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UNLV Magazine

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Got Involved

Six Students. One Reason.

Why undergrads are reading to middle-schoolers, growing beards, and making peanut butter sandwiches.

Plus: Image-conscious professors tackle racial identity. Education experts explain why teaching evolution is tough.
The UNLV Foundation offers myriad ways to contribute. So whether you choose to give time or money (or both) your generosity helps each and every student.

Give to UNLV.
20 Evolution’s Learning Curve

Religious objections, students who think they know the facts, and that troublesome word ‘theory’ make teaching evolution tough.

Plus: Tricky Topics
Professors share their approaches to handling classroom controversies.
A Place to Linger

Sixteen hours a week is not enough. I want UNLV to engage our students both inside and outside the classroom.

I believe UNLV’s rise as an urban university requires changes beyond our academic programs. This university must be brimming with vitality 24 hours a day. We must create an engaging campus culture, one that provides the rich out-of-classroom experiences that produce well-rounded graduates. These experiences — debating ideas after a lecture, working on a research project over the summer, and pitching in on community service projects — are what help students define themselves as individuals.

Some of the ingredients for this transition are already in place. The Lied Library’s inviting spaces (and great coffee) have shattered the traditional stereotype of hushed spaces for solitary pursuits. Business is booming in the new student union; in its first two months, the union sold 30,000 more Jamba Juices, tacos, and Frappacinos than it did over the same period last year. I expect the student recreation center, set to open by fall, will add even more credence to the expression, “If we build it, they will come.”

We also want you to come. Our campus has always drawn alumni to its arts and sports venues. But do you head right back home when the event is done? I envision a vital atmosphere that keeps you here and encourages you to participate in student-mentoring activities, alumni events, or after-hours public lectures.

The Midtown UNLV project is one more ingredient in this change. By collaborating with local developers, we hope to revitalize the area around the university and create a distinct neighborhood in Las Vegas — a university district. Our plans will calm traffic and build a safe, pedestrian-friendly environment along Maryland Parkway. On the west side of the street, the community will access public spaces and the rich cultural and intellectual resources the university offers. On the opposite side, a full complement of restaurants, retail shops, and residential projects will serve UNLV’s students and encourage all to linger and even live here.

In 10 years’ time, I believe UNLV will be a remarkable destination for community activity, a place where students learn and grow and where community members come to discuss the issues important to them. Certainly, the concept is grand in scope, but I believe it is right on target.

David B. Ashley,
UNLV President

More info: Visit midtown.unlv.edu to learn about the university’s efforts to revitalize Maryland Parkway.
A trip to the Bodies exhibit — which features preserved cadavers in such poses as throwing a baseball — prompted professor Stephen Bates to teach a class on cadaver and dissection displays as entertainment.

More Than Skin Deep

Media Studies Class Examines ‘Bodies’

By Grace Russell

Journalism professor Stephen Bates’ class is using an interesting source as a study guide: the preserved human bodies at a Las Vegas tourist attraction.

Bates’ course, Morality, Mortality, and Formality: Gazing at the Dead, explores the history of cadaver and dissection displays from the mid-18th century to today’s Bodies exhibit at the Tropicana Hotel and Casino. The traveling exhibit, one of five around the world, showcases human cadavers that have been dissected and preserved.

The Gazing at the Dead course examines cultural attitudes about viewing the dead and how the press covers this surprisingly popular form of entertainment. The exhibits have drawn critics who question the ethics of the displays, while supporters say the exhibits offer powerful lessons in anatomy and the effects of poor health choices.

Before embalming, the bodies of the dead were washed and prepared for burial at home, Bates notes. The process moved to hospitals and funeral homes starting in the late 19th century. “Death has been distanced from us,” he says. “The Bodies exhibit is a small step toward re-familiarizing ourselves with it.”

Bates admits that the topic did not initially draw his attention. He saw Bodies only at the urging of his 17-year-old daughter. “It wasn’t something that I had ever written about before,” Bates says. “But as a teacher it can be fun to explore something that you don’t know by heart with students. That way you can learn from one another.”

Increasingly, the School of Journalism and Media Studies is capitalizing on Las Vegas’s location for research, says Director Ardyth Broaderick Sohn. Professors are exploring topics ranging from visual communication (think billboards) to how religion in Las Vegas affects entertainment media. “I see this as an exciting and natural agenda for the school,” Sohn says. “We have a wonderful field site in our backyard that just can’t be ignored any longer.”

The class has drawn an eclectic mix of students, including a law professor and an anthropologist as well as graduate students in journalism.

Journalism is not the only unit on campus to use Bodies as a textbook. Exhibit organizers are offering internship opportunities to UNLV students interested in health professions. The interns will enhance their knowledge of anatomy as exhibit docents.
By The Numbers

A new center for individuals and families affected by autism puts UNLV at the forefront of research into the disorder.

The Center for Autism Spectrum Disorders is the first of its kind in the state, said Matt Tincani, center director and assistant professor of special education. “Autism affects one in 166 children, and given Southern Nevada’s growing population, this center is needed to help those with autism and their families,” he said.

The center will conduct research related to assessment and intervention programs for autism and similar disorders, such as Asperger Syndrome. It also will provide community-focused training and support.

This is the first university-based resource in Nevada for professionals, families, and individuals dealing with autism. Partners include Nevada Early Intervention Services and Nevada Parents Encouraging Parents, the state’s technical assistance program for parents of children with disabilities. Proposed projects include outreach seminars to professionals and parents, therapist training, and research on teaching communication and social skills.

With the center now established, Tincani hopes to attract additional external funding from federal, state, and local sources.

State’s First Autism Center Established at UNLV

Update: Chips and soda have been replaced with bottled water and saturated-fat-free snacks, thanks in part to the advocacy work of UNLV professors. In our Spring 2005 issue, we told you about efforts of Susan Meacham of nutrition science and Audrey McCool of food and beverage management to tackle childhood obesity. The duo worked with Clark County School District officials and then state officials to help reshape school foods policy and pass legislation to establish a state fitness and wellness council. “Our role — and really the role for most researchers — was to provide a sound technical background about the science behind the policy,” Meacham says. “It’s a good illustration of how the university’s research agenda can improve the community.” The Center for Science in the Public Interest, a national nonprofit advocacy group, recently ranked Nevada second in the country in terms of school foods policies.

17,500 pounds of oranges used to make smoothies in the first three months after phase one of the new student union opened.

30,000 increase in food court transactions at the new union compared to the same period last year in the old union. Includes 7,893 Starbucks frappacinos.

135,000 total size the union will be in square feet when phase two is completed this summer. The union features a 300-seat theater, expanded spaces for student organizations, computer labs, and social and study lounges. Phase two will bring a full-size ballroom and outdoor amphitheater.

With solar-powered sensing units and wireless transmissions, students hope to end the need to troll for parking garage spaces. Stephan Tam, Niveen Shlayan, and Kristal Sauer took the grand prize of $2,500 in the College of Engineering’s senior design competition in December with a system to notify motorists of available parking spaces. Before graduation, all engineering students must complete a project that applies a practical solution to an engineering challenge. Potential marketability of the project is one consideration in the competition.

Source: UNLV Division of Student Life

Aaron Mayes

Geri Kodey

Geri Kodey
UNLV microbiologist Brian Hedlund never envisioned that his pursuit of scientific frontiers would land him in such hot water. Turns out, there’s no place he’d rather be.

“People have been interested in studying high temperature limits for a long time,” Hedlund says, “but there has not been a lot of research on the ecology of where microorganisms get their energy from in extreme environments.”

The National Science Foundation (NSF) recently awarded Hedlund an Early Career Development Award to do just that. The five-year, $841,632 grant will support Hedlund’s research on how microorganisms thrive in the hot springs of Nevada’s Great Basin.

The research will allow scientists to better understand the foundations of life in geothermal habitats and will expand our knowledge about the biological diversity of life on Earth. Since photosynthesis doesn’t occur above 163 degrees Fahrenheit, organisms that thrive in geothermal waters must gain energy through chemolithoautotrophy, a process that uses energy from inorganic chemical sources instead of light.

Collaborative Approach
To accomplish his research goals, Hedlund has had to employ an interdisciplinary approach, collaborating closely with colleagues from the fields of genomics, geochemistry, and mineralogy. He admits that the collaborations were somewhat uncomfortable at first — particularly stepping outside his highly specialized professional niche — but he quickly saw the benefits of such collaborations.

“To make breakthroughs in science, we have no other choice than to become more collaborative and complex,” he says.

Hedlund is cautious when speaking about the potential impact of his research, but the possibility for breakthroughs in his work is definitely high.

“There’s a decent chance that we could find microorganisms with new energy-harnessing metabolisms that are completely unknown, and that could either shake the foundations or just shift them a little,” Hedlund says, somewhat reticently.

Major groups of microorganisms have been discovered somewhat regularly in geothermal environments — such as in Yellowstone and other places around the world — but Hedlund says he has never seen studies that produced higher percentages of unknown major groups than the ones he and his colleagues have found in the Great Basin Hot Springs. His tallies are not yet complete, but he estimates that approximately 90 percent of the microbes in the springs he’s studying contain genetic signatures unknown to science.

“No argument could be made that the hot springs that I’m looking at in Nevada are among the least understood habitats on Earth.”

Through generations of natural selection within extreme environments, the microbes have developed characteristics that are more varied than those encountered in plants or animals.

Sharing with Students
Hedlund shares his genuine love for the science behind his research with his students. The NSF grant was based in part on the educational component of his research proposal, which he designed to increase interest in the scientific process and inspire future generations of students to pursue careers in the sciences.

As part of the grant, Hedlund will conduct a one-week field course each year in Northern Nevada, during which he hopes to help foster relationships between members of the Pyramid Lake Paiute tribe, UNLV students, and the scientific community through collaborative study of the biological, cultural, and socio-political importance of the Great Basin’s geothermal resources.

“I’ve taught close to 1,000 students since coming to UNLV, and watching them go on to do good things is one of the most rewarding aspects of teaching for me,” he says. “Although it’s really hard work at times, it’s also a lot of fun. And what could be better than that?”
The UNLV swimming team is like family — a big, talkative family from all parts of the world.

Head coach Jim Reitz’s best recruiting tool has been the tendency of swimmers to talk amongst themselves during those long breaks at meets.

“The greatest recruiting tool is a former athlete going back home and singing the praises of UNLV swimming,” says Reitz, who has served as UNLV’s head swim coach since he took over the program in the early 1980s.

Athletes have come to UNLV from as close as California and Arizona to as far away as Hungary, South Africa, and Romania. This year alone, there are 15 athletes from outside the United States, including six from Sweden.

Come One, Come All
In 2004, after learning that two fellow Swedes were coming to UNLV, junior Marina Sandback decided to swim for the Rebels as well. Since then, three other Swedish swimmers have followed.

Sophomores Jonas Andersson and Johan Claar have been friends since they began swimming at Swedish national meets as teens. Claar was on the fence between Georgia Tech and UNLV; when Andersson told him of his intention to become a Rebel, his decision was solidified.

Being 5,000 miles from home isn’t easy but Claar says the transition was easier with Andersson as a suitemate and other swimmers from his homeland on the team. “It made a real difference my first year,” Claar says. “I didn’t know anything, so I could talk to them about what to expect.”

Like a Family
Reitz says that international diversity hasn’t hindered team unity. “Everybody is the same,” he says. “You get wet the same way and put your swimming suit on the same way.”

Claar adds, “There is a special bond.”

How Swede It Is
Team’s Reputation Draws Six Swimmers from the Land of the Midnight Sun

By Shane Bevell
The UNLV swimming team is like family — a big, talkative family from all parts of the world.

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The Unsinkable Jim Reitz
For the first time in his 27-year UNLV coaching career, Jim Reitz missed a swim meet last November.

Reitz and his wife were in New Jersey watching their son, Ben, a senior water polo player at Princeton, compete in the last tournament of his career. “I was more nervous sitting in the stands helpless than I ever have been at any swim meet,” he says.

Although 2,500 miles away from
amongst the Swedes, but we try to include everyone, no matter where they are from.”

