the CMU main campus. Top Gulf students still go to Europe or US universities, except for students – typically female - who may not be allowed to travel overseas by family. High School preparation is still not as rigorous as in the US. There are a number of faculty led efforts to increase the pool of applicants in Lebanon, Egypt and India for example and to raise the standards of Qatar preparation through high school courses and competitions in programming. Nonetheless, CMU-Q needs a larger regional and international name recognition, with an appropriate branding and marketing effort throughout the region and beyond to improve the applicant pool and support tighter recruitment.

CMU-Q needs more faculty with CMU experience

There is some misconception that CMU-Q is robbing the main campus of its faculty. In reality, CMU-Q has a small dedicated faculty drawn from: recent CMU grads; grads from other US CS/business degrees after 1 semester teaching/learning at CMU-Q’s main campus; and more recently tenured CMU faculty pursuing a “sabbatical semester”. To put the numbers in perspective, CMU CS has 200 faculty and at full scale CMU-Q would have 8 full time CS (4 from CMU, 4 from other institutions with CMU experience).

The Qatar Foundation will absorb more salaries, especially as student numbers grow each year, and CMU-Q needs more faculty with CMU experience, especially 3-year faculty in teaching track dedicated to undergraduate teaching.

More CMU faculty and their doctoral students should take advantage of the opportunity, even for a short period of time. Teaching at CMU-Q has the best characteristics of a “foreign service” experience, with hardship post salaries and amenities, a collaborative team/ family, and time to write, research, with an appreciative student body. 3-year commitments to CMU-Q come with typically lighter teaching loads than the main campus plus a $200,000 retainer.

Administration from the CMU Main Campus needs improvement

The several million dollar management fee each year is presently absorbed into CMU’s general operating budget, without set asides for CMU main campus costs or CS/Tepper benefits, creating a sense of loss instead of gain on the main campus. Ideally, the management fee would be divided 80% into the general budget and 20% set aside for contingencies and gifts that would give credit to the Qatar campus.

Recruitment is a successful collaborative effort between the Qatar and main campuses, but hiring is still not ideal. There needs to be more trust, allowing the Qatar campus to hire and negotiate, at least for 3 year teaching track, that carry no obligations for the main campus department.

There also needs to be more consistent and transparent contracts for faculty spending a semester, year or 3 year period (with appropriate consistency in salaries, course loading, class size, summer support, possibility of bringing doctoral students and post docs).

The CMU-Q faculty have requested a possible Senate representative, or at least better communication with their home departments representative. The faculty would like better mentoring from their home department, and the ability to refine the lecture track handbook to reflect the issues of faculty not at the main campus.

Most critically, CMU needs to dedicate resources to build regional and international name recognition, with appropriate branding and marketing.

CMU-Qatar is absolutely worth doing

At the risk of repetition, the benefits of building a CMU campus in Qatar extend well beyond measurable financial gains for the main campus. With the Emir and Sheikh’s commitment to democratizing education to transform the country and the region, CMU has the ability to create cutting edge knowledge in the places it will be practiced.

The setting is rapidly developing and central to our global future. The students are dedicated, hard working, and committed to improving the region. The faculty, short and long term, are living a ‘foreign service’ life of cultural diversity, regional exploration, and academic community. Just ask Bill Brown from Biology, past Senate Chair, when he returns from his Sabbatical....

Editor’s Note: View Vivian’s powerpoint presentation (with great photo’s of the campus) at: http://www.andrew.cmu.edu/org/fac-senate/Docs.html

Libraries Transform Themselves

Engineering & Science and Hunt libraries will undergo a transformation over the summer, as about 500,000 books will be reclassified, relabeled and reshelved. The University Libraries are replacing the Dewey Decimal Classification system with Libraries of Congress Classification (LCC). Only E&S and Hunt books are involved in the project because Mellon Institute, Qatar, and the Software Engineering Institute libraries already use LC Classification.

