The Campus

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Undergraduates who’ve only taken three courses in Islamic studies

Mike McGowan, a budding art historian, gets his first taste of Islamic studies when he browses through a book at a local bookstore. “I was drawn to it because of the cover,” McGowan says. “The colors were really vibrant.”

McGowan is one of many students who are taking courses in Islamic studies for the first time. “It’s been great to see so many students interested in the subject,” says Professor Richard McGregor, assistant professor of Islamic studies. “I think we’ve really been able to connect with them and show them the depth and breadth of Islamic studies.”

McGowan is not alone. Many students have been drawn to the subject by its rich history, diverse cultures, and unique art forms. “I was really impressed by the level of detail in the lectures,” says Rebecca Brown, a junior majoring in Islamic studies. “It was like living in another world.”

McGowan’s course, “Islamic Art and Architecture,” is just one of many courses offered in the department. “We have a variety of courses that cover all aspects of Islamic studies,” says McGregor. “From history to literature, from art to architecture, we’ve got it all.”

The department is also home to a number of research projects, including a study of the impact of Islamic art on contemporary culture. “We’re trying to understand how Islamic art has influenced modern art,” says McGregor. “It’s a fascinating topic.”

The department is also working to expand its reach beyond its traditional student body. “We’re trying to reach out to students who might not have considered studying Islamic studies before,” says McGregor. “It’s a challenging field, but one that’s full of surprises.”

Isaac Evans, a senior majoring in Islamic studies, is one of those students. “I had never really thought about studying Islamic studies before,” says Evans. “But now I’m hooked.”

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Top Picks

Tong One of 2005’s Scientific American 50

Vanderbilt psychologist Frank Tong has been named a research leader in the 2005 Scientific American 50, the magazine’s annual list recognizing outstanding leadership in science and technology from the past year. Tong and his colleague Yukiyasu Kamitani, an investigator at ATR Computational Neuroscience Laboratories in Kyoto, Japan, shared the honor for their work in neural imaging. Tong and Kamitani were recognized for their work in functional magnetic resonance imaging, a special type of MRI technology that detects the brain areas that become active during certain mental tasks by registering variations of blood and oxygen flow.

Seddon Lands in Hall of Fame

Dr. Rhea Seddon, assistant chief medical officer at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, was inducted into the Tennessee Aviation Hall of Fame in November. A former NASA astronaut, Seddon flew three space shuttle missions between 1985 and 1993, including service as payload commander for the 1993 life sciences research shuttle mission. The Tennessee Museum of Aviation opened in 2001, and the Hall of Fame inducted its first honorees in 2002.

Doc Hollywood

Dr. Travis Stork, 33, who is completing his residency in the Vanderbilt University Medical Center emergency room, was the star of ABC’s matchmaking reality TV show The Bachelor, which aired during January and February. Stork was the eighth bachelor to star in the series, which pits 25 females in competition to win the heart of the leading man. A native of Fort Collins, Colo., Stork earned his medical degree from the University of Virginia and graduated magna cum laude from Duke University. The series was filmed in Paris, but Vanderbilt University Medical Center worked with Warner Brothers Telepictures in October to provide footage of Stork on shift in the ER.
While the incidence of diabetes is low in their native countries, adoption of an American lifestyle after entering this country prompts a rapid rise in disease incidence. "I think we should hand out diabetes medicines at the border when people come into the country," says Fowler, assistant professor of medicine in the Division of Endocrinology, Diabetes and Metabolism.

The impact of this epidemic is felt at the Tuesday night clinics. "It's always a packed house," Fowler says.

He is working to establish a practice at the Vanderbilt Eskind Diabetes Clinic specializing in treating diabetes in the Hispanic population. Through advertising in Spanish newspapers and word-of-mouth, Fowler hopes to draw Spanish-speaking patients to Vanderbilt for their diabetes care. He recently secured grant support to study how best to provide services.

Non-English-speaking patients often harbor a distrust of medical science. But Fowler, who majored in Spanish in college and has studied in Spain, finds having a Spanish-speaking medical staff helps break down the walls and puts patients at ease. "If patients can explain things to you in their own native tongue, they are much more comfortable with the doctor."

Several lab staff, nurse educators and dietitians at the Vanderbilt Eskind Diabetes Clinic also speak Spanish. Fowler hopes to recruit additional Spanish-speaking faculty and encourage other faculty to learn Spanish.

"The complications of diabetes are preventable, and diabetes is absolutely controllable if we catch it in time," Fowler says.

More than four decades after a national furor over the expulsion of James Lawson from Vanderbilt University, he will return as a distinguished university professor for the 2006–07 academic year.

"This is for me an unexpected, even momentous personal instant in my journey," Lawson said. The announcement was made Jan. 18, when Lawson was named Vanderbilt's 2005 Distinguished Alumnus.

Lawson’s expulsion from Vanderbilt Divinity School and the resulting resignations of faculty members in protest embroiled the campus and the Nashville community in a nationally reported controversy for months in the spring of 1960. Eventually, a compromise was forged to stop most of the resignations and allow Lawson to complete his degree in Nashville. Lawson instead chose to transfer to Boston University.