That team unity comes, in part, from the amount of time they spend together. The team practices six days a week, including twice (once in the morning before classes and once in the afternoon) on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Practices include not only swimming, but also weightlifting and running.

“Swimming isn’t for sane people,” Andersson says. “You really have to push your body to the limits. We see each other at our best and at our worst. There is a tremendous amount of emotion that everyone shares.”

Sandback learned to swim when she was 7 years old because her parents had a cabin on a lake and wanted to be sure she was able to swim. She is a first-team all-Mountain West Conference (MWC) performer in the 100 butterfly and the 200 and 400 freestyle relays.

Claar has dreams of not only making the Swedish Olympic Team in 2008 but also opening his own business. He is first-team all-MWC in the freestyle events.

Andersson has always been fascinated by water and says that his parents saved him from drowning more times than he can count because of his propensity to jump in pools, fountains, and ponds at a young age. He is a first-team all-MWC performer in the 200 breaststroke and the 200 medley relay.

As with most sports, proper sleep and nutrition are critical to swim performances, Reitz says. “I believe that the success of our team, in the pool and in the classroom, is directly related to the lifestyle choices and time-management skills we seek in our recruits and cultivate in the team.”

Oddly enough, Reitz’s own health suffers a bit during swim season. He traditionally gains 15 pounds because he can’t fit exercise in during the season. And one of his biggest challenges is balancing his family life with the demands on the pool deck. Reitz admits that his wife, Nina, raised their children. “It is sort of a running joke — when people find out my son is attending Princeton, they say, ‘Oh, your wife must be pretty smart,’” he says.

Reitz has experienced a lot of changes since he started in 1980 with one volunteer assistant and an operating budget of a couple thousand dollars. “Life was simple,” he says. “Now swimming has become big business, which involves a lot of paperwork and staffing. Sometimes I feel more like an administrator than a coach.”

Still, Reitz admits that he feels blessed to be doing for money what he would do for free. “I haven’t applied for a single job in those 27 years.”
When Hannah Page took a fieldtrip to UNLV as a precocious 5-year-old, she raised her hand and announced that she knew an interesting fact about the school: “My dad is UNLV president,” she claimed. “She, of course, left out the ‘alumni association’ part,” says dad Kevin J. Page, ’86 BS Finance, ’87 MBA. Page’s long record of service — including 17 years on the association’s board of directors with stints as treasurer and first vice president — culminated in a three-year term at the helm. Now he can add 2006 Outstanding Alumnus of the Year to the list of accolades.

“Thousands. To be the one chosen from all those is very impressive. To be told, ‘We appreciate the job you did,’ is special,” he says. Page is no neophyte at nabbing awards. Awards run from desk to ceiling in his spacious office at Wells Capital Management, where he’s managing director and senior relationship manager. In 2006, he was only the second UNLV alumnus and the youngest person ever to win the Distinguished Nevadan award, given by the Nevada Board of Regents. He’s also been recognized by such community groups as the Boy Scouts of America, Leadership Las Vegas, and the Police/Fire Emerald Society of Nevada, an organization he helped establish that raises funds for public servants and their families.

“Of all of them, probably the most cherished is the Outstanding Alumnus Award. It’s really a cumulative award,” he says. Page says he first became interested in serving on the alumni board after talking to a former colleague who was a board member.

Echoing remarks made by President David Ashley at the homecoming dinner, Page says alumni will play a critical role in enhancing the university’s reputation, raising the profile of the university, and strengthening the perceived value of a UNLV degree.

“Be the cheerleader; be the supporter by joining and helping promote the university. It’s a way to promote yourself. Part of cheerleading is trying to help convince good students to go (to UNLV),” he says.

Two-time degree holder Kevin J. Page was named 2006 Outstanding Alumnus of the Year. The managing director at Wells Capital Management served on the Alumni Association board for 17 years.
a better chance of getting into medical school if I was a Nevada resident. I had an uncle who lived in Las Vegas, so I decided to try UNLV.” He and his twin brother, Paul (’86 BS Business Administration, ’87 MBA), moved to Las Vegas in 1983.

Page admits his first impression wasn’t a good one — but only because he couldn’t find the campus. “I asked for directions and they sent me to the Silver Bowl (now Sam Boyd Stadium),” he says. “Then came (Jerry) Tarkanian. The Thomas & Mack and the Beam Hall opened, and the hotel program really put us on the map worldwide. I don’t think anyone would have a problem finding the campus today.”

After his sophomore year, Page changed his major to business. He wasn’t sure the school was a good fit until he returned from a six-week winter break in New York. “When I came back, I loved it,” he says. “I got involved with the Financial Management Association and worked at the Environmental Research Center and in the cafeteria. Living on campus and getting to know people made the difference.”

He went on to complete his bachelor’s degree in two years while working full time. “I did the same thing with my MBA. I look back and wish I had taken my time because those were the best days of my life.”

Good Business Sense
Page says his UNLV education helped him plot a successful path in business. At Wells Capital Management, he oversees institutional portfolios of $10 million and up and all statewide business operations. He also manages financial investments for national unions totaling more than $1.5 billion. Previously, he served as senior vice president and senior portfolio manager at First Security Investment Management and assistant vice president at First Interstate Bank of Nevada.

Because his work requires a great deal of interstate travel, Page says he weaves UNLV into introductions on airplanes and into presentations as often as possible.

“I get to talk to a lot of people — trustees and boards of directors — and tell them that I graduated from UNLV. It’s pretty amazing the responses I get back and the reputation UNLV has out there. People here don’t give it enough credit; it has a very good reputation outside of Nevada.”

He adds that people know UNLV for much more than its winning basketball tradition. “People at UNLV have a can-do attitude and are willing to work a little harder to overcome negative perceptions. I’d put my degree up against one from any other school.”

Education A Must
Page credits his parents with emphasizing the value of higher education to him and his siblings. “When kids turn out well, it’s not by accident. Our parents instilled in us that we would be going to college.”

During his acceptance remarks for the Outstanding Alumnus Award, Page paid tribute to his parents. “My dad always worked two jobs and never complained. Many times he would work the night tour as a New York City firefighter, come home, take a shower, change, and head out to a second job — which he did for more than 20 years. My mom also worked.

“Theyir goal was always to make sure we had a better life than they did and for us to graduate from college. Fortunately, they were successful in those goals, and I’ll always be indebted to them for all they’ve done for us,” he says.

Page and his wife, Patty (’94 BS Management), are passing on the importance of education to their children, Lauren, 12, and Hannah, now 10. “With my kids — it’s not if you’ll go (to college), but where. They say they’re going to Harvard, Yale, or UNLV.”

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A Will to Change Lives

Heritage Circle Recognizes Donors who Designate UNLV in Estate Plans

By Jennifer Lawson

For Andy Fry, distinguished professor of history, the decision to remember UNLV in his estate plan was an easy one.

“My wife, Sandy, and I decided to do this because UNLV is where she earned her graduate degree and where I spent my career, so we feel we owe the institution a great deal, both professionally and personally,” he says.

The Frys are establishing a bequest through the UNLV Foundation to be added to the John S. Wright scholarship endowment for history students. As he pointed out, “One cannot have a university without students, and in that spirit, trying to aid students seems like a logical thing to do.”

Bequests, which are gifts left by will, and other types of planned gifts allow individuals to make considerable donations to UNLV — and leave a great legacy — with possible tax savings.

UNLV donors can take advantage of several planned giving options, each of which offers them particular benefits. With a charitable gift annuity, for example, the donor transfers cash to the university and, in exchange, is paid back a sum each year for life. Others choose to create a charitable lead trust, which pays a fixed income to the university for a set term before the funds are passed to heirs or other designees.

Donors Recognized Today for Future Gifts

The Frys’ gift intention qualifies them for membership in the Heritage Circle, a recognition society for donors of planned gifts.

Bud Beekman, director of gift planning, says that although most planned gifts are not realized for a number of years, the foundation has developed an immediate and formal way to recognize donors. Alumni and other friends who have designated UNLV in their wills or estate plans, or have made a deferred gift, regardless of the amount, may be included in the Heritage Circle. Currently, it includes 40 individuals whose 25 planned gifts total about $45 million.

“The Heritage Circle acknowledges the present and promises the future,” Beekman says. “It’s simply a way to say, ‘Thank you.”
We really appreciate what you’ve done.”

Heritage Circle members are invited to UNLV events and receptions throughout the year, and are kept up to date on campus happenings.

However, acknowledging a planned giving donor when the university does not know about the gift to UNLV can be challenging. Family members of the donor sometimes cannot be found when the gift matures.

“The donors are not making the donation to get credit, they’re doing it to help kids,” Beekman says. But, “it’s a bit of a bittersweet experience when you get a call from a lawyer’s office about the gift, but family members cannot be found and there is no one to whom we can express our gratitude.”

Over the past four fiscal years, including 2005-06, UNLV received an average of $2 million from the maturation of planned gifts. Donors can designate how they want their funds to be used, which may include establishing scholarships, funding programs, or going toward the greatest need on campus.

**Grad Students Benefit from Former Dean’s Planned Gift**

Another planned giving donor, Jim Frey, retired dean of the College of Liberal Arts, knows how important financial assistance in the form of fellowships can be when earning a degree.

As a master’s student at the University of Iowa and a Ph.D. student at Washington State University, fellowships helped him focus on his studies. “It gave me an income while I did part-time work that was related to my field,” says Frey, who retired in 2004 after 30 years on campus. “It was much better than sacking groceries at Safeway.”

Frey wants to offer UNLV graduate students the same opportunity by establishing a planned gift to fund a scholarship and research support for graduate students in sociology. “It makes you feel good that you’re helping students, particularly graduate students, who can use all the help they can get,” Frey says.

**More info:** Contact Bud Beekman about planned giving at 702-895-2841 or bud.beekman@unlv.edu.

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**Gaming Group Looks to UNLV for Tech-Savvy Future Employees**

The Gaming Standards Association, an international trade association representing gaming efforts, has made a three-year commitment to provide a grant for two professor-in-residence positions, one in the School of Informatics and the other in the William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration. The professors will teach courses related to gaming technology.

“The association’s grant opens up an entirely new range of opportunities for UNLV in the areas of standards and best practices for technology — areas that are of enormous importance to industry and business,” says Hal Berghel, director of the School of Informatics and associate dean of the College of Engineering.

The partnership will allow the colleges to merge education and future gaming technology. Association President Peter DeRaedt says, “The gaming industry as a whole will benefit from having access to current and highly trained students. Graduates will have both the academic and gaming experience requirements to support Nevada’s largest industry.”

—Angela Sablan

**New Leaders Head Foundation**

The UNLV Foundation executive committee recently appointed Nancy Strouse as executive director for the UNLV Foundation. In this role, Strouse serves as the university’s chief fundraising officer, leading 45 professional and support employees in annual fundraising efforts, including the $500 million Invent the Future campaign.

Additionally, the committee selected community business leader Mark Fine as the board of trustees’ vice chair. Fine replaces local attorney Ted Quirk, who assumed the chair post Jan. 1.

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**Planned Giving’s Lasting Promise**

The Invent the Future campaign will live on long after UNLV reaches the $500 million goal. Planned gifts, often provided through wills and trusts, will continue to mature during the next three decades, providing the university millions of dollars in future support. These gifts allow donors to contribute to their favorite UNLV program for generations, with possible immediate or deferred tax advantages.

Donors have committed more than $81 million in deferred support for areas such as athletics, biological sciences, hotel administration, nursing, scholarships, and where the need is greatest.

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*As of Dec. 31, 2006*
Marketing Students Create Plan to Revitalize New Orleans Tourism

When most people think of service learning, they think of clothing or food drives, says marketing professor Jack Schibrowsky. However, the true meaning of service learning, according to Schibrowsky, is students using their growing expertise to help others.

This spring, marketing students will put their skills to the test at the 2007 Case Competition of the American Marketing Association (AMA) in New Orleans. Students in local chapters are creating campaigns to revitalize tourism in the city, which was ravaged by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005.