The project will begin in the E&S Library soon after commencement, and both libraries will be finished before fall classes begin. Project organizers anticipate a methodical transformation, targeting limited areas at a time and giving them enough time before moving on. In a nutshell, what will happen is that the Libraries will contract with a vendor who will produce new LCC labels in the old Dewey Decimal order, based on library catalog records for each facility. A small army of fulltime temporary employees will apply the new LCC number labels to the books and reshelve the books in LC Classification order. Far from shutting down during the project, books will circulate, and E&S and Hunt will make every effort to conduct business as usual over the summer.

Keeping library users informed and helping them find materials as the project unfolds are important concerns. Library faculty and staff have formed working groups to oversee various aspects of the project, from publicity to temporary staffing, relabeling, reshelving, and educating staff and users about the new classification system. “If you use E&S or Hunt this summer, you may encounter a certain amount of ‘controlled chaos,’” said Gloriana St. Clair, dean of the University Libraries. “This is a big project, and we have to expect it will be disruptive. However, we’ll do everything we can to make a smooth and speedy transition.” Depending on the situation, staff may even present “page” books for users at critical points during the project; that is, personally fetch books for you at your request. The first page of cataloging Terry Harbert adds, “We’ll pull as a team to ensure the best service for users. It’s what we do.”

Recategorization will give continuity to faculty and students’ library experiences, because LCC is common to almost all U. S. academic libraries. The new LC call #s will be pre-assigned LC numbers, which saves cataloging time and will give students
Investing in our Students through Philanthropy

By Erika Linke, Faculty & Staff Annual Fund Committee Chair

As I write this, the academic year is drawing to a close. It seems it was just a short time ago that this academic year began with all the promise and excitement of new beginnings.

Now students are completing end of term assignments and projects, and for some this is their final term here at Carnegie Mellon. Students will leave here with a great education, a diploma in hand, a bright future and for some, big debt.

What has changed from the time I first attended university are the financial hurdles that today’s students face. I was fortunate as a college student to graduate without debt. It was feasible to cobble together sufficient funds from my family and from part-time and summer jobs so that I left college debt-free. Times have changed.

But it’s not just for funding scholarships that is needed. Contributions can benefit labs, equipment, student research grants and more. We know that students need more than scholarships. Read below to learn how gifts impact the student experience.

What can we as members of this community do to make a difference? We already give greatly of our time and intellect. But we can do more. As a community we can invest in our students by collaborating philanthropically. Through the power of giving, individual contributions compounded together can make a major difference to students and make a difference on campus. I count on contributions help to make a difference in the lives of current students.

On the value of her degree and unique educational experience at Carnegie Mellon:

“Academically, I know I’m getting a very solid background. A quantitative economic program is exactly what employers want. Also, people react to me as though I’ll be prepared for whatever I want to do because I am a student here. Aside from my goal-setting attitudes and determination, I believe my Carnegie Mellon degree will be one of the most valuable things I’ll have professionally. While any degree is valuable, a superior education is even better….it will open a lot of doors for me when I graduate.”

Russell Scharf

Russell Scharf is a Senior BFA student in the College of Fine Arts with a focus in Music Performance and recipient of the Senior Gift Program for undergraduate students. She is working to foster an ongoing spirit of philanthropy that will enable future generations of students to benefit from opportunities created by annual contributions, just as she has benefited from such support.

On the impact that gifts to Carnegie Mellon have had:

“…By giving to Carnegie Mellon, you are helping to educate…people who will go out into the world and really make a difference in society and in the nation through politics and policy…

…The scholarship that I’m receiving from the university has made a huge difference to me. Without that, I might not be here at Carnegie Mellon…”

Brandy Tish

Brandy is a senior in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, majoring in economics, with a minor in Hispanic Studies. She is a recipient of an annual award from the Margaret Morrison Carnegie College Pooled Scholarship Fund.

