Addressing diversity

Learning how to interact across racial, ethnic cultural lines key to success

By Craig Chamberlain

he professor remembered that his first experience at the U. of I., as a student, was isolating and unwelcome. His entire life had been among African Americans. He had grown up in segregated Alabama, gone to black schools and a black college (only the college faculty was white).

He arrived in Champaign-Urbana for graduate school and found himself in a “totally different environment” he had not prepared himself for. He remembered getting off the bus and walking all the way to campus and seeing no other person of color, no one who wasn’t white.

It was 1966, and all minority students together made up less than 2 percent of the U. of I. student population, or fewer than one in 50, the professor said. He could hardly recall a class – even among large ones of several hundred students – in which he was not the only African American. Many blacks found they were alone even within entire departments or disciplines.

“You felt very much on your own,” recalled Jim Anderson, who went on to earn his master’s degree and doctorate at Illinois, and has taught education history for more than three decades. “It’s hard for this student body (today) to even appreciate that at Illinois for more than three decades. “It’s hard for this student body, to even appreciate that at that time was that no one seemed concerned about really making the university more accommodating to students like him. The impression was “this is the way it is,” and no one seemed to feel any need to change it, he said.

Although the U. of I. still can seem a challenging environment for many students who are not part of the majority, the campus is a very different place in 2008, by the numbers and in other ways. Minority students now make up more than a quarter of the undergraduate population, or one of every four students, the highest percentage among Big Ten schools. It also has the highest percentage of undergraduates from underrepresented groups combined (blacks, Latinos and Native Americans) and the second most diverse faculty in the Big Ten.

In addition, supports have been added over the years, such as cultural houses, ethnic studies programs and efforts to improve the climate and environment for many students who are not part of the majority, the campus is a very different place in 2008, as a student, when some forms of discrimination had been eliminated in the university and the community.

Anderson’s impression as a student at that time was that no one seemed concerned about really making the university more accommodating to students like him. The impression was “this is the way it is,” and no one seemed to feel any need to change it, he said.

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In addition, supports have been added over the years, such as cultural houses, ethnic studies programs and efforts to improve the climate and student interaction in residence halls. The greater numbers also make it possible for students to find and form supportive interest groups within their given communities.

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Diversity

And rather than a “this is the way it is” attitude, the campus administration has made concerns about campus diversity and the campus climate part of strategic planning and other initiatives. Activist groups and others in the campus community have strongly advocated, especially over the last two years, that even more needs to be done.

Along with concerns about the campus climate, many faculty and staff members make the case that learning how to interact across racial, ethnic and cultural lines will be key to students’ future success in an increasingly diverse America and a globalizing economy.

The fall enrollment included more than 2,000 African Americans, but that was still only 6.7 percent of the undergraduate population of 30,695, or about one of every 15 students. The Latino population was about the same, at 6.9 percent. Asian Americans represented 12.9 percent, and 5.5 percent were international students.

Add to that the fact that many students, from all backgrounds, are coming from communities and schools in which they were in the vast majority. For white students from predominantly white high schools coming to a predominantly white campus, that requires little adjustment. For some minority students, that transition can be much more difficult.

“It’s not unusual for us to have African-American students come and say this is the first time they’ve been around this many white people,” said Jodie Castanza, a university staffer who coordinates the campus administration has made concerns about campus diversity and the campus climate part of strategic planning and other initiatives. Activist groups and others in the campus community have strongly advocated, especially over the last two years, that even more needs to be done.

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They may suddenly find they are the only African American or person of color on a residential hall floor, or in one or more classes, Castanza said. “It’s a shock; it’s harder than they thought it was going to be... and nobody can really prepare them for it.

White students “can pretty much walk around and take it for granted that this situation’s going to be pretty comfortable for them,” said Adele Lozano, director of La Casa Cultural Latina, the cultural house for Latino students. For many students of color, aware of their minority status in the dominant culture, their racial or ethnic identity “is pretty comfortable for them,” said Castanza. “It’s pretty comfortable for them, and how feels welcome. “I can’t afford to be apathetic,” he said.