A dozen members of the UNLV chapter, led by Schibrowsky as faculty advisor, began working on the project last fall, with each student expected to commit more than 120 hours outside of class to plan the campaign. “I feel that this was a perfect campaign for us to do,” says Shavonne Burks, vice president of advertising for the UNLV chapter of AMA and a member of the women’s basketball team. “I think that this is a golden opportunity for our organization to help revitalize New Orleans, and possibly make a difference.”

They will attend the conference in late March. The competition requires the team to research and analyze the current situation in New Orleans, and then create a situation analysis, communication plan, advertising, and slogans. “It’s a great service learning opportunity,” says Schibrowsky. “The students can use their marketing skills to help a sister city in terms of tourism.”

Funds from the College of Business’ Rebel Ring Phonathon will support student travel, lodging, and conference fees. The Phonathon, an annual spring outreach where students telephone alumni to ask for their support of emerging needs, raised more than $14,000 for the college last year.

—Lisa Shawcroft

More info: Call Michael Richmond about the Rebel Ring Phonathon at 702-895-3641.

Board Honors First Chair, New Members

The UNLV Foundation Board of Trustees recently awarded Irwin Molasky, president and CEO of Paradise Development, the title of trustee emeritus. Molasky is the founding chair of the UNLV Foundation and has been an active member since 1981.

At its December meeting, the Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents appointed four new members to the UNLV Foundation board:
- H. Don Ackerman, chairman for Gaudin Ford Porsche
- James A. Duddlesten, president and CEO of G.C. Wallace
- John A. Ritter, president of Focus Commercial Group
- James M. Stuart, ’91, president and CEO of Centra Properties

Did You Know…

- Last year, 1,800 undergraduate and graduate students received privately funded scholarship awards.
- In 2006, more than 30 new scholarships were established, with a total value of more than $2.8 million dollars.
- This spring, students from the Rebel Ring Phonathon program will reach out to more than 29,000 alumni to ask for support of their favorite programs.
- Since January 2002, alumni, friends, faculty/staff, and corporations have made more than 45,000 gifts to UNLV through the Invent the Future campaign.

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At its December meeting, the Nevada System of Higher Education Board of Regents appointed four new members to the UNLV Foundation board:
- H. Don Ackerman, chairman for Gaudin Ford Porsche
- James A. Duddlesten, president and CEO of G.C. Wallace
- John A. Ritter, president of Focus Commercial Group
- James M. Stuart, ’91, president and CEO of Centra Properties

More info: Call Michael Richmond about the Rebel Ring Phonathon at 702-895-3641.
Vaudeville Goes from Alta Ham to Adelaide

By Lori Bachand

This March, the curtain goes up on the student-faculty collaboration “Sin City: The Vaudeville Years” in an unlikely place: South Australia.

It’s fitting that the Las Vegas helping the College of Fine Arts students take their show from UNLV to the University of Adelaide is Mary Healy Hayes. Her career spanned six decades in vaudeville, radio, television, and film. “She and her husband were performers, so she understood the need for travel funding,” says Fine Arts Dean Jeffrey Koep.

Hayes recently earmarked a gift to the college to provide for student development opportunities such as participation in the Adelaide Fringe Festival — the second largest fringe festival in the world.

“Last year, more than 800,000 people attended the festival and this year, they’ve added an extra week of performances,” notes Tim Jones, a UNLV visiting lecturer and a graduate of the University of Adelaide.

UNLV students and faculty wrote and choreographed the one-hour show that chronicles how the vaudevillian variety show thrived through the 1950s in Vegas headliner performances. In addition to mounting the show in one of the city’s central theaters, students will have performers’ passes, allowing them access to more than 400 festival events.

“It’s a chance to work with artists from all over the world and see how they approach their crafts,” says Sarah Norris, the production’s student director and a second-year MFA student. “This is such a reputable festival; it’s really a big deal.”

The trip is also academic coursework, as participating students are required to meet with faculty to review and assess their participation in the cross-cultural program. It’s important for students in the fine arts to have international exposure and understand how other cultures create and react to different types of art, Koep says.

“For many of us, this is the first opportunity to travel outside the U.S. in a performance setting,” graduate percussion student Ben Stiers says. “I’m really excited about the opportunity to collaborate with others in the college, but also to be part of a cutting-edge international festival.”

Adam Walton (left) and Alex Stopa will travel to Australia this March to perform with students and faculty at the Adelaide Fringe Festival. Mary Healy Hayes, a former vaudevillian entertainer and a friend to the College of Fine Arts, funded a student development program to help subsidize the performers’ travel.
Psychotherapy as Religion: The Civil Divine in America

by William M. Epstein

University of Nevada Press, 2006

A tiny couch dangles from a necklace cord on the cover of William Epstein's latest book, Psychotherapy as Religion, and the symbolism is clear: the psychotherapist's fabled couch has supplanted the cross and other religious symbols we hang around our necks.

At least that’s what Epstein, a professor of social work, contends in some 200 tightly argued pages. The cover image might also symbolize an albatross that hinders the development of what, to Epstein, would be more effective social policy.

Epstein came to UNLV nearly 15 years ago after teaching at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, the University of Southern Mississippi, and the State University of New York at Buffalo. In this work he analyzes a number of clinical studies about the effectiveness of psychotherapeutic treatments. He finds that each study in some way violates the criteria for scientific credibility.

“The typical megabookstore devotes about 300 linear feet of shelf space to psychotherapy, counseling, self-help, and the like,” he observes. “The last time I looked there was not one single item on the shelf that questioned the field’s effectiveness.”

He doesn’t mince words in his criticism of those who purport to evaluate the effectiveness of psychotherapy: “I was constantly impressed with the cult-like assurance of presumably neutral researchers that therapy works. These are the very last people who should be evaluating their field’s practice, yet the National Institute of Mental Health largely restricts its research grants to them. Talk about insularity!”

Epstein calls psychotherapy “the civil religion of the United States, an institution that shapes American policy thereby demonstrating that rationality plays hardly any role at all in our society’s social choices.”

In an introduction that draws historical parallels between psychotherapy, Christian Science, and spiritualism, the outspoken professor states his case.

His concern centers on psychotherapy’s focus on the deterministic influence of character rather than social conditions. “This, in turn, emphasizes the nation’s choice of personal responsibility over social responsibility in inspiring social welfare interventions. Thus the poor are most often seen not products of an uncaring, ingenuous, and cruel society, but rather as moral failures, miscreants who have freely chosen to be burdens on their fellow citizens.”

He says he became convinced that psychotherapy is “bogus” by “constant observation that it does not work with people we know who have very serious behavioral problems: addicts and alcoholics, the morbidly obese and morbidly thin, phobics, the violent, the drab, the self-centered, and so on. Remission of symptoms is more often coincidental with therapy than a result of therapy.”

Principles of Supply Chain Management

A Balanced Approach

Joel D. Wisner, G. Keong Leon, and Keah-Choon Tan

Thomson Press, 2006

This new work looks at supply chain management from an unusual four-point perspective: purchasing, operations, logistics, and integration of the first three areas. Most texts on the topic concentrate more narrowly.

The authors are all management faculty members. Joel Wisner came to UNLV in 1991; Keah-Choon Tan in 1998; and G. Keong Leon in 2001 to chair the department.

Wisner, who teaches in the MBA program, says he and Mike Mezja, another colleague who teaches the course, had used all the textbooks on the topic at one time or another. “I felt that none of them was covering the true idea of supply chain management, which is the collaboration with trading partners in the key business processes, including purchasing, quality, customer services, inventory, and transportation issues.”

Rival textbooks focus mainly on purchasing and logistics, but Wisner believes there is much more students need to know and clearly others in the field agree with him. Arizona State University has adopted the text for its students.

A popular feature of the book will undoubtedly be the opportunity to play “The Beer Game,” developed at MIT in the 1960s. The game takes students through the steps in ordering, stocking, and distributing beer, while dealing with realistic conditions such as a two-week transportation delay from order to receipt of the product. A typical game, um, class exercise can continue for 20 weeks.

Real Estate Law (6th Edition)

Robert Aalberts and George J. Siedel, III

Thomson, 2006

Law texts aren’t just for future lawyers. Students in other disciplines, such as business, education, and journalism, need to learn enough about the law in their areas to stay out of trouble. Hence the need for textbooks like Real Estate Law by UNLV finance professor Robert Aalberts and University of Michigan professor George Siedel, III.

In their preface to the sixth edition, the authors say they were responding to “a need to have a real estate law textbook that combined text, short case summaries, longer teaching cases, and problems.”

From a business perspective, the authors note, real estate “represents an important but frequently undermanaged asset. In the United States alone, land and structures make up about two-thirds of the nation’s wealth.”

The text also addresses ethical issues. For example, authors ask students to consider whether prior appropriation in water law, the idea that the first person to use water has priority over later users, regardless of who owns the land, is “a fair and moral system” of distributing water in arid and semi-arid regions.

Aalberts says the discussion of ethics is what sets the volume apart from others and helps make it the number two text on the subject in the nation’s colleges. “Real estate represents for most people their largest single investment in life, and in the aggregate billions of dollars to our economy,” he says. “With so much at stake, unethical activities take a very heavy toll on people and institutions.”
Anatomy of a Boyfriend
by Daria Snadowsky
Random House, 2007

Proving a student can have a life outside of law school, Daria Snadowsky has just published her first novel, Anatomy of a Boyfriend.

The 2006 Boyd School of Law graduate describes Anatomy as “the product of a long, circuitous personal and professional path marked by numerous mistakes, failures, and dead ends (oh, and did I mention countless rejections?).”

She continues: “Not surprisingly, the most rewarding part has been hearing back from readers who have gotten hold of advance copies of the book and connected to the characters and story. And at the very least, now when someone asks me what I want to be or what I’m interested in, I have an answer.”

Snadowsky, who moved to Las Vegas from New York City with her family in 1992, is a 1997 graduate of the Meadows School. From there she went to Emory University in Atlanta where she majored in film studies, wrote for the school newspaper, and interned at Las Vegas Weekly in the summer of 1998 and at Creative Loafing, an Atlanta magazine, the following summer. After college she worked as managing editor of Insite Magazine in Atlanta.

In an autobiography on the Random House website, Snadowsky recounts her problems in figuring out what she wanted to do with her life. She found that journalism was a productive way to fill spare time. “It’s not so much that I enjoyed journalism,” she writes, “but as extra-curriculars go, it was convenient time-wise. Squeezing in an article here and there was very doable, and receiving feedback from readers was very gratifying — I loved the feeling of ‘connecting’ with people I’d never met before but who were nonetheless affected by my written words.”

When she realized she wanted to connect on a more emotional level, she decided the teen “chick lit” genre offered a better outlet than journalism. While between jobs, she started Anatomy, a coming-of-age story of two high school seniors experiencing first love and sex while navigating the transition from high school to college.

Having exhausted her resources, she moved in with her family and “decided to do the ‘responsible’ thing and go back to school,” she says. “After I finished writing Anatomy of a Boyfriend’s first draft, part of me wanted to go on and try to write a second book, but another part was scared I was going to find myself at 30 years old with a hoard of unpublished writings and no professional skills. So law school seemed like a ‘sensible’ way to bide my time and gain new life experiences while attempting to get published.

“Unexpectedly, law school helped my writing a great deal. In my legal writing classes, the professors stressed succinctness and often gave us word-count maximums. This was polar opposite of my college classes, where I got higher grades the longer papers I wrote.”

Snadowsky found an agent and during her second year in law school got a publishing offer. Her studies began to take a backseat to the novel’s revisions. “It felt so sinfully fabulous sitting in class editing a love scene on my laptop when I was supposed to be taking notes on civil procedure.”

Although Snadowsky, who earned a joint bachelor’s and master’s degrees in four years at Emory, says she had a “lousy gpa in law school,” she clearly was paying attention because in October she passed the bar exam. She hasn’t decided whether she wants to practice law. “I’d love to write more, but that second novel is still gestating.”
Getting personal: When I was 20 months old, I was adopted from Seoul, Korea. My parents are white and have two biological children. I have a brother — not related — who was also Korean-adopted. He has two Korean-adopted kids and I adopted a daughter from Korea. We have this multigenerational adoption family going on. So there is a personal connection to my work. I think you will find with most researchers there is usually individual motivation that feeds the passion for their research — otherwise they would not be doing it.