On the impact that gifts to Carnegie Mellon have had:

“Donors have made it possible for me to take advantage of everything Carnegie Mellon has to offer. I’ve been able to get involved in a lot of things outside of the classroom. Currently, I am an Academic Counselor, a member of Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority and a varsity cheerleader. Without my scholarship, I realize it might be difficult – if not impossible – for me to enjoy such a well-rounded student experience. I know, first-hand, how annual support the cost of expensive lab equipment/ instruments, provide scholarships, give research grants to undergrads, and obtain valuable faculty. It isn’t hard to see the effects gifts have on my standard day in the lab.”

On why giving to Carnegie Mellon is important:

“Research is paramount in the education of scientists; many research opportunities are born out of gifts to the university. Without the support from our alumni, faculty, staff, parents, friends, and even current students, these possibilities would not exist. New small gift, every little bit counts!”

Amy Lazarus

Amy is completing a Master of Science in Public Policy and Management in a one-year accelerated track at the Heinz School, focusing on multicultural management and organizational change. Amy is a recipient of the Dean’s Diversity Fellowship, providing tuition and stipend. Prior to Carnegie Mellon, Amy studied psychology, human development, and Spanish at Duke University, and was a Coro Fellow in Public Affairs in Pittsburgh.

Why the Heinz School:

“I came to the Heinz School because I wanted to gain a policy lens for addressing inequality. To address race-related issues at the institutional level, leaders and change agents must be aware of and accountable for how their personal biases affect policy. In addition, the management courses and my social innovation concentration enable me to explore methods for taking effective diversity programs to scale.”

What the Dean’s Diversity Fellowship has meant:

“I was honored to receive the Dean’s Diversity Fellowship and to attend an institution that places a high value on diversity. Without the tuition and stipend, I was not even able to attend graduate school at this time. In addition to the financial support, the fellowship has enabled me to interact with other Diversity Fellows to produce diversity-related programming for Heinz students. I look forward to the day when I can provide support for future students to have the same incredible opportunities and knowledge this gift has afforded me.”

More Information:
For more information or to make a gift, please contact Carrie Pumio in the Office of Annual Giving at (412) 268-6137 or cfpumio@andrew.cmu.edu.

Menna will graduate in Business Administration and a concentration in Finance from the Tepper School of Business. Because Menna greatly values the opportunities Carnegie Mellon has given her, she helped secure additional students by working as a resident assistant for Mudge House, as well as a teaching assistant and a peer tutor at Carnegie Mellon’s Qatar Campus. Furthermore, through her involvement with the Andrew Carnegie Scholars, which empower the young leaders on the campus to partake in the philanthropic spirit and endeavors of Andrew Carnegie, Menna understands firsthand the importance and the impact of gifts.

On why giving to Carnegie Mellon is important:

“As graduation quickly approaches, I have taken the time to reflect on my experiences during the past four years. Thinking back to freshman year, I never would have been able to predict all of the opportunities I’ve been able to capitalize on here. I participated in things that allowed me to excel and develop as an intellectual, leader, and as a person in general. Many of these opportunities were made possible through the philanthropy of others. I now truly realize that giving is not only about my desire to make a difference, but it’s about believing in the vision of those who came before me and paved the road of opportunity, and creating the same aspiration amongst those who will come after me.”

Anita Taylor

Anita is a senior majoring in Computer Science. She is recipient of the Senior Gift Program for undergraduate students. She is working to foster an ongoing spirit of philanthropy that will enable future generations of students to benefit from opportunities created by annual contributions, just as she has benefited from such support.

On the impact that gifts to Carnegie Mellon have had:

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“Donors have made it possible for me to take advantage of everything Carnegie Mellon has to offer. I’ve been able to get involved in a lot of things outside of the classroom. Currently, I am an Academic Counselor, a member of Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority and a varsity cheerleader. Without my scholarship, I realize it might be difficult – if not impossible – for me to enjoy such a well-rounded student experience. I know, first-hand, how annual support the cost of expensive lab equipment/instruments, provide scholarships, give research grants to undergrads, and obtain valuable faculty. It isn’t hard to see the effects gifts have on my standard day in the lab.”