Other acts of intolerance are directed at entire groups, such as the “Tacos and Tequilas” party held by a fraternity and sorority in the fall of 2006. It reportedly was an event that had been held for years, but drew no public attention until photos were taken and posted on Facebook, the online social networking site now so popular with college students. Some of the students were dressed as farm workers and gardeners, or pregnant women.

“You can just see students looking at the pictures and becoming outraged,” Lozano said. “It was kind of the straw that broke the camel’s back” in an atmosphere of existing tensions, shaped in part by awareness of other “stereotype parties” at Illinois and many other campuses, she said.

Protests soon followed, and eventually a campus forum on Feb. 1, called “Racism, Power and Privilege at UIUC,” organized by the student organization Students Transforming Oppression and Privilege (STOP). The panel for the forum included many of the university’s top administrators and was attended by an estimated 2,300 people packed into Foellinger Auditorium and other locations.

It seemed clear that the campus was in a new period of increased sensitivity regarding issues of diversity and tolerance. Adding further to campus tensions was the Feb. 16, 2007, announcement by the university that Chief Illiniwek would not be hosted, and five days later, he performed for the last time at a basketball game.

The university has always described the Chief as a symbol, rather than a mascot, and there is no doubt he has become – and remains even in retirement – a symbol at the center of any discussions about campus climate, tolerance and inclusion at the U. of I.

For many in the campus community, “the Chief becomes symbolic of injustice, or becomes symbolic of being marginalized or being ‘othered’ in this (place),” says Dominic Cobb, who served last semester as interim associate vice chancellor for student affairs and director of intercultural relations.

For many others, Cobb said, “the Chief becomes a symbol of the joy and the wonderful traditions and the great experiences and the lifelong friends.”

But after years of controversy in the campus culture, Cobb thinks the Chief has come to represent much more.

“It becomes shorthand, in many ways, for your political, religious, social perspective on the world,” and often not in a useful or accurate way, he said. Others looking in on the conflict, and wondering why it continues at such a high level, “don’t understand the complexity of what the Chief has become in this environment.”

Those who deal with the issues and realities of diversity on campus often talk about the basic need for simple dialogue, for students to find ways to interact with people unlike themselves.

The lack of interaction, and the stratification of campus social life, is something Letrell Crittenden, an African-American doctoral student in communications who came to campus in 2006. Too many students, he has observed, “choose not to interact with people that are unlike them. And really, I think, they don’t know how to.”

Also, he has noticed, issues of race and tolerance are rarely the subject of discussion. The impression is that “everybody thinks that everything’s OK.”

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TEAM approach to ease transfer students’ transition trauma

By Sharita Forrest

Although the program is starting with a handful of partner community colleges initially, “Illinois will be increasing recruitment of students from all 44 community colleges in the state, and the policy changes we are working to put in place will help all students,” said Dan Cullen, visiting assistant director of undergraduate admissions with the TEAM project.

“We also will be working with students once they are here to make sure we are providing the best possible university experience, regardless of their previous institutions. We will work with prospective students as early as we can, recruiting them to transfer to Illinois, guiding them through the completion of their lower division courses and providing information to help them with their decisions such as selecting housing and other transition issues. And we’ll be providing peer support when they get to the U. of I., especially during that first semester of transition,” Cullen said.

Peer mentors are being recruited from organizations such as the Tau Sigma Honorary National Transfer Student Association, the Transfer Mentors registered student organization and the cultural houses on campus. A core of 10 peer mentors were in place by the end of January, and about 20 will be by the fall semester. They will host information sessions, one-on-one sessions and panel discussions as well as online mentoring and discussion groups about Illinois and the transfer process for prospective students and their families.

“Promoting stronger partnerships with community colleges to ensure access and success for transfer students is a critical component of our Illinois mission.”