Hot Topic: This semester, I taught a class on global child welfare. Inherent to that was a discussion on international adoption and, of course, the students were eager to talk about the whole Madonna adoption controversy and Angelina Jolie.

Think Before You Adopt: All babies are cute and anyone can fall in love with a baby. But they are not going to be babies forever. So really think about what it means to integrate your family and look at your own assumptions about race and American society as it pertains to that.

Being Asian-American: For an adoptee, it is not about learning to speak Korean and cook Korean food. It’s more about what it
means to be Asian-American and how they navigate the racial assumptions people have about them based on what they perceived to be their race and identity.

**Stereotypes:** People assume Asian adoptees — and Asian-Americans in general — don’t experience racism. In a way, it’s more insidious and often couched as “positive” discrimination. There is the stereotype about Asians being “the model minority,” the assumption that all Asians are really smart and hard working. But a stereotype is a stereotype regardless of how it is packaged.

**Perpetual Foreigners:** There is a UC Berkeley scholar who talks about Asian-Americans being “perpetual foreigners.” It doesn’t matter if you are fourth-generation Chinese-American in this country, people will always ask you where you are from. When you tell them you are from California, they then ask, “No, where are you really from?” We don’t do that to Irish-Americans or German-Americans. So there is a sense of not having the right to claim that you are a U.S. citizen.

**What’s Best for the Children:** Policy-makers have long struggled with international adoption. Some argue that adoptees have access to resources and education that they would not have had if they stayed in Korea. That’s true. But there is something so profound and so basic to human existence about knowing where you came from and having that connectedness that most people take for granted.

I don’t know that I stand on one side of the debate or the other. As a researcher, I just ask the questions.

**Missing Puzzle Pieces:** I don’t want people to have the perception that these children are in pain or angst. For the most part, adoptees are very well-adjusted. When you look at the markers for education, achievement, and sense of self, adoptees do very well and love their families. But that doesn’t minimize the fact that many have this profound detachment from a really important part of who they are. As an adoptee, everybody has different pieces of your story. You never have the whole puzzle.

**The Puzzle:** For some people it is important to find their birth parents. Some could live their whole lives without finding their birth parents. My brother was adopted a year before I was. Growing up he would say that he didn’t care that he was adopted and that our parents were his real parents, whereas I was always curious. That didn’t mean that I loved my adoptive parents any less.

**Returning to the Homeland:** More than 200,000 children have been adopted internationally out of Korea. When the Korean government first started doing these placements, they did not expect the kids to come back. Now there is this huge underground movement where adoptees have organized and started doing homeland tours and searching for their birth parents.

**The Search:** I have traveled back to Korea several times. One time I went back to the agency that placed me. I was told that the files they had on me were “lost” because when I was placed the recordkeeping was not that great and all of these excuses. I have been told it is virtually impossible for me to find my birth parents, but I don’t really believe that. So I may at some point search again. At my point in life though, I should probably do it sooner than later.

**Supportive Parents:** On the road to self-discovery, every adoptee takes a journey. For every adoptee it looks a little different. Parents need to understand that their kids are going to take that journey at some point in their lives. I would prefer that they take the journey with their kids.

**Knowledge is Power:** I believe that change occurs on the macro level and the only way to change systems is with information. That’s why it is important that I continue to contribute to the knowledge base and help make international adoption more understandable for everyone.
Mixed Messages
Rainier Spencer, anthropology & ethnic studies professor

Rainier Spencer didn’t take a typical undergrad-to-doctorate path in becoming a professor. The former military officer stumbled into his second career after Army personnel reviewed his record and discovered his art major. That somehow made him a candidate for teaching philosophy at West Point if, at the Army’s expense, he wanted to go to Columbia University for graduate school. “It was considered a career detour and I nearly turned it down,” he says. Spencer’s wife was perhaps the wiser one, pointing out that more education could only lead to more opportunities.

—As told to Cate Weeks

■ The One-Drop Rule: I didn’t really question the issue of race until I began teaching philosophy at West Point. It was like going from night to day. Everything I knew no longer made sense. I grew up under the one-drop rule, which for 400 years has defined mixed-race people as black. In philosophy this is an illogical argument. How is it that my father’s contribution overshadows my mother’s? I gravitated toward the multiracial movement, but that didn’t make sense either.

■ Bucking the Trend: My area of study is in “multiracial” identity, and what I have to say isn’t politically correct — I think I’d get booed off Oprah for saying this, but the term is bogus and it’s overly rife with emotion.

■ Multiracism: People from mixed backgrounds will say they’re discriminated against because they’re mixed. They’re not — they’re discriminated against because they’re part black, because of the part that’s not the majority.

■ The Fallacy: The movement for the “multiracial” label largely grew out of
white moms advocating for their children from a black father. They wanted their children to have what they felt was a better identity. But you can’t have “multiracial” children unless you believe there is more than one race, and there isn’t. And you shouldn’t base your identity on something that doesn’t even exist.

Race is purely a social construct. All humans are a single species. Ask any biologist or geneticist.

Deceiving Appearances: You see Michael Jordan and Kobe Bryant dominating basketball and you draw this conclusion that blacks must be more naturally gifted. Then you might conclude there’s a biological basis in that. But in the 1920s the best professional basketball players were Jews. They lived in the inner city then. They excelled in basketball because that’s what they had access to.

Those assumptions hurt white kids, too. They don’t try basketball because they think they can’t be as good as the black kids.

Eliminating Racism: We have to think it can be done, otherwise the future is too dark.

Approach: I’m not out to be a social force or to advocate for one way or another based on how I feel about it. All I can do is be an academic, to critically study the issues and bring scholarly integrity to the discussions.

The Double-edged Sword: Race doesn’t exist, but the concept of race is deeply ingrained. So we can’t take “race” off the census forms because racism is very real. So how do you track the effects of racism without asking people to self-identify?

Language: Who says the preferred term is “African-American” or “black,” and what does that actually tell us? I’m male, a professor, Christian, live in the West — those things tell you who I am. But saying I’m Afro-American doesn’t tell you anything. It doesn’t mean I like hip-hop or I’m from an inner city.

Still, I don’t have the answer for where to go from here. It’s hard to imagine what the language would be other than it must be different. I do know that “race” and “multiracial” shouldn’t be a part of our vocabulary.

Ethnicity: Ethnic identity is a stronger support to hang a person’s identity on, but it shouldn’t become a shorthand for race. Ethnicity has to do with customs, dress, and beliefs. It should be a very, very rich set of adjectives that can help define a person. A lot of Americans don’t really have an ethnic identity. Most of us are just Americans.

Ancestry: Would you be proud of your grandfather if he was Jack the Ripper? We like to assume the greatness of our ancestors, but not the evilness. I think you ought to be consistent.

Training: Sensitivity programs are the most counterproductive things you can do. Forcing people into something just doesn’t work. The people who are closed to it are not going to accept it by going to a class. And those who are open to it are going to be angered by the fact they have to go to a class — the message will be lost.

In the Classroom: Students are drawn to learning about their own cultural history. It’s not something they really get in high school. Here they seek out the deep well of information that exists at universities.

As a professor, it’s not your job to get students to think a certain way. My job is to provide history and background — the kind that’s founded in good research, not what they get from reading mainstream media. Newsweek and Time — they’re just filled with what’s trendy.

The End Product: More than anything, I hope that students leave my classes able to articulate and defend their opinions with solid information.
Religious objections, students who think they know the facts, and that troublesome word ‘theory’ make teaching evolution tough. A trio of researchers is moving beyond the controversy to better understand how students learn complex concepts in science.
“It’s almost like the proverbial blind man and the elephant. Researchers … have been looking at this issue for years. Now it’s time for everybody to talk to each other.”

GALE SINATRA, EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY PROFESSOR

A task like memorizing the periodic table is a cakewalk compared to understanding human evolution. There are no simple experiments students can use to prove the evolutionary process, and then there’s that troublesome word “theory.”

Human evolution is a complex enough subject to teach even without the highly publicized struggle between those who embrace it as fact and those who believe it to be at odds with intelligent design or creationism. And teachers walk a fine line as they try to convey the evidence for evolution without coming off like they’re trying to change a student’s beliefs.

This year, Gale Sinatra will help bring together scholars from multiple fields to share findings about how such a controversial subject as evolution is taught and learned, and how our assumptions about a topic play into learning.

Sinatra, an educational psychology professor, and her co-investigators want to find out whether students understand the nature of science — that it’s a way to collect evidence about the world around us. “We want students to understand that science is not an infallible march to ultimate truth.”

Joining Sinatra in the project are Sarah Brem, an associate professor of psychology in education at Arizona State University (ASU), and Margaret Evans, assistant research scientist at the University of Michigan’s Center for Human Growth & Development Research. Brem takes a socio-cultural approach to the topic, while Evans is a developmental cognitive psychologist with experience in museum education. Coming from educational psychology, Sinatra is interested in the larger question of conceptual change — how people shift their thinking about a topic they already know something about.

The trio won a grant for more than $200,000 from the National Science Foundation to take stock of the field of teaching and learning about evolution. The grant was awarded under a new program for Research and Evaluation on Education in Science and Engineering that’s designed to corral several strands of research from different fields, in this case, biology, philosophy, cognitive science, and developmental psychology.

“It’s almost like the proverbial blind man and the elephant,” Sinatra says. “Researchers in all these different domains have been looking at this issue for years. Now it’s time for everybody to talk to each other.”

TRICKY TOPICS: The Muslim Milieu

Today’s college students are casualties of the blurry line between news and commentary, says Mehran Tamadonfar, chair of the political science department.

For these novice news consumers, he says, bloggers and Jon Stewart factor more than the New York Times. “Students always ask, ‘Why are Muslims so violent?’” Tamadonfar says. “When I teach Islamic politics, they have no notion what Islam is from a religious point of view. They tend to put all Muslims in same cultural milieu.”

Tamadonfar’s task is to lead his students through political theories and compare them to what we see in practice. Pretests help him gauge his students’ grasp of the concepts at work in current events, and class time is largely devoted to discussion. “Normally what happens as a result of their participation is that they answer each other’s questions,” he says. “That kind of approach is helpful rather than me telling them, ‘What you think is wrong.’ That makes them defensive.”

Often the strongest assumptions come from students who are the brightest or most well-read. “It’s very hard to break through that sometimes. Their selective approach to reading gives them a more parochial view of these subjects, and they often have a real difficulty understanding that they need to have a broader, more open-minded perspective as a college student.”

Like Tamadonfar, Joseph Valenzano prizes class discussions, and he plays devil’s advocate to get students to think critically. A communications studies professor, he researches and teaches on terrorism, the American presidency, and religious rhetoric.

Last fall, students in his political communications class had to read opposing views on issues such as Iraq and the war on terrorism. Most of the students held fast to their preconceived notions about the issues until discussion time, when a pair of Muslim students challenged their classmates to think again. “They taught them more through the interaction in class than I could have,” Valenzano said.

But the big assumption that Valenzano deals with isn’t about the class material. It’s that students assume themselves to be passive consumers of education, when they should be participants. “I want to hear them express their own opinions, so they’re not just trying to tell me what they think I want to hear,” he says. “It’s hard for them to wrap their heads around the fact that they’re expected to engage and be critical of the material.”
About 40 scholars from all over the country — and some from outside the U.S. — will meet in small groups in five cities throughout the year. Then the entire group will come to ASU next fall for a final conference to synthesize their work.

**The Challenge in the Classroom**

What the researchers discuss in the next year will have little to do with the controversies that have gripped the school systems in many states, where evolution has become a battleground between social conservatives and scientists. The meetings aren’t intended to debate the merits of intelligent design or rehash the effects of placing stickers in textbooks to urge students to consider alternate views.

Instead, evolution will be used as a lens through which the scholars will look at problems in all science learning, Sinatra says. Evolution makes for a good case study of the social, cultural, curriculum design, and other issues that influence learning. “In evolution, these complexities are easier to see. It’s a microcosm of complex systems for teaching and learning.”

Neither will they be creating new standards for science educators, who already must meet a full slate of curriculum requirements. But their work may be able to help teachers overcome the preconceived ideas their students bring into the science classroom.