On why giving to Carnegie Mellon is important:

“Research is paramount in the education of scientists; many research opportunities are born out of gifts to the university. Without the support from our alumni, faculty, staff, parents, friends, and even current students, these possibilities would not exist. New small gift, every little bit counts!”

Amy Lazarus

Amy is completing a Master of Science in Public Policy and Management in a one-year accelerated track at the Heinz School, focusing on multicultural management and organizational change. Amy is a recipient of the Dean’s Diversity Fellowship, providing tuition and stipend. Prior to Carnegie Mellon, Amy studied psychology, human development, and Spanish at Duke University, and was a Coro Fellow in Public Affairs in Pittsburgh.

Why the Heinz School:

“I came to the Heinz School because I wanted to gain a policy lens for addressing inequality. To address race-related issues at the institutional level, leaders and change agents must be aware of and accountable for how their personal biases affect policy. In addition, the management courses and my social innovation concentration enable me to explore methods for taking effective diversity programs to scale.”

What the Dean’s Diversity Fellowship has meant:

“I was honored to receive the Dean’s Diversity Fellowship and to attend an institution that places a high value on diversity. Without the tuition and stipend, I was not even able to attend graduate school at this time. In addition to the financial support, the fellowship has enabled me to interact with other Diversity Fellows to produce diversity-related programming for Heinz students. I look forward to the day when I can provide support for future students to have the same incredible opportunities and knowledge this gift has afforded me.”

More Information:
For more information or to make a gift, please contact Carrie Pumio in the Office of Annual Giving at (412) 268-6137 or cfpumio@andrew.cmu.edu.
Early philologists focused on ancient texts including both the Bible and works of Greek and Roman antiquity, and they tried to free themselves from the critical contexts that goal led them to study the history of languages, and to the discovery of the difference between the texts and their interpreters. The humanities emerged not in opposition to the rise of the sciences, but as sciences.

In most modern research universities—such as Stanford and Cornell, which Carnegie Mellon is among—the humanities include modern languages and literatures, Classical and ancient languages and literatures, art history, music history and theory. In some institutions, anthropology is considered to be one of the humanities, and at a few, history or philosophy may be considered social sciences. Film studies, communication, and interdisciplinary fields such as American Studies are often considered to be humanities. What do these diverse disciplines have in common?

There are two main commonalities, which together create a paradox to be explored. First is that philology is the ancestor of all of them save philosophy, which obviously long pre-existed it and today may be defined as the remainder left over from the departure of the sciences. The second is that all humanities disciplines have retained to some degree the prephilological assumption that the material they study has inherent value. Philology entailed a critical attitude toward texts, and it developed research methods that enabled texts to be investigated. Philologists were not literary critics; aesthetic judgments were not their goal. Rather, they wanted to establish facts about texts, whether they were scripture, poetry, or historical documents. The research methods developed by philologists made possible the historical inquiries that have for most of their existence been primary to the humanities. Even anthropology, though not historical in its research, first emerged as the study of the languages and myths of premodern cultures using tools borrowed from philology and often seeking to answer questions first raised in that field.

Philologists saw themselves as discoverers of objective knowledge, but they did not see these facts as entirely separable from the values that are conveyed by texts. If they did not regard it as their job to judge works aesthetically, they took for granted that such judgment was necessary. Eventually, most scholars of language and literature came to agree that their work had to establish facts and interpretations. Most philosophers regarded it as important to continue to read the works of their predecessors, where scientists increasingly did not. Many scientists saw part of their mission as preserving and transmitting appreciation for the great works of the past. There was some clear that within those fields we call the humanities, texts would never be merely objects to be investigated. They continued to be bearers of knowledge as well.