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Olayide Akinwale, a 20-year-old student from Chicago, the transition from community college student to university student was “not fun at all.” Akinwale, who earned an associate’s degree in biology at South Suburban College in South Holland, Ill., before he transferred to the U. of I., was eager to move on to a university environment but found he was unprepared for the rigorous academics.

“I guess I didn’t attack the classes the way a four-year college student would,” Akinwale said. “I still had the mentality that it shouldn’t be that hard. I got my first Cs at the end of my first semester, and that came as a surprise. I hadn’t gotten lower than a B before.”

Akinwale, who changed his major from cellular and molecular biology to integrative biology after that rocky initial semester, said he’s still adjusting, sometimes pulling all-night study sessions, something he had never done in community college.

“Classes here are a lot different from what I was exposed to in community college,” Akinwale said. “I actually had no idea what I was getting myself into.”

Each year about 125,000 students enroll in baccalaureate transfer programs at community colleges in Illinois, but only a small number of those students transfer to four-year public institutions, and many of the students who do transfer never achieve their dreams of earning four-year degrees, according to the Illinois Board of Higher Education.

The U. of I. is taking a TEAM approach to recruiting more transfer students to earn four-year degrees and helping them succeed academically. The Transfer Experience and Advising Mentors program is being funded in part by a three-year grant from the Lumina Foundation for Education, a private foundation based in Indianapolis that strives to expand access to and success in postsecondary education, particularly for people from underrepresented groups. Last fall, the foundation awarded the U. of I. an $899,000 grant for the TEAM program.

Having a sense of community has been shown to be critical to the success of students from underrepresented groups, and the peer mentors will help foster that collegiality and provide valuable first-hand perspectives about the academic and social milieu at Illinois.

Akinwale believes that a peer mentor familiar with classes in his discipline could have helped him make a smoother transition by offering advice about course scheduling and support services.

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Photo by L. Brian Stauffer

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Photo by L. Brian Stauffer
Students practice, compete to judge dairy, horses, livestock, meat

By Diana Yates

A

nimal sciences junior Erin Lyons knows how to pick the most productive milk cow out of a herd.

Senior Daniel Clark from Obion, Ill., can tell just by looking which beef ribs or legs of lamb have been cut to USDA standards and which will bring the best prices at market.

Dallas Duncan, another senior, can explain why a particular animal will produce the most, the leanest or the tastiest meat.

Megan Tyler, a new graduate from Monroe Center, can tell you which horses are likely to win a reinining competition.

These animal sciences undergraduates have chosen to devote much of their free time to a remarkable extra-curricular - or perhaps more accurately, co-curricular - pursuit. They have elected to train for and participate in one or more of a host of national and international judging contests.

Intercollegiate dairy judging, horse judging, livestock judging and meats judging are part of a long tradition that began in the early 20th century at most land-grant universities. These competitions were created to refine the skills of students hoping to go into the meat or dairy industries, or those whose careers would lead them to work with horses or other animals. The judging competitions serve the same purpose today.

Only a handful of students at Illinois choose to take on this challenge, however. Fewer than a dozen students participate in each judging category each semester. Depending on the season and the number and type of contests the students enter, the effort can require three to 30 hours per week - on top of a full class load.

Despite the long hours, those who join a judging team are in for a rewarding experience, said animal sciences professor Tom Carr.

“There are a significant number of things that you gain from it,” Carr said. “Number one, in my opinion, is the relationships with each other, because you develop a friendship with these individuals that you will have for the rest of your life.”

Participants must learn to work as a team. They must master the details of their particular category of judging. They must think fast and, in most cases, be ready to explain their judging decisions - either orally or in writing.

The students also must be willing to travel: Lyons, a packing plant worker, has judged for three years away, a dairy farm upstate, a reining competition in Oklahoma, a horse contest in Denver or even to a competition overseas. (The meats judging team went to Australia for a contest in 2007 — a first for the university. They won the competition.)

Time management is another critical skill, Carr said. With such a demanding practice schedule, “you don’t have time to fool around.”