That’s one of the key points Cheryl Wagner discusses as a teacher trainer for the Clark County School District (CCSD). Teachers need help recognizing students’ preconceptions at the start of a course, Wagner says, and in knowing how to address them.

Many students, not just those with a religious or cultural bias against evolution, are genuinely perplexed about the difficult questions evolution raises. With the incorrect presumption that evolution says humans evolved from apes, students might wonder, “How can there still be apes?” Such misguided preconceptions aren’t limited to evolution. Students might think the moon’s phases are caused by a shadow from the earth, Wagner says, or think that single genetic traits are passed on at random. They can have a lot of their own ideas about science topics that are either incorrect or incomplete.

“In the classroom I have to find out where my kids are. The conceptions they come in with might not be scientifically valid,” Wagner says. “The students may do well on tests, but they may not understand the concepts when they’ve left. Then they go out of class with the same thoughts and misconceptions as when they came in.”

There hasn’t been widespread opposition to teaching evolution in Clark County schools, Wagner says, but at least two science teachers in the district declared that they would not teach it. “As a result,
“We tell students to use evidence to support their conclusions. Unless we help them reason through it as a scientist, they won’t have learned a topic.”

CHERYL WAGNER, SCHOOL DISTRICT TRAINER

they’re not teaching biology,” Wagner says, because evolution is a mandated part of the curriculum.

Some researchers and educators are calling for more emphasis on teaching about the scientific process and the nature of science. “We tell students to use evidence to support their conclusions,” Wagner says. “Unless we help them reason through it as a scientist, they won’t have learned a topic.”

Sinatra says science classes probably need to spend more time on how to develop scientific arguments and inquiry. Traditionally, the emphasis has been on scientific facts that can be memorized, such as species classification. But that’s not enough, she says, because science changes.

“We need to tip the balance more toward the process of science than the content of science,” Sinatra says.

Theoretical Arguments

One of the biggest gaps in evolution education comes down to the “theory” problem.

Evolution opponents have seized on the status of evolution as a theory, and have used it to suggest that the science behind it is still up for debate, Sinatra says. But the common and scientific definitions of “theory” are vastly different.

“Popularly we use the term ‘theory’ to mean a guess, but that’s not how scientists use the term,” Sinatra says. “They use it to mean something for which they have a great deal of evidence to report. The idea that there isn’t any evidence, or that we aren’t sure about the evidence, is incorrect.”

CCSD’s Wagner acknowledges that teachers could do a better job of explaining the difference. “There are definitely some educational kind of gaps where teachers know evolution and have been studying the series and textbooks, but they don’t totally understand the process.”

One reason might be that most teachers are educators first — they’re not expected or required to be professional scientists. “I never had a class specifically on evolution when I was in college,” says Wagner, whose undergraduate degree is in microbiology. “What I’ve learned has been through biology courses with evolution components and through my own study and reading.”

Peter Starkweather, a professor of biology, sees that disconnect in his UNLV classes. To scientists, evolution is a building block of biology, not a footnote, he says.

A good start to changing that would be to require more science education for prospective teachers, he says. That would not only improve the students’ understanding of evolution, but teachers would also be better prepared to explain the issues to those who challenge them — not just students, but parents, too.

“If we want incoming college freshmen to understand these concepts, we have to make sure the outgoing teachers do, too,” Starkweather says. “I really think they ought to know biology with greater depth and greater confidence.”

By the time they reach college, most students have forgotten the basics of their 10th grade biology classes, he says. “If I ask students what they know about evolution, it’s essentially zero. They have caricatures.”

When he has asked students to define evolution in introductory biology classes, they usually respond “survival of the fittest.”


Not Found in a Petri Dish

Evolution is a difficult process for anyone to understand, says Brem, the ASU professor who is one of Sinatra’s co-principal investigators on the grant. It doesn’t lend itself to tidy lab experiments and it relies on a vast number of variables in the environment — thousands of organisms doing their own thing and reacting with their surroundings to produce an outcome. Boiling that down for a four-week lesson plan is tough.

Is the mind the first thing to go? Psychology professor Karen Kemtes says many of her students assume that mental decline is inevitable in aging. It’s sometimes tough to get students to believe otherwise, says the director of UNLV’s Cognition in Aging Laboratory.

“While it is true that individuals may experience minor declines in memory and attention as they age, severe cognitive decline tends to be associated with disease such as dementia,” she says.

Stereotypical portrayals of the elderly as demented in TV and film don’t help, she says. There’s also some conflicting research that muddies the waters. Plenty of published studies have shown that older individuals, on average, have more difficulty with certain types of memory and attention tasks. “At the same time, there’s also work showing that with cognitive training and physical exercise, older individuals’ cognitive performance can improve.”

She and her students explore the available research in class. By the end of the semester, “many students have revamped their preconceived notion that aging brings about inevitable cognitive decline.”

Even the young, it seems, need a little time to learn new tricks.
“Science has been hit with the accusations that, since we can’t explain everything, then what we do know is wrong.”

PETER STARKWEATHER, BIOLOGICAL SCIENCES PROFESSOR

“It’s like predicting the stock market or traffic jams,” she says. “There’s a larger set of issues here than you usually come across in middle school science class. It’s a really challenging topic.”

Evolution’s fluidity may be part of why some find it untrustworthy. Learning it is suited more to field work, Brem says, unlike a more law-driven field such as chemistry, which rewards you with the same thrilling, messy outcome every time you mix vinegar and baking soda.

“The kinds of arguments you have to make in evolution and biology are different from physics and chemistry. Those work the same way, every time, everywhere,” Brem says. “With evolution, if you roll back time, something else would happen. You can’t predict much.”

One of the major arguments against evolution is that it’s untestable, and that seems to fly in the face of what scientists normally demand. “One thing we teach is that science should be replicable. That’s very difficult in evolution. It might make the arguments seem less satisfying, I think, because they work on different rules.”

Starkweather, the biology professor, says the evolution backlash is part of a larger skepticism about unknowns in science. People want proof, or nothing. “Science has been hit with the accusation that, since we can’t explain everything, then what we do know is wrong.”

What helps students grasp the concepts of evolution when they can’t build a project in a Petri dish? CCSD’s Wagner finds it best to leave the humans out of the discussion when starting out. “That’s where there are questions, and kids are going to shut their minds.”

Teachers find more success in discussing evolution on the scale of simple organisms. They find issues that are familiar to students: mutations in the AIDS virus or the threat of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Most high school students can relate to wondering why they have to finish their prescription even after they feel better.

Changing Knowledge, Not Beliefs

Everyday issues like virus mutations are the reason why evolution is a central component of biology education, Sinatra says. The goal for educators is not to change beliefs, but to fill in the gaps for those who don’t yet have the complete picture on evolution.

“Our concern is teaching and learning about essential topics for scientific literacy. We’re not focused on the controversy,” she says. “What’s interesting to me as an educational psychologist is how to teach about complex topics when people have a lot of pre-existing ideas.”

But to explore this topic, you can’t take religion out of the mix completely. That’s why the trio of researchers invited Kenneth R. Miller to the discussion. A biology professor from Brown University, he wrote Finding Darwin’s God: A Scientist’s Search for Common Ground Between God and Evolution. “He’s an example of one way people move beyond focusing on conflict and toward an appreciation of both their faith and science,” Sinatra says.

Miller writes in his book, “As more than one scientist has said, the truly remarkable thing about the world is that it actually does make sense. The parts fit, the molecules interact, the darn thing works. To people of faith, what evolution says is that nature is complete. God fashioned a material world in which truly free, truly independent beings could evolve.”

A team of German emotion researchers will also participate in the meetings to share their findings on how emotion and culture play a role even in the most rule-based subjects of math and science. ASU’s Brem focuses on the social and cultural factors in learning, and how they can create assumptions about a topic, which is at the heart of the dispute between evolutionists and creationists.

“Although the political and cultural aspects of teaching evolution are the most publicly looked at, it’s the area where we have the least amount of evidence — how those beliefs affect learning,” Brem says. “Still, even if we could take all of the socio-cultural conflict out of evolution, it would be a really hard thing to learn.”

TRICKY TOPICS: Pulpits and Pupils

Ted Jelen is nothing if not thorough when it comes to documenting the political positions he discusses in class, especially with such raw-nerve topics as abortion, separation of church and state, and school prayer. Each side gets its due — with footnotes.

“It does kind of make the class a little tedious,” the professor admits. “Students who are looking for the ‘right’ answer don’t like it, but I’ve found it’s so important to make sure they know I’m not proselytizing.”

Then he turns the job over to his students. He frequently assigns them to defend a position with which they personally disagree. That gets them out of the rut that comes from reading only what reinforces their own points of view.

“I tell them, ‘I don’t care whether you believe it, you need to be able to state it.’ I don’t think I’ve ever convinced anyone to change a political belief.”
A TRUE EDUCATION is more than the study of textbooks. At UNLV, it can include helping the homeless, creating a new fraternity, or working to dispel the misconceptions about different faiths.

The university creates opportunities for students to add to their classroom lessons through involvement in student organizations, with one supplementing the other. “I think the assumption is that campus groups are all fun and games rather than another place on campus where learning happens,” says Katie Wilson, director of student involvement and activities.

UNLV officially recognizes more than 185 student organizations — from sororities and fraternities to academic and professional clubs to service organizations. According to the office of student involvement, about a third of the student body participates in some sort of organized extracurricular activity.

As her regular attendance at student events attests, Rebecca Mills, vice president for student life, believes in the educational purpose of student involvement. “We know that students, who are engaged in the life of a university are more likely to be satisfied, more likely to stay in college, and more likely to be successful in achieving academic goals,” she says.

Getting students to do more than go to class and then go home is Wilson’s job. Building awareness of UNLV’s growing programs is a challenge, she says. To connect students with opportunities, the student involvement office recently launched a searchable website of organizations and opened an involvement information desk in the new student union.

Wilson likes to cite the work of Alexander Astin, a professor in the UCLA Graduate School of Education and Information Studies. He found the single most important factor in a student’s personal and academic development is interaction with peers.

And the benefits of involvement don’t end at graduation. “Campuses that provide opportunities for students to learn outside the classroom find that involved students are more likely to be engaged as alumni,” Mills says. “That engagement has lasting effects as universities benefit greatly from the sort of advocacy that successful alumni can provide.”

Case in point: Usman Malik, ’02 BA Sociology. After founding a UNLV chapter of the Muslim Student Association and participating in sociology and interfaith student clubs, Malik went to work as a real estate agent. He’s remained involved in university activities and continues to mentor students in the association he founded.

“The biology and sociology classes were great, but I really think that the majority of the life lessons I learned were through (student groups).” There, he says, he built leadership and management skills, implementing ideas he learned in the classroom. “It was like having a third major.”

Wilson would like to see more students enrich their education through involvement as Malik did. The result is stronger graduates and a stronger community, she says. “It’s kind of clichéd, but what you put in really is what you get out of your college experience.”
Changing Perceptions

The Saturday afternoon meeting of the Muslim Student Association (MSA) begins like that of any other student group. Members drift in with coffee from Starbucks. They talk about weekend plans. Then the meeting begins and Islam takes center stage.

“We’re doing a lot of positive things to get the message of Islam to students who don’t understand it or are getting a misconstrued picture,” says MSA President Nur Kausar, a senior in journalism and political science. “I feel that it’s our responsibility to get the message out that we’re not as the media portrays us to be.”

MSA has been holding campus lectures and participating in interfaith forums to establish a Muslim presence on campus. Kausar believes campus is the perfect venue for presenting alternative views of Islam and Muslims. “That’s part of the college experience,” she says, “examining all sides of the story and making a decision for yourself.”

Aslam Abdullah, director of the Islamic Society of Nevada, has participated in MSA forums. In November, he gave a campus lecture on the Quran and peace. “In these difficult times, when Muslims are seen as suspects and when people are profiled on the basis of their religion and the names they carry, then certainly these Muslim students have a greater challenge to interact with students and tell them what their faith is,” he says.

Muslims are often characterized as violent, unpatriotic, and untrustworthy, Abdullah says. “I think the presence of the MSA on campus is clear proof that none of these things are true.”