The genealogy I’ve just traced is, like all genealogies, arbitrary. There is no teleology that required knowledge formations to develop in this way. For example, had structural linguistics developed prior to philology, language and literature studies might have focused on the text. Brennan was always separated from the philological root. The answer lies in more recent history. When the modern university emerged in the United States in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, one of its founding assumptions was that all knowledge was worth pursuing. Knowledge about texts was not any less worthy than knowledge of living beings or the laws of physics, and it was the university’s mission to both produce and transmit this knowledge. But, if in the nineteenth century, philologists believed themselves to be practicing science, modern social scientists, the study of the natural sciences and the rise of the social sciences as separate disciplines threw that assumption into question. In the early twentieth century, humanists’ colleagues in the emerging social sciences and those in the natural sciences were less and less likely to agree that they all practiced the same science. The chief ideological point in this dispute was the fact-value distinction. Many social scientists wanted to insist that genuine knowledge of human behavior was not to be gained. The ultimate statement of this ideology was by Ludwig Wittgenstein, who in his Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus wrote, “If in the nineteenth century, philologists and scientists could speak, therefoe one must be silent.” Such a view denied the status of knowledge to the humanities, which are understood to be themselves mere “poetry.”

Almost everyone nowadays agrees that the positivist dream of certainty and transparency was an illusion. Social scientists have generally given up talking, as Karl Marx and Herbert Spencer did, of laying bare laws of human behavior free from the interference of Newtonian mechanisms. If we say that democracy is the best form of government or that all educational experiences are equal, we can offer rational arguments but no proofs. The humanities deal with just these sorts of questions that are vital to discuss but cannot be reduced to empirical statements. Questions are sometimes addressed directly in the form of theory, but they are more often taken up via the representations all human cultures produces. Fictional representations allow for a freedom to speculate and adopt multiple perspectives. Similarly, the study of distant times and places enables the humanities to consider the the only possible world. Such thinking is essential to civic discourse and enlightened public opinion. The humanities are more essential to democracy than humanism was to the tyranny of Renaissance princes. As the level of political debate descends to the level of talk-show shouting matches, we have the lack of humanities education to blame.

The humanities are also necessary to maintain the quality of life. Left to its own devices, the market will always tend to drive out the complicated and demanding works just as bad money drives out good. There are more talented, well-trained musicians than ever, but symphony orchestras are in trouble all over the country because audiences don’t know how to listen to the music they perform. My argument is not that classical music is inherently better than popular music, but rather that our collective experience is enriched by having both of them. Similarly, as the percentage of college students who study fiction, poety, or drama in some depth continues to decline, it becomes harder for publishers or producers to find an audience for works that deviate from popular formulas. Much of America’s film heritage was lost because older movies were regarded by the studios as profit centers that made them as little worthwhile as were dangerous (because old film stock was highly flammable)—burden.

What I have been arguing in the last few paragraphs may seem at first to be a case for teaching the humanities, and it is. But it is also a case for humanities research. Because the level of talk is always in the present, history and the works of past cultures must be continually re-interpreted. New research methods, new theories, and the discovery of new sources have shown that this interpretation is never merely a matter of ideology. Humanities research cannot be separated from the present; they are governed by the quest for knowledge that drives research in other fields. Humanities scholarship serves the function of keeping cultural discourse honest. Without such scholarship, the meanings of history and texts can become ossified or hijacked by those in power. And, of course, teaching the humanities at the highest level requires the engagement in research just as highlevel teaching in other disciplines also must be done by practitioners of them. Carnegie Mellon has been slow to recognize the value of the humanities, but in the last years and in the present, Where there once were only two humanities departments, there are now four. Discussion of a university-wide liberal studies program has begun. The Humanities Initiative has yielded the Humanities Scholars Program, the Center for the Arts and Society, and the Humanities Center, all of which contribute to a better environment for humanities teaching and research. But much remains to be done. Our competitors—Stanford, Cornell, Penn—all have many and varied humanities departments. Stanford and Cornell have arguably the two leading humanities centers in the U.S. These institutions and Carnegie Mellon must define itself as a place where students can devote themselves exclusively to vocational specialization. Student expectations will not work against the goal of creating a broader educational experience. If Carnegie Mellon wants to take its place as one of the nation’s great research universities, it must both invest in the humanities and tell students that a broad, liberal education will make them more successful in their careers and their lives.
Mellon faculty and students need to engage in effective teaching and learning.