Animal sciences professor Dan Shikie agrees. He trains students to compete in the livestock-judging contests.

“The most valuable things I think the students pick up from the experience have nothing to do with being able to tell which cow’s better than another one or which pig’s better,” he said. “The challenging part is the discipline, the time management.”

Students on the livestock-judging teams put in three to five hours a night, three evenings a week in preparation for the contests. At the busiest times of the season, they spend another 10-12 hours on the weekends traveling to other sites to hone their skills.

Duncan grew up in the industry — her father is a cattle producer near Quincy, Ill. — but she still learned plenty from her experiences on the livestock- and meats-judging teams. She hopes to be a veterinarian or get a job in the procurement part of the business.

“I will definitely use what Dan Shikie has taught me in selecting breeding stock,” she said. “And as far as meats judging goes, I have greater respect for what my dad has done his whole life in producing cattle for meat purposes.”

Megan Tyler, left, and Debra Hagstrom, horse juding team adviser, with Skips Honey Bit, a 3-year-old quarter horse filly, owned by Steve Fluty, a member of the dairy judging team and employee of the horse farm.

“Putting people in a stressful situation is very, very important,” he said.

The experience even changes some students’ career goals.

“Before I started I was planning to go to grad school in reproduction,” said Clark, a member of the meats-judging team that went to Australia. He now wants to pursue a graduate degree in meat science.

“Meat science is the end product, where your reproductive biology, your nutrition, all that stuff kind of funnels in,” he said.

Carr said he likes to see students engaged in intercollegiate competitions that test their brains and nerves.

“Competition is the lifeblood, really, of our work ethic,” he said. “Being forced to make evaluations and decisions in a short period of time develops some important skills.”

“Putting people in a stressful situation is very, very important. It tests their ability to think and to be able to make decisions under stress. It’s just like life. So we’re teaching them life skills, which are very, very important.”

“Any judging contest will give them analytical skill, reasoning skills, decision-making skills, and it’s going to improve their powers of observation,” Hagstrom said.

Tyler, who went to the Oklahoma event this year, believes the experience will help in her career as a veterinarian.

“From watching that display of riders I would probably be able to relate more to my clients and understand the stresses that the horses are put under,” she said.

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Honey bee colonies are in decline in many states, but little is known about their wild cousins, the humble bees, or, for that matter, honey bees living on their own in the wild without beekeepers. A new initiative from the University of Illinois seeks to build a better record of honey bees and humble abundance and distribution in Illinois by recruiting citizen scientists to report on wild bees seen anywhere in the state.

Beginning in October the BeeSpotter Web site (http://beespotter.moth.uiuc.edu) connected bee enthusiasts to resources that helped them identify local bees, and photographed and enter geographic information about wild bees seen in backyards, parks or other Illinois locales.

“Given that 90 crops in the U.S. agricultural sector depend on a single species of pollinator, and other crops depend on other pollinators, it would seem that for economic reasons alone this has been a serious oversight on our part,” said U. of I. entomology professor and department head May Berenbaum, who has testified before Congress on colony collapse disorder, a mysterious malady of North American honey bees. She also chaired the National Research Council committee that reported this year on the status of pollinators in North America.

There are too few publication experts in the U.S. to bridge the data gap, she said. The new Web site seeks to address the problem by involving citizen scientists in bee-monitoring efforts. Participants will feed their information into a database, interact with experts in the field who will answer their questions and connect them to other resources, such as the Illinois Natural History Survey database of North American bees.

Students practice, compete to judge dairy, horses, livestock, meat

Competitors in video clips of horses performing portions of a reining pattern of a horse-reining event, and rank two classes of 10 horses each in a live competition, trying to score the horses exactly as the paid judges do.

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Wanted: Citizen scientists to help track wild honey bees in Illinois

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of I. students can enroll in any number of cutting-edge science degree programs – biotechnology or nuclear engineering, for example, information or earth systems – and also in Latin – yes, Latin – a dinosaur of a language that fell by the spoken-tongues’ wayside centuries ago. But students do study Latin at Illinois and they do learn to teach it too – not in the droves that the newest sciences are drawing, but in steady streams that started to flow when Latin was required for admission to the young campus in 1894.