The current MSA was founded at UNLV in 1997 after an earlier version of the organization disbanded. The MSA has about 15 active members, including undergraduate and graduate students, and more than 50 people on its e-mail list. The MSA encourages Muslim students to meet and talk about issues important in their lives.

“I think because we’re on a college campus and we’re in Las Vegas, it’s good to have the MSA as a place for students to go and discuss things,” Kausar says. “We’re all students going through the same challenges. We’re there to help each other.”

Differences in religious interpretations and practices — often between international and domestic students — have split Muslim student organizations at other universities into conservative and liberal factions. At UNLV MSA meetings, women may be seen wearing veils or tank tops. Kausar tries to keep the group inclusive.

“Being involved in MSA has also shown me how diverse Islam is,” says Kausar, who was born in Pakistan but raised in Las Vegas since she was 4. “I’ve been involved with Las Vegas’s Middle Eastern Muslims virtually all my life. At UNLV, I started meeting black Muslims, Asian Muslims, and converts.”

Usman Malik, ’01 BA sociology, was a founding member of MSA and continues to help the organization. After Sept. 11, people were apprehensive of Islam, he says. “They just didn’t know what Islam was about. They needed to put a face to this name, like, OK, that’s what Muslims look like.”

In response, the MSA took a more active and visible role on campus. And Malik changed, too, adopting a more traditionally Muslim appearance. He grew a beard and shaved his head — which he says “freaked my mom out” — so his fellow students could identify and know him as a Muslim.

The MSA is planning more efforts to engage the campus community by bringing in Muslim speakers, scholars, entertainers, and musicians. Kausar says even small events — such as watching and discussing a popular film about Islam or holding social mixers with Muslims and non-Muslims — increase religious understanding. Understanding, she says, can begin by simply asking questions, providing answers, and approaching one another as fellow students.
“(The Muslim Student Association) has opened my eyes as much as I’m trying to open the eyes of nonmembers.”

NUR KAUSAR
Junior, born in Pakistan, raised in Las Vegas
Majors: journalism and political science
Activities: Muslim Student Association president, Rebel Yell managing editor
Preparing peanut butter and jelly sandwiches might not be most people’s idea of a higher education. But on a Friday afternoon in the UNLV dining commons, there they were — about 30 UNLV students, packing sack lunches and making the most of their university experience.

As volunteers in the Rebel Service Council, the students meet at least once a week to feed the homeless.

“It is good to be able to help people, even a little bit,” says Felicia Ford, a freshman in interior architecture, as she fills lunch sacks. “This is a reminder to those of us who live comfortable lives that homelessness is a real problem.”

The program is just one aspect of Rebel Service Council. Its volunteers have worked with Catholic Charities, Opportunity Village, Habitat for Humanity, and the Nevada Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Jacob Murdock, program coordinator for the council, says that about 500 students interact with the council each semester. The organization has an open membership, allowing all students to participate in any activity. Murdock says council service helps students connect to their community and realize how they can help.

But service is about more than simply pitching in. Ford got involved with the council because it seemed like a worthwhile way to meet good people. She wasn’t sure what to expect but figured it had to be better than watching television at home. Then she visited a homeless shelter.

“I was surprised to see so many children and families there. It was a real eye-opener,” Ford says. By facilitating discussion, program leaders challenge students’ knowledge of social problems and ensure that participants view in person issues they may have only studied in books. “I think service also helps students develop their organizational skills, whether they’re planning the activities or just helping,” Murdock says.

A unique aspect of the Meals on Wheels program is that it is funded in part by students donating meals from their campus dining plans. Once the 250 lunches are prepared, volunteers travel in two vans from campus to the Salvation Army shelter. As they pass Huntridge Circle Park, a conflict point in the city of Las Vegas’ relationship with the homeless, the conversation turns from campus activities to social issues. The homeless community becomes more visible as the vans near the shelter.

“You have an idea about homelessness from what you’ve heard. You see homeless people here or there. But when you see homelessness in multitude, it’s so surprising,” says Tahnee Padilla, an architecture major.

The students arrive and pass out the lunches, which are happily accepted. Some volunteers spend time talking with the people at the shelter. They are thanked.

For sophomore Leonard Evans, the experience renews his connection to activities he did through his church in Cincinnati. “I’ve done stuff like this back home. It means a lot just to help people, to have an impact on a person’s life,” Evans says. “To change somebody’s outlook is important.”

Such personal experiences can do a lot to changes perceptions, Evans says. “There’s a stereotype about the homeless — that they’re angry and dangerous. But they’re real people,” he says. “They say ‘Thank you’ and ‘God bless you.’ They’re a lot nicer than some other people I know.”

As they return to campus, the students discuss their experience. Recognizing how the trip has changed her view of the homeless, Padilla says, “I wish more people could see this.” The students all say they have learned something unexpected and plan to come again. The rest of the conversation on the way back to campus is different, a little heavier. It slowly returns to classes, homework, and evening plans.
“I knew I had to venture out and do more than go to class; otherwise college would be just like high school.”

TAHNEE PADILLA, Junior from Las Vegas
Major: architecture Activities: Honors College Council, Tunnel of Oppression room chair, Rebel Service Council

“I can’t be here and not be involved. What would be the point?”

ANGELA COUNTY, Junior from Corona, Calif.
Majors: international business Activities: Residence Hall Association activity organizer, Rebel Service Council

“Non-traditional students can be reluctant to get involved. Your life might be more complicated, but you can start small.”

HILDY FAULTERSACK, Senior from Ralph, Mich.
Major: art education Activities: Golden Key National Honor Society, Rebel Service Council

“It’s important to be involved in groups that can help your career as well as something that’s just enjoyable.”

LEONARD EVANS, Sophomore from Cincinnati
Majors: hospitality management and dance Activities: National Society of Minorities in Hospitality, Rebel Service Council
Jose Lainez and Yoko Agemura took different paths to UNLV. One comes from California and the other from across the Pacific Ocean. Both found through student organizations a sense of belonging.

Lainez, a sophomore in criminal justice, looked for a group to join as soon as he registered. “In high school I was always in clubs. But the organizations that I saw on campus, they didn’t fit what I was looking for,” Lainez says.

So, Lainez started his own. He had heard about a multicultural fraternity from some students in an Arizona chapter. A new organization would offer Lainez an opportunity to lead. “We got to mold what we’d like a fraternity to be and to break the multicultural stereotype that fraternities are only for one kind of person,” he says. Lainez is now the president of Omega Delta Phi (ODP), officially recognized in May as a campus organization.

Establishing a student organization can be tricky; different types of groups have different requirements. Sports clubs must deal with liability and safety concerns, and Greek organizations need to be recognized by their national affiliate. That’s when student government and the Division of Student Life can help.

Katie Wilson, director of student involvement and activities, says there are organizations to fit most students’ interests. “But if there’s not, there’s a way to create a space that matches what they’re looking for.”

Lainez says he wanted to start ODP to challenge the perception of fraternities. “We’re known as frat boys and what not. The whole stereotype is that all we do is party,” he says. “We’re showing the other face of what a fraternity does.”

Like many Greek organizations, ODP requires members to do community service. Last semester its nine members averaged 55 hours of service — nearly twice what was required for membership, Lainez says. The fraternity works with children at local middle schools to help them succeed academically and eventually enter college.

For its members, Lainez says, the organization offers positive peer pressure. “Having this organization and trying to stay active pressures me to get good grades.”

While Lainez was creating a place for himself on campus, Agemura, an international student studying hotel management, was still trying to make Las Vegas home. The city is far different from her native Tokyo. For starters, there’s all that neon. “In Tokyo the lights are from the buildings. But here the lights are all advertisements and hotels.”

Agemura looked for a way to acclimate herself to Las Vegas and American culture. “I knew international students, but I didn’t have any American student friends,” Agemura explains.

Her search led to UNLV Buddies. The cultural-mentoring program matches international students with American students by common interests. The program currently has 78 student members.

The result of the match is a cultural awakening for many students, says Dyane Hill, a junior in chemistry and coordinator of the Buddies program. “Reading about another place is one thing — when someone is recounting their first-hand experiences in front of you, it has a different impact,” he says.

Hill is also president of the International Club. He trusts in the power of cross-cultural experiences to change people’s outlooks. “I’m a really loud advocate of diversity. Everyone can learn from a different culture. The most rewarding part for me is seeing the friendships grow.”

Agemura was partnered with a local student and their conversation often focused on Japanese culture and language. “She has introduced me to many friends, so I know a lot more people now compared to a few months ago.”

Like Lainez, she used student groups to find her place to belong.
“I wanted to bring something different to Greek life at UNLV.”

JOSE LAINEZ Sophomore, born in El Salvador, raised in Van Nuys, Calif.
Major: criminal justice
Activities: Omega Delta Phi founding president
n 1970s
Gary J. Paquette, ’71 BS Hotel Administration, has spent the past 38 years working in hotel-management and gaming-related positions. He currently owns three small businesses. He is the father of two grown daughters, one of whom earned a master’s degree in English from UNLV, and the grandfather of two. His hobbies include golfing, flying, and vacationing abroad.

Richard Knight, ’73 BS Hotel Administration, recently was appointed president, CEO, and general manager of Presque Isle Downs, a wholly owned subsidiary of MTR Gaming Group. His previous executive-level positions have been with Sands Hotel and Casino in Atlantic City, N.J.; Hollywood Casino Corp. in Aurora, Ill.; Tunica, Miss.; and Dallas; and Bally Manufacturing Corp. in Atlantic City and Chicago.

Quincy L. Moore, ’75 MS Guidance and Counseling, recently was named vice president of student services at Palm Beach Community College in Lake Worth, Fla. The college serves more than 46,000 students. Most recently he had served as dean of undergraduate studies and student support services at West Chester University in Pennsylvania. In 2005, he received the David K. Brooks Distinguished Mentor Award from the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the Presidential Award for Distinguished Service to the Division from the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development.

Gordon Hecht, ’78 BS Marketing, is employed by Sofa Express, a 70-store home furnishings chain. He has served as corporate director of training and regional manager for central and northeastern Ohio. He is married.

CLASS NOTES

Victoria Webb
Assistant Company Manager at KA
’89 BFA Dance

Early job: “I paid a lot of dues being a production assistant, doing everything. I was running around getting lunch for people who would make me turn around and take it back. I had some mean bosses.”

First thing international performers ask for: “How do I get a driver’s license?” because in Las Vegas, without a car, you can’t get anywhere.” But for foreign performers, especially those who speak little English, dealing with immigration and DMV systems can be tough. “It takes a lot of research — which is what I do. You just have to go to the DMV with all the right work papers.”

After hours: An avid hiker, Victoria often heads out to Red Rock Canyon with her shepherd mix, Harley.

Un-KA-ventional Career Path

Cirque du Soleil shows are known for their gifted performers. Dancers, acrobats, clowns, and martial artists — all possessed of physical skills that can make them seem not quite human — soar through the air and climb to dizzying heights. Offstage, though, they sometimes need a little help keeping their feet on the ground.

As assistant company manager for the KA production, Victoria Webb does quite a juggling act to make sure 300 artists are ready to perform. The former dancer’s job is to “take their minds off of all of that stress so they can focus on what they’re doing in the show.” Thus, she organizes visas, apartments, and driver’s licenses for her multinational performers.

Webb tends to these problems not only with the practical information on who to e-mail, when to call, and how to file paperwork, but also with unshakeable calm and genuine sympathy. At times, there’s as much drama backstage as onstage. “If somebody gets hurt, you have to take them down to the emergency room and make sure they’re OK,” Webb explains. “If they have a situation at home or their boyfriend broke up with them,
it’s ‘Hold my hand, I need to talk.’”

Her small office is hung with colorful art made by fellow Cirque workers and crammed with boxes containing the favors for next week’s company party. Performers in street clothes and stage makeup flit in and out. She consults a poster-sized list of names and numbers as she tries to solve the problem-of-the-moment, knowing full well another crisis is close at hand. “When you have 300 people coming at you, you have to take care of them,” she says. But sometimes, she admits, “it’s like ‘Take a number and I’ll get to that.’”