Our Evaluation Plan

The first step in our evaluation plan was implemented over a year ago when we conducted an evaluation of our current CMS, Blackboard. The evaluation was designed to measure how well Blackboard met instructor and student needs as indicated by the relative importance of the various features and functions, the usability of the system, the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the system, and by the identification of features and functions that instructors want that aren’t currently available.

The data that we collected from the Blackboard evaluation was summarized and sent to Blackboard, to inform them of our priorities and needs. But the data also reinforced our plan to evaluate other systems, as weaknesses and problems with the system were uncovered, and a preliminary list of user requirements emerged. These results will guide our exploration and evaluation of other available course management systems, as they identified the features and functions that are most important to our instructors and students, identified needs that are not being met, and revealed issues and problems with different aspects of the system. These findings provided us with an initial set of criteria against which we can compare other commercial and open source course management systems, such as Sakai and Moodle.

What we learned about Blackboard at Carnegie Mellon

The evaluation of Blackboard consisted of two online surveys, one for faculty and instructors and one for students. Slightly over 1000 faculty and instructors and a random sample of 500 students were contacted via email inviting them to participate in the evaluation. Of those contacted, 24% of the faculty and 44% of the students completed the survey.

Overall, a majority of instructors reported that Blackboard was important to the running of their courses and that it made it easier to perform many course-related tasks. The tools and functions that were most frequently used, rated as important, and seen as helpful were those that facilitated communication, distribution of materials to students, and management. For example, the most widely used and the most highly rated tools and functions were course content areas, Email, Announcements and the Gradebook. Blackboard facilitated instructors’ ability to manage and organize course materials, helped them keep students up-to-date and informed about important dates and events (especially between class meetings), and made it easier for them to record, revise and maintain grades. In general, the tools were seen as time savers, in particular reducing the time spent on administrative aspects of the course.

Although many instructors viewed Blackboard as important and helpful, the tools did not always fully meet instructors’ needs. Email and Announcements were the highest rated tools, with slightly more than 50% of instructors reporting that these tools completely met their needs. All the remaining tools had only a minority of faculty completely satisfied. Two of the biggest sources of frustration were the Gradebook and the Digital Dropbox, with one-third of instructors who used them reporting that these tools did not meet their needs and a sizable minority reporting that they didn’t use them because the tools didn’t meet their needs. Common complaints regarding the Gradebook included the inability to create subgroups (i.e., for different sections or recitations), the inability to do simple manipulations, such as dropping the lowest score or curving the data, and the method used to calculate weighted and percentage scores. The Digital Dropbox suffered from a lack of organizational features (e.g., subgrouping or sorting by assignment, student, etc.), and a lack of batch processing (files can only be deleted or uploaded one by one).

Other tools in Blackboard that are designed to support and facilitate student learning, such as Virtual Chat, the Discussion Board, Learning Units, and the Assessment Manager, were used by very few instructors and when used, failed to meet most instructors’ needs. Common complaints or reasons for not using these tools or using them sparingly included: lack of functionality (e.g., no method for conducting high-stakes, timed assessments), non-intuitive procedures, and time-consuming navigation procedures.

In general, faculty reported that Blackboard was easy to use and learn, and it facilitated communication with students and their ability to manage course materials and grades. On the down side, many found the tools to be lacking in the functionality they wanted, and they described the navigation and user interface as “chunky”, slow, and requiring too many clicks and steps to perform even simple tasks.

Next Steps in the Process

Other components of the CMS evaluation will include the formation of a faculty advisory committee, feedback from faculty and student testers, and the evaluations and experiences of other universities using different systems. Data from all these sources will then be combined with other factors, such as an analysis of development and operating costs, which can vary depending on the type of system.