To be sure, the number of Latin majors and graduate students is less than magnus, but it has steadily increased over the past five years. Moreover, one would be hard pressed to find a group of students more dedicated to – even passionate about – their field.

What is the appeal? Why are students drawn to the ancient language?

According to Ariana Traill, one of their professors, students are “fascinated by the legacy of the Romans – Roman history, Roman art, Roman literature – and they fall in love with the Latin language. It’s such an enormous part of western cultural heritage, not to mention our own language. It seems perfectly natural to want to learn more!”

Traill, whose research interests include Greek and Roman culture, antibody, knows well the signs of a lifelong attraction to Latin and the classics.

“I’m the child of a historian of ancient Greece, so I’ve been learning about classical antiquity since I first started playing with Greek alphabet blocks,” Traill said.

One of the practical reasons today’s young men and women study Latin at Illinois is because Illinois is one of the few colleges and universities in the U.S. that offers a Latin program that includes teacher training; it offers a B.A. and a B.A.T (bachelor’s degree in teaching Latin), an M.A. and an M.A.T (master’s degree in teaching Latin), an Illinois teaching certificate and a doctorate. In its 2008 “America’s Best Colleges” issue, U.S. News & World Report cited only 14 institutions of higher education that offered Latin teacher education.

What is perhaps even more surprising is that teachers of Latin are highly sought.

“Not only is it a rewarding field, but it’s also well-paid,” said Mazza. “I’m the child of a historian of ancient Greece, so I’ve been learning about classical antiquity since I first started playing with Greek alphabet blocks,” Traill said.

One of the practical reasons today’s young men and women study Latin at Illinois is because Illinois is one of the few colleges and universities in the U.S. that offers a Latin program that includes teacher training; it offers a B.A. and a B.A.T (bachelor’s degree in teaching Latin), an M.A. and an M.A.T (master’s degree in teaching Latin), an Illinois teaching certificate and a doctorate. In its 2008 “America’s Best Colleges” issue, U.S. News & World Report cited only 14 institutions of higher education that offered Latin teacher education.

What is perhaps even more surprising is that teachers of Latin are highly sought.

Traill led a campaign to improve the Latin teacher education program by adding certification to the department’s M.A. degree. The change was enacted in the fall of 2009, and proved to be a move that would increase the numbers of students in Latin. The push for certification began when “No Child Left Behind” was enacted, she said.

“To the past, Latin teachers were under less pressure to become certified because Latin has such a strong presence in private schools. Now, more candidates want the option of teaching in public schools, which must hire certified teachers.”

Illinois’ classics department, now experiencing growing enrollments, is planning on hiring faculty members with expertise in Latin literature in order to enlarge the courses offerings.

“We have learned a lot from modern languages about language acquisition and this is reflected in new approaches to teaching Latin,” she said. “For example, people are doing much more with oral Latin, incorporating writing into Latin teaching, and teaching Roman culture along with the language.”

Still, there are things Traill would like to add to Illinois’ program. For example, she would like her students to be able to study in Rome and also to participate in the annual conference of the American Classical League, where many experienced teachers share what they have learned.

Even without some of the more exotic opportunities looming on the horizon, current U. of I. students are delighted with their programs of study.

Christine Pinheiro, a senior in classics from Champaign, said that Latin “definitely gives me an edge when it comes to applying to graduate programs in theology, and for gaining a deeper understanding of the history of the (Catholic) Church.”

It also helped expand her vocabulary.

Pinheiro is planning on teaching theology at a Catholic high school after she graduates in May of 2009. She may go on to study theology.

Pinheiro was a relative latecomer to Latin, starting in her sophomore year at Illinois.

“It’s a lot of hard work,” she conceded, “but it’s great to be able to sit down with a passage and decipher it.”