During his visiting professorship, Lawson will teach at least one course and give at least one public lecture each semester, participate in discussion groups with faculty, and work on his autobiography.

Lawson is pastor emeritus of Holman United Methodist Church in Los Angeles, where he served for 25 years before retiring in 1999. As a young man he studied the Gandhian
movement in India before becoming an integral part of the Civil Rights Movement.

Lawson was dubbed by the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. as “the leading nonviolence theorist in the world.”

Lawson helped organize sit-ins by African American students, which led to the end of racial segregation of lunch counters in downtown Nashville. He also was active in civil rights struggles in Alabama and Mississippi. “Permanently expelled from Vanderbilt University, James Lawson would have done fine and well,” said James Hudnut-Beumler, dean of Vanderbilt Divinity School. “But Vanderbilt could not be fine or well without confronting its troubled soul. ... James Lawson has progressively helped this university find its conscience—and dare I say—its soul.”

Children’s Hospital Takes Services to Guatemala

Children in poverty-stricken Guatemala have among the worst growth rates in the world due to rampant malnutrition and lack of quality medical care. Half the country’s population of 14.2 million is children under the age of 18.

In February a team of 14 surgeons, doctors, nurses and staff members from the Monroe Carell Jr. Children’s Hospital at Vanderbilt took part in a weeklong surgical trip to Guatemala. They screened patients and performed 35 pediatric urologic surgeries on children at San Sebastian Hospital in Guatemala City.

Many of the surgeries they performed were on children much older than those who might receive the same procedures in the United States. Limited resources and lack of specialists cause many children to suffer disabilities and conditions that would be corrected much sooner in the U.S.

Children’s Hospital partnered with The Shalom Foundation, a Middle Tennessee-based nonprofit humanitarian aid organization, and the Guatemalan Pediatric Foundation, a nonprofit based in Guatemala that provides health services and helps coordinate international medical missions and trips.

The groups plan to continue their partnership, and Children’s Hospital has committed to participate in other surgical trips to Guatemala in the future. Children’s Hospital has committed with Shalom to help create sustainable programs to provide health-care services, educate the community on health issues, provide staffing for surgical trips, and share technology and information related to advances in health care in the country. In the future, elective international rotations for pediatric residents and nurses from the U.S. may also be offered.

Meth Costly in Lives and Health-Care Delivery

In 2004, Tennessee authorities seized 1,574 meth labs in the state—a whopping 75 percent of the total in the Southeast and second only to Missouri across the United States. To fight the use and manufacturing of methamphetamine in Tennessee, Gov. Phil Bredesen has enlisted a group of local and state partners, including Vanderbilt University Medical Center. In November they launched a $1.5 million statewide methamphetamine education campaign, “Meth Destroys.”

The issue is an important one to Vanderbilt, according to Dr.
Jeffrey Guy, director of the Vanderbilt Regional Burn Center. In 2004 as many as one-third of the patients in the Burn Center had been involved in meth explosions, which are responsible for an estimated $5 million to $10 million a year in uncompensated care. The number of meth patients has since reduced to about 10 percent, but many of the cases rely on self-reporting.

“It’s not like a gunshot wound where there is no denying how it happened,” Guy says. “On a lot of this stuff we rely on self-reporting, and even when the patients come here, you don’t know who has the meth burns.”

Meth is typically consumed in a white powder form that can be snorted, smoked or dissolved in water to be injected. Effects of chronic meth abuse include psychotic behavior and brain damage. Health risks include depression, psychosis, skin infections, high blood pressure, hepatitis C, kidney damage and severe tooth decay.

The “Meth Destroys” effort includes television and radio spots, brochures, posters, billboards, a Web site, and other sources of dissemination.

“We have seen a reduction in the number of really big explosions,” says Guy. “But even if you have four or five of those a year, economically, you are still taking it in the teeth.”

**Owen Students Win Three National Competitions**

Teams of students from the Owen Graduate School of Management emerged victorious at three of the nation’s premier case competitions last fall.

Case competitions have become a common tool for MBA students to test skills in strategic thinking and problem solving. This year Owen students have bested teams from top business schools around the world at contests hosted by Carnegie Mellon, Ohio State and Thunderbird, and posted finishes in the top echelons at competitions held by the National Society of Hispanic MBAs (NSH MBA) and the National Black MBA Association (NBMBAA).

A team of four Owen students came out on top in a field of more than 321 teams from 83 universities and 18 different nations at this year’s Global Innovation Challenge. Their work earned them the title of “Most Innovative MBA Team in the World” and a $20,000 prize. Owen students took second place in this same competition last year.

At the second annual KeyBank Minority Case Competition, hosted by the Fisher College of Business at Ohio State University, the Owen students’ solution earned team members the top prize of $6,000. Owen students also won the top spot in the 10th Annual International Operations Case Competition at the T epper School of Business at Carnegie Mellon in Pittsburgh. Widely regarded as one of the most significant case competitions in the operations field, this year’s invitation-only contest included 15 student teams from the United States, Canada and China.

“Our accomplishments reflect two of the hallmarks of an Owen education: cutting-edge thinking and real-world knowledge,” says Jim Bradford, dean of the Owen School.