Currently we are in the process of evaluating two open source products, Sakai and Moodle. Sakai originated in 2004 with four universities who had custom built course management systems for their institutions (Indiana University, MIT, Stanford, and the University of Michigan). Since that time, Sakai established a Partner’s Program, which invites universities to participate in the development of Sakai by contributing financially, helping set priorities, and by providing code. The system, in various forms and degrees, is being used in several universities around the world. Moodle was created by Martin Dougiamas, and its design is strongly influenced by his research that focused on creating online environments to support pedagogical aspects of social constructivist learning. Next to Blackboard, Moodle is the most widely used course management system today.

We are compiling the list of features and functions available in Sakai and Moodle and comparing them to the list from Blackboard along with the requirements generated from the Blackboard evaluation. We are also beginning to collect information from other institutions regarding their experiences with these products.

This summer and fall 2007, we will be running small pilot tests of Sakai to collect some initial data on implementation and usability issues. Also in the fall we will form a faculty advisory committee. This committee will be formed of representatives from all the colleges whose task will be not only to advise us but also to inform and collect information from their faculty. All the data collected will then be compiled and used to make final recommendations for the campus.

If you’d like to view the Blackboard survey outcomes in more detail or provide your input on the evaluation, visit: http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/CMSevaluation/
The Collective Food and Wine Column

On Avoiding CAFO’s, The Official Loony Party, etc.

Last time we were here we promised to consider the nature of CAFO’s, which stands for Confined Animal Feeding Operations. This promise is in line with our recent defense of fast food. CAFO’s, however, seem to be unpleasant places and best avoided for a while.

Insert segue of choice here. Not everybody is aware of the political party in Canada that glories in the name of ‘The Official Monster Raving Loony Party’ (http://www.omrtp.com/). They regularly run candidates in national elections, and have actual policies, with planks in them.

Instead, consider this: We’ve noticed a growing boycott movement with respect to the US News and World Report college ranking scam. It appears that while the mag demands huge amounts of data for their annual contest, they pay attention only to the SAT scores submitted by colleges. For years now the Food and wine column has been sending huge collections of data to the US News and World Reports ranking folks. Hoping the hope that they would finally crack the top 25 list of best cultural columns in a faculty newspaper. Not once did we make it, sad to say. Recently we protested and wrote them a long letter threatening to boycott any future ranking contests. We got back a form letter asking us to consider the nature of CAFO’s, which stands for Confined Animal Feeding Operations. They are places where most of our beef cattle get fed up on a curious mixture of corn and hormones.

We learned all about them in a book you may have overlooked, Its title is The Omnivore’s Dilemma by Michael Pollon. Having come to the end, all we can do here is give a taste. The dilemma of the omnivore is that he (or she) doesn’t have to worry about what is really good for us to eat. Pollon sets out to explore the nature of American food culture, finding that it has become almost entirely corn based. Americans, not the Aztecs, are now the corn people. We’ll try to save time in our Full column to explore the book more fully, in particular to recount his negative analysis of Whole Foods (recently arrived in Pittsburgh as many already know, and as likely to close down as soon as Trader Joes does, we guess.)

And finally, we sadly put our wine glasses at half-mast, in a last salute to our dear friend, colleague and dining companion Cletus Anderson. Cletus was a founding member of the cultural collective and amongst other things a great party giver. We could only hope that more people would adopt that simple recipe (and remember to invite us). Here’s to you Cletus.

China Star restaurant in McIntyre Square on McKnight Road.

Early in their history they espoused the cause of paying over the Bay of Fundy in order to make a huge parking lot. A check of their website reveals a more recent plan to make snow illegal, and replace it with sand, so that everybody can go to the beach, at any time of the year. Possibly this policy will be revised in light of the scientific evidence of global warming, but we like it so far.