Now in her ninth year with Cirque du Soleil, Webb came to her backstage career after dancing professionally on several continents. “When I quit dancing, I was just ready,” she recalls. “I knew that job was not going to be long-term.” She then spent time working her way up the production ladder on stage and film before landing a job with Ice Capades. Her career with Cirque started with its Biloix, Miss., production of Alegria. Before moving on to Las Vegas’ Mystère and KA, she took a year to learn more about immigration issues.

Family Ties

Webb has both family and university roots in Las Vegas — her father is UNLV Distinguished Professor of English Joe McCullough, which made choosing a college easier. “I took a couple of his classes, which was kind of fun,” she says. “I didn’t ace them, but I passed.” McCullough remembers it this way: “She would sort of do her own thing and I would stay out of her way.”

Webb’s exploration of classes beyond dance has proved helpful in her career. As a student she considered a future career in counseling and minored in sociology. “That helped a lot because counseling people is basically what I do.”

UNLV also provided her with her first production management experience when jazz studies students traveled to Japan. “Someone in the jazz department was looking for anyone interested in helping organize the trip, she recalls. She leapt at the chance to travel and work. “That was the first job I ever had, and now I’m here taking care of dancers.”

While many dancers find themselves eventually pushed out of their careers by injury or age, Webb has easily made the transition into another facet of the world she loves. “I’m used to not being on stage,” she says, “but I’m glad to still be part of it.”

— Lissa Townsend Rodgers

to Michelle Eggers Hecht, ’91 BA Psychology, who is a sensory panelist with Nestle Research and Development. She enjoys writing articles and short stories and has been published in Expressions magazine several times. The couple lives in Columbus.

Russell Leavitt, ’78 BA History, is chairman of the board and CEO of Telian Inc., an international company consisting of Fire Materials Group and TVA Fire and Life Safety Inc. The company specializes in fire-protection and life-safety engineering and construction services. He enjoys spending time outdoors, playing the piano, and following UNLV basketball. He and his wife, Jean Stratton, have three daughters and six grandchildren. The couple lives in Mesa, Ariz.

Ted DeCorte, ’79 MA History, is director of ancillary products for Sierra Health & Life Insurance Co., a subsidiary of Sierra Health Services. He is president of the Clark County Association of Health Underwriters and a board member of the Nevada Association of Health Underwriters. He owns and operates smartwom-eninvest.com, eclecticbuzz.com, and christinedecorte.com. He also serves as a corporate officer in the financial services and insurance firm DeCorte & Associates, which is owned by his wife, Christine. They live in Henderson.

Rex Miller, ’79 BS Business Administration, is chief operating officer for the law firm of Kummer Kaempfer Bonner Renshaw & Ferrario. He oversees strategic planning and business operations, including legal administration, information technology, finance, and marketing for its four locations in Nevada. He is a member of the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, the Nevada Society of Certified Public Accountants, the Las Vegas Chamber of Commerce, and the Las Vegas Art Museum. He also owns a franchise of The Great Frame Up.

Cindy Goldberg Newman, ’79 BA Psychology, received a master’s degree in psychology from California’s Humboldt State University in 1981. Today she is a licensed marriage and family therapist, hypnotherapist, and sex therapist. She and her husband, Thomas, have been married 25 years and have two sons, Robert and Elliot. Her hobbies include snorkeling, cooking, and gardening. She lives in Dayton Beach, Fla.

1980s

Chuck Weinberger, ’83 BS Business Administration, is a 21-year commercial real estate broker with Award Commercial Properties in San Diego. He represents buyers and sellers of multifamily, office, retail, industrial, warehouse, tenants-in-common, and triple-net properties. A certified commercial investment member (CCIM) of the CCIM Institute, he owns the website uscommercialbrokerage.com.

Eric Mackler, ’84 BS Hotel Administration, has been general manager of the Hampton Inn Phoenix-Midtown for the past eight years. Before that he served as general manager of the Hampton Inn Mesa (Ariz.) for six years. He and his wife, Malivon, enjoy traveling and fishing. They live in Gilbert.

John Fountain Jr., ’85 MS Computer Science, is vice president of technology for Cox Communications’ Cox Business Services in Las Vegas. The division is responsible for all commercial services to local hotels and businesses. He is chair of UNLV’s Electrical Engineering Community Advisory Board, interim chair of UNLV’s School of Computer Science Industry Advisory Board, and a member of the MIS Executive Advisory Board. He and Tammy L. Howard have been married 21 years and have two sons, Jonathan, 15, and Nicholas, 11.

Bonnie Tell Lally, ’85 BS Hotel Administration, joined KSL Resorts as senior project manager/owner’s representative in July. She currently is in charge of the $30 million renovation of the Rancho Las Palmas Resort & Spa in Rancho Mirage, Calif.

Robert Powers, ’87 BS Hotel Administration, has purchased Maddie’s Sail Loft Restaurant and Bar in Marblehead, Mass. It is an historic landmark restaurant. He has been married for 14 years to Vita and has two children, Erik and Jordan.

Marcus Threats, ’87 BS Hotel Administration, joined KSL Resorts as executive director of the Hampton Inn Phoenix-Midtown for the past eight years. Before that he served as general manager of the Hampton Inn Mesa (Ariz.) for six years. He and his wife, Malivon, enjoy traveling and fishing. They live in Gilbert.

Mary Beth Cutshall, ’88 BS Hotel Administration, is director of contract services for Hotel Equities. She secures third-party management contracts and services the needs of investors and owners who hire the company. She also continues to serve as director of sales for the Fairfield Inn & Suites by Marriott-Buckhead. She enjoys playing tennis, cooking, and traveling. She and her two children, Isabella and Dominic, live in the Virginia-Highlands area of Atlanta.
Where in the World is Bruce Jones?

You may not know where he is, but he probably knows where you are.

Since May, Bruce Jones has been chief scientist for geography at the U.S. Geological Survey headquarters in Reston, Va. It’s the nation’s largest agency for civilian mapping and water, earth, and biological sciences. It’s his job to put humans back on the map, showing where we intersect with the land—or sometimes collide. His work in assessing risks and reducing natural hazards guides decision makers on land-use policies.

“In geography there’s a strong commitment to making people’s lives better,” Jones says. “We deal with people and lives and property, as well as the ecosystem. Geography sees them as integrated.

“Look at what’s happened with flooding, fires, hurricanes, volcanoes — the last few years have been pretty devastating. The challenge is to make the science useful by reducing the risks to hazards.”

Avoiding Hot Spots

Mapping out our vulnerability requires integration of data from biology, geology, geography, and water. That’s where Jones’ background in biology and ecology serves him well — geography is the crossroads of several strands of science, putting people into the landscape and looking at spatial patterns. The data that comes out of USGS studies may provide options for smart growth or suggest changes to building codes in disaster "hot spots."

Federal and state agencies charged with setting land-use policies and building codes are major consumers of the information. Insurance companies develop their own risk assessments from it, such as outlining flood plains. And organizations such as the Nature Conservancy are clients as well.

“We’re not in the business of telling people what to do,” Jones says. “It’s different from the regulatory approach. The idea is, if we provide good data and tools, planners will want to make good decisions.”

Saving Money and the Environment

Jones’ office also works to protect the environment from hazards both natural and manmade. One of his major projects now is using satellite imagery to determine how U.S. land cover has changed since the 1970s. That’s water, forest, cropland — anything that can be remotely detected from the sky. The researchers are looking for trends and potential drivers of change.

Since 2002, Jones has teamed with scientists from Europe and Australia to assess watershed conditions across the continents.

Remote sensing is an area of expertise for Jones, who also used the technology in his 18 years at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. There his research focused on environmental stressors such as contaminants, land use, and habitat change.

One of his major accomplishments saved New York City from building a multibillion-dollar water filtration system. Jones initiated and provided the research design for a project that eventually showed the city could spend far less money to protect an upstate watershed from development by strategically buying lands in sensitive areas. If they left the land alone, the water would stay clean by itself.

Returning for a ‘Brain Boost’

It was while working at the EPA that Jones decided to get his doctorate at UNLV in biology, his first love. He wanted to be a scientist, like the ones in the sci-fi movies he loved to watch. At the age of 9 he visited a reptile farm and got hooked on snakes; eventually he became a herpetologist.

Returning to school for his doctorate gave him a “brain boost,” he says. He found it refreshing to set aside his EPA work to study reptiles again with mentor Brett Riddle, professor of biological sciences.

Riddle’s offices are major clients of the information he produces. He and his wife, Valerie Watkins Nelson, have two children, Selene and Maya. His hobbies include fishing and football. The family recently moved from California to Naperville, Ill.

Ted Williams, ’88 BS Business Administration, was promoted to logistics manager for plumbing/HVAC at Cerro Flow Products Inc., where he has worked for three years. He coaches children’s soccer, basketball, baseball, and softball teams. He and his wife, Leslie, have been married 17 years and have three children, Jessica, 14, Sam, 11, and Erin, 9. They live in St. Louis.

Michael G. Murrell, ’90 BS Hotel Administration, is the west region manager for Lighthouse Catholic Media, which specializes in practical and effective ways for Catholics to know and keep their faith. He has six children, Jason, 12, Marissa, 10, Sierra, 6, Joshua, 4, Joey, 2, and Gianna-Marie, 8 months. The family lives in La Quinta, Calif.

Elora Tshudy Paik, ’90 BS Business Administration, recently became the human resources system manager at UNLV. Previously she spent 15 years working in information management for four subcontractors to the U.S. Department of Energy on the Yucca Mountain Project. Her husband, Eugene, is a doctoral student at UNLV studying education learning and technology. Their son, Eugene II, attends the UNLV/CSUN Preschool.

Jeffrey Stutts, ’90 BS Hotel Administration, recently became director of event management at the Renaissance Hollywood Hotel. He transferred there after two years as director of event planning and operations from San Francisco’s Stanford Court. He lives in West Hollywood, Calif.

Theodore R. Nelson III, ’91 BS Business Administration, is the Midwest regional vice president for Foot Locker. He and his wife, Valerie Watkins Nelson, have two children, Selene and Maya. His hobbies include fishing and football. The family recently moved from California to Naperville, Ill.

Ki-Joon Back, ’92 BS and ’94 MS Hotel Administration, recently joined the faculty at the University of Houston as an associate professor and graduate program director in the Conrad N. Hilton College of Hotel Administration. He lives in Sugarland.

Linda Bernstein, ’92 BS Business Administration, ‘06 Master of Hospitality Administration, is corporate director of training and development for Resorts International, which employs...
“One of the things that was always fun about working with Bruce is that he was very receptive to any new ideas,” Riddle says. “He could see how they might be blended together and synthesized into new ways of thinking.”

While some in his profession might become weary of travelling, Jones relishes the jaunts. “Some people have a bird checklist,” he says. “I have an ecosystem checklist. My goal is to stand in every bio type on the continent before I go on. I’m about two-thirds of the way through.”

The desire to explore was a gift from his father, an engineer who held patents on some of the first paper mills. “He was a real traveler and very adventure-some. Being taken to different places as a child really piques your interest in discovery,” Jones says. “The reason I’m in science is because I have a hunger for discovery.”

— Erin O’Donnell

Bruce Jones
Chief scientist for geography, U.S. Geological Survey
’95 PhD Biological Sciences

Favorite place on earth: Daintree National Park in Australia, a tropical rainforest on the country’s northeastern coast.

In my tool kit: Jones relies on two important acronyms, GIS and GPS. Geological information systems are the core of his work, using satellite imagery to track changes on the earth’s surface. His global positioning system helps him match up what he gets off the satellite with what’s on the ground.

Family: Wife, Anna Jones. Three sons from a previous marriage, Justin, Luke, and Mick; two stepchildren, Jason and Sarah Paine; and two grandsons, all living in Las Vegas. Luke and Sarah are both UNLV students.

Shawn Danoski, ’94 BS Architecture, and Bryce Clutts, ’03 BS Business Administration, are the leaders of a full-service general contracting firm, Danoski Clutts Building Group, which was founded in 2001. Among the firm’s recent projects have been the new Thrifty Car Rental and the Dollar Rent-A-Car facilities at McCarran International Airport, the Southwest Airlines cargo scanner project at McCarran, and the Sullivan Real Estate offices on Rainbow Boulevard.