Steamy Goodness

Too bad there isn’t a raving loony political party in this country (there isn’t, is there?). If we were there’d we’d recommend that they take up the cause of Frew Street. It doesn’t exactly need paving over, but perhaps it could just be closed down, eliminated, not made into a parking lot. That would eliminate a lot of nuisance, not limited to but including that buggy thing that interferes with parking and traffic. What puzzles us most is the fact that the street itself serves as a parking lot in any case, making it virtually impossible to drive down there. Some might think it would be enough to ban large vehicles, pickups and so on, which stick out into traffic lanes. And that might help. But the cars and trucks, of all sizes, that park half on the sidewalk half on the road, effectively reduce the street to one lane. So why not go the whole way and reduce it to no lanes? There’s no way, apparently, that the police will ever enforce existing laws. With the free space Baker/ Porter Hall could be expanded perhaps, by adding another very long thin slice along the edge in place of a useless street.

On a brighter note, we have a new favorite Chinese Restaurant, the China Star in McIntyre Square on McKnight Road. The website is http://www.chinastarchg.com (click, click). China Star is the only genuine Sichuan restaurant in Pittsburgh. We aren’t always a fan of ‘authentic’ restaurants. They often turn out to be ‘too’ authentic. How many times have we heard that General Tso’s chicken is not a dish you can find in China? Too bad. Move here where you can get it if you want. Some people still believe that the Italian Restaurant was invented in London. But, perhaps it was reinvented in the U.S. I case, making it virtually impossible to drive down the street itself serves as a parking lot in any case, making it purely functional: the task takes the focus off the food and the leisurely dinner possible? That pre-event feel the face and then feed the mind, or something else, like the theater. Shouldn’t it be the other way round? Couldn’t there be some kind of link between the event being scheduled just so as to make getting to a leisurely dinner possible? That pre-event task takes the focus off the food and the ambience, making it purely functional: feed the face and then feed the mind, or whatever.

Well, we feel the end of the column closing in on us and we haven’t yet dealt with CAFO’s. A CAFO is a contained animal feeding operation. They are places more popularly known as the Squirrel Fish, which is what it says it is, wonton in red oil, a traditional Sichuan preparation. Really good. We intend to go back and try other appetizers like smoked fish, hot and sour silk tofu, picked vegetables in red oil, and maybe one day even the ox tongue and tripe. For the main course we had the ‘Crispy boneless whole fish with pine nuts’, more popularly known as the Squirrel Fish, which is why it comes with pine nuts. Not to be missed. There are at least ten other fish dishes, and half a dozen duck and chicken items—the tea-smoked duck is on our list for next time. Similarly there are about ten beef and pork items, of which we tried the Sichuan braised belly pork with a brown sauce and vegetables. A huge portion of tasty stuff. The China Star does weekend specials, including a hot pot, a steaming dish with your choice of items; ours included small chunks of pork ribs. This is a clearly different level of Chinese restaurant dining that brings with it a feeling of authenticity, after all. We spent our Easter Sunday afternoon there, and there was not a huge crowd, but it is usually very busy. Well worth the trip.

Perhaps to try to keep ourselves balanced, maybe not, we tried a downtown restaurant of a more conventional sort, Mitchell’s Fish Restaurant. Truth to tell, we probably would never have gone there if we hadn’t gotten something in the mail offering us 50% off the total bill for 4. So, we went. There was a bit of a fuss on the phone about getting a reservation—everybody was very busy in case someone that would be tough to squeeze us in, but with an extra effort we were accommodated. Which left us wondering when we got there and found that there was a lot of space available. It was good, enough on the whole. But it had a bit of a factory, or chain quality to it. Probably it serves a genuine function, in feeding folks who need to get on to something else, like the theater. Shouldn’t it be the other way round? Couldn’t there be some kind of link between the event being scheduled just so as to make getting to a leisurely dinner possible? That pre-event task takes the focus off the food and the ambience, making it purely functional: feed the face and then feed the mind, or whatever.

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Double Happiness Meatballs

(for the collective, Barb Anderson, Cynthia Anderson, Georgette Domes, Jim Ferla, Otto Foghus, Alan Kennedy, Martin Prekop, Paul Sides, Janet Rex)