Vicki Pettersson, ’94 BA English, will have three books published by HarperCollins/Eos Publishing. The Scent of Shadows and The Taste of Night are part of an open-ended urban fantasy series set in Las Vegas. The first will be published in March, the latter in April. In November, a novella in a fantasy anthology called Holidays are Hell will be released. She and her husband, UNLV Athletic Hall of Famer Roger Pettersson, ’96 BS Hotel Administration, who played tennis, have a 1-year-old daughter. They live in North Las Vegas.

Vicki Kunkel, ’95 BA Communication Studies, is a senior human resources reporting specialist at a global Fortune 100 financial investment firm. She previously worked in human resources at both Ralston
Purina and Nevada Power Co. and was a reporter for a local newsmagazine. She and her husband, Tom, have two children. They live in Missouri.

Brad Packer, ’95 BS Hotel Administration, is director of public relations for Four Seasons Resorts Lana‘i in Hawaii, which includes its properties at Manele Bay and Lana‘i and The Lodge at Koele. He previously spent five years in Miami Beach, Fla., as director of public relations for the Island Outpost and Noble House hotels. His hobbies include travel and outdoor recreation. He lives in Honolulu.

Michael Campbell, ’96 BS Business Administration, works for Keller Williams Realty and is dedicated to giving back to the community. Among the ways he does this is by donating $500 on each real estate transaction to the charitable organization of the client’s choice and by donating money for community development and redevelopment in Henderson through a fund he has established called the Campbell Housing Fund. He has signed up to be a mentor through UNLV’s Lied Institute for Real Estate Studies.

Stephanie Pernell, ’96 Master of Education, and Jeff Pernell, ’03 Master of Education, recently co-founded the Flathead Valley Montessori Academy, the first Montessori middle school in Montana. Stephanie serves as head advisor, while Jeff is school administrator. They have two children. Their hobbies include traveling, hiking, snowboarding, skiing, and sailing. They live in Kalispell.

Jacqueline Neal Hooper, ’98 BS Education, teaches for the Rutherford County School District in Tennessee. She previously taught for the Clark County School District for seven years. She earned a master’s degree from Walden University in 2004. She and her husband, John, have two children, Shaylynn and Mason. They live in Murfreesboro.

Valerie Miller, ’98 BA Communication Studies, is a reporter for the Las Vegas Business Press and recently won two first-place awards from the Nevada Press Association in 2006. Her award for best news story was about Harrah’s use of radio frequency tags to track cocktail waitresses. Her award for best feature story concerned convenience stores and their struggle for industry survival and convenience store crime.

Editor’s Note: With the range of work that these images show, it’s no surprise that Aaron Mayes, ’06 BA Art, is leading the University Photographers Association of America’s annual image contest.

For the past three years, UNLV Magazine has been fortunate to feature his work (check out this issue’s portraits on Page 25). We’re sad to report that Mayes left us in January for a position at University of Wisconsin-Madison. We asked Mayes if he had a favorite assignment: “By far the most rewarding moments were stolen. I’d be buried in processing images and (UNLV photo services manager) Geri Kodey (‘85 BS Criminal Justice) would say, ‘Aaron, the light is beautiful; that will wait.’ For someone like me who plans everything, those moments can be precious.”

Previously, he worked at the Las Vegas Sun newspaper and has done numerous freelance assignments. He and his wife, Sylvia, have three children: 4-year-old Ella, and 2-year-old twins, Kylie and Hayden.
What’s Up?
Tell us all about your latest milestone. Submit your accomplishments to the Class Notes section of UNLV Magazine. Or, if you’ve moved recently, let us know your new address.

Fill out our online form at:
myupdate.unlv.edu
Or mail to: UNLV Magazine, 4505 Maryland Pkwy. Box 451024, Las Vegas, NV 89154-1024
Fax: 702-895-1596
(Class Notes entries must be received by Aug. 1 for the fall issue.)

Jason Roth, ’98 BA Communication Studies, is director of marketing for the University of Southern Nevada, a Henderson-private university. Previously, he worked as an account supervisor at Phoenix-based Mullen Public Relations. There he oversaw the development and implementation of a marketing-driven, regional public relations campaign on behalf of one of North America’s largest degree-granting higher education systems. He enjoys traveling, working out, and pursuing outdoor activities. He and his wife, Marygrace, welcomed their first child, Zane, on March 29, 2006.

Stacy Smith, ’98 BA Theatre, is pursuing an acting career in Los Angeles and is co-editor of the “MiGNation Telegraph” newsletter at www.mignation.com. The portal website supports fans of Universal Music Group recording artist MiG Ayese, who came in second place on the television reality rock show Rock Star: DISX. She lives in Glendale.

Glæe Valencia, ’98 BS Sports Injury Management, received a doctor of chiropractic degree from Southern California University of Health Sciences. She has a solo practice in Las Vegas, Valencia Sports and Family Chiropractic. She also works with the Southern Nevada Pop Warner and Nevada Youth Football leagues. She is married and has one daughter, Mia.

Illan Kessler, ’99 BS Business Administration, owns North Pole Xmas Trees, which wholesales and retails a wide variety of evergreen products and supplies, including trees, wreaths, and garlands. The company’s wholesale division supplies more than 20,000 trees and hundreds of thousands of wreaths. The largest trees are shipped around the nation to a variety of customers, including Orlando (Fla.) City Hall and Las Vegas casinos. He lives in Nashua, N.H.

2000s
Johnny Ward, ’00 BS Hotel Administration, is a regional property manager for a Reno developer and owner of the Wrondel Plaza Office Complex. In 2005, he was president and CEO of the Northern Nevada Apartment Association. He is married to Jeanne Jordan, ’99 BA Sociology, who soon will begin working on a master’s degree in education at Sierra Nevada College. They have one daughter, Augusta, 3. The couple’s hobbies include boating, boarding, and riding motorcycles.

Michelle Cantwell, ’01 JD, is an attorney with the Las Vegas-based law firm Kolesar & Leatham.

2000s
Jason Feger, ’02 BS Hotel Administration, was promoted to the new property development department of Wyndham Worldwide, which formerly was the Cendant Corp. Hotel Group. Previously, he worked as corporate director of rooms for Steadfast Companies Hotels, which included the Lady Luck Casino Hotel and three Mexican resorts. He lives in Van Nuys, Calif.

Kevin Nance, ’02 BS Hotel Administration, works for Accor Hotel Corp. in China. He has been in China four years and currently works in the city of Xian, home of the terra cotta soldiers.

David A. Sferra, ’02 MBA, is a manager of financial analysis for Cox Communications supporting the commercial line of business. He is responsible for planning and forecasting in the commercial area. On Oct. 24, 2004, he married Rachel E. Cohen, ’96 BS Hotel Administration, in Rancho Palo Verdes, Calif. They live in Anthem, Ariz.

Jennifer Allen Wider, ’02 BA Psychology, is a court conciliator for Maricopa County Superior Court in Arizona. On Aug. 2, she married Mike Wider in a ceremony in Yosemite National Park. They live in Phoenix.


Rey Ramirez and Cynthia Shipley Ramirez, both ’03 Master of Music, welcomed their first child, Samuel Rey Ramirez, on Sept. 19. After graduation they had moved to Lewisville, Texas, to launch Ramirez Musical Services, providing French horn and clarinet lessons. In 2005, Cynthia accepted a clarinet position with the U.S. Air Force Heritage of America Band in Virginia. Rey is director of education and community engagement for the Virginia Symphony Orchestra. They live in Hampton.

Susan Price Lavender, ’04 BS Culinary Management, and her husband both work for the Culinary Institute of America. They live in Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

Joe Mugan, ’04 JD, is an attorney with the Las Vegas-based law firm Kolesar & Leatham.

Grover “Pete” Peters, ’04 JD, is contract director for the medical imaging company Desert Radiologists. He has extensive experience in senior-level health-care management, including development of integrated delivery networks, management services organizations, and single- and multispecialty medical groups. He also has functioned as CEO, COO, administrator, and controller for several health-care companies.

Jennifer Hartwick, ’05 BA Interdisciplinary Studies, is director of recruiting for Resources Global Professionals. She has attained the “professional in human resources” designation given by the Society of Human Resources Management. She is married and has one son, who will turn 1 in April. She enjoys reading and taking advantage of the entertainment Las Vegas has to offer. She lives in Henderson.

John R. Zimmerman, ’05 JD, is an attorney in the Reno office of the law firm of Parsons Behle & Latimer. He is a member of the firm’s environmental, energy, and natural resources department. He practices primarily in governmental permitting and licensing of water projects and due diligence analysis of water rights.
**UNLV Symphony Features Violinist**

Violinist Sarah Chang appears with the UNLV Symphony Orchestra, led by award-winning conductor George Stelluto, as part of the UNLV Performing Arts Center’s Charles Vanda Master Series at 8 p.m. March 2. Tickets are $45, $60, and $90.

One of classical music’s most captivating and gifted performers, Chang appears in the music capitals of Asia, Europe, and the Americas and collaborates with orchestras such as the New York Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony, and the Berlin Philharmonic.

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**March**

1-11 **Nevada Conservatory Theatre:** *Mother Courage and Her Children.* 8pm, March 1-3, 7-10. 2pm, March 3-4, 10-11. Black Box Theatre.

2 **Charles Vanda Master Series:** Sarah Chang with the UNLV Symphony Orchestra. 8pm. Ham Concert Hall.

2-3 **Dance:** *Spring Dance Concert:* Kinetic Journey. 8pm, March 2-3, 2pm, March 3. Judy Bayley Theatre.

9 **Classical Guitar Series:** Sharon Isbin. 8pm. Beam Music Center Recital Hall.

9-11 **Opera:** *La Bohème.* 7:30pm, March 9-10. 2pm, March 11. Judy Bayley Theatre.

16-18 **Nevada Ballet Theater:** Fusion, Fire & Ice. 8pm, March 16-17. 2pm, March 17. 1pm & 4:30pm, March 18. Judy Bayley Theatre.

21 **Black Mountain Institute:** “The Vietnam War in Light of Iraq.” Panel talk featuring Robert Stone, Tim O’Brien, Jim Castel lanos, John Irsfeld, Vu Tran, and Andy Fry. 7pm. Beam Music Center.

22 **Charles Vanda Master Series:** Joshua Bell with the Academy of Saint Martin in the Fields. 8pm. Ham Concert Hall.

22 **Black Mountain Institute:** A reading by authors Robert Stone and Tim O’Brien. 7pm. Barrick Museum Auditorium.
Season Finale Features Blind Boys of Alabama

May 19  The Performing Arts Center’s final event of the season will bring the gospel group Blind Boys of Alabama to campus. Joey Williams, Ricky McKinnie, Bobby Butler, and Tracy Pierce join founding members Clarence Fountain and Jimmy Carter. Formed in 1939 at the Alabama Institute for the Negro Blind, the Blind Boys of Alabama starred in the Obie-winning musical, The Gospel of Colonus.
Need to ward off evil? Try rubbing UNLV’s own “Talisman.” The sculpture’s name comes from a Greek term for a stone or charm that brings good luck and averts evil.

In 1990, the steel sculpture by Colorado artist Kevin Robb was installed on the lawn in front of the university’s old library — now the James E. Rogers Center for Administration and Justice.

The sculpture was installed by the UNLV Foundation in honor of longtime board member Elaine Wynn.

“They saw an advertisement of my husband’s work in a gardening magazine and contacted him about buying a unique piece to honor Mrs. Wynn,” said Diane Robb, wife of the artist and manager of Kevin Robb Studios. “Once they saw the Talisman they said, ‘This is the one.’”

A stroke one year ago left the sculptor unable to speak, but he is still working in his Colorado studio. Without using a plan, he creates his unique pieces by twisting and molding individual sheets of metal and then welding them together. It takes him about six weeks to fabricate one sculpture.

His numerous installations can be seen at the University of Kentucky, Upper Iowa University, and the Borgota Resort Casino Spa in Atlantic City, N.J.

—Grace Russell
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