Pinheiro described the U. of I. Latin program as rigorous, but said it has given her “a solid grounding in both Latin and Greek,” which she may need for her theology studies. The biggest surprise for her is how much the study of Latin has improved her English grammar.

“For example, I now know and understand the difference between ‘choo,’ ‘wham,’ ‘whoo’ and ‘whizz!’”

Giulia Mazza, a freshman majoring in psychology and minoring in Latin, says Latin holds many attractions for her, beginning with the fact that it’s a part of her heritage.

“Being Italian means living side-by-side, literally and figuratively, with the glorious ruins of this great civilization,” said Mazza, who was born in Milan, Italy, and lived there for seven years, as well as in Brazil for five years. She now lives in Lake Forest, Ill.

In addition, Latin courses have helped her “innumerable times, especially on standardized tests, where the meaning of obscure words could be drawn from the Latin root.”

It even affects one’s mental processes on a broader scale, she said, “leading one to think more logically and methodically through translation.”

“Finally, Latin is just a beautiful language: from high-school Ovid and Catullus, where I first became enamored with it, to the equally fascinating medieval psalms I’m grappling with, Latin always expresses things with power and elegance.

“Some say Latin is a dead language, but I cannot imagine anything farther from the truth: it never ceases to surprise me. The cheerful bawdiness of certain Catullus poems made me blush; Virgil’s tragic description of Troy’s fall brought me near tears; currently I’m exploring medieval Latin and the fascinating transformations that shaped the language over a millennium of history.”

Mazza described Illinois’ Latin program as “fantastic.”

“Coming in as a freshman, I could easily have been dealt with patronizingly or diffidently for my wish to pursue Latin at higher levels; instead, the professors I spoke to were incredibly friendly, helpful and professional.”

Mazza said it’s comforting knowing that, although many of her courses are 300-student lectures, “there’s always a small, engaging, intimate Latin class waiting two times a week.”

Kay Suleiman, a graduate student in Latin, is a strong advocate for that language. Recently she ran a little recruitment campaign to snag students into a semester of Latin. She had quite an argument.

“Why should you study Latin when there are so many other worthwhile subjects to study?” she asked prospective students in an e-mail.

Quite simply, because you will get more long-term leverage from the study of Latin than from the study of any other subject in the U. of I. course catalog, no matter what your major is. Every hour you spend studying Latin is an investment in your future – if your future involves using the English language to express thoughts orally or in writing.”

Suleiman, a mother of four who is writing a Latin curriculum for parents and their children, claims that learning Latin “increases your wonder of the beauty of English and causes you to make connections that will enchant you. It also will provide you with a foundation in your own language that will give you a deep and abiding satisfaction.”

“In my opinion,” she said, “every student in this university ought to have at least one semester of Latin. It is an absolutely basic subject for anyone who speaks English.”

First Class
Latin: Very much alive – and thriving – at Illinois
By Andrea Lynn

Ven, Vidi, Vici Latin
Illinois is one of only 14 colleges or universities that prepare Latin teachers, according to U.S. News & World Report’s 2008 “America’s Best Colleges” issue. The other institutions:

• Brigham Young University at Provo, Utah
• Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.
• D’Youville College, Buffalo, N.Y.
• Duquesne University, Pittsburgh
• Furman University, Greenville, S.C.
• Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pa.
• Hope College, Holland, Mich.
• Marquette University, Milwaukee
• Miami University at Oxford, Ohio
• Monmouth College, Monmouth, Ill.
• Northwestern College, Dubuque, Iowa
• SUNY-Albany, Albany, N.Y.
• Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Mich.

• Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pa.

University

• Arizona State University, Phoenix, Ariz.
• Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, Pa.
• Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, Fla.
• Hofstra University, Hempstead, N.Y.
• The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio
• SUNY-Albany, Albany, N.Y.
• SUNY-Buffalo, Buffalo, N.Y.
• SUNY-Ulster, Thunnan, N.Y.
• Utah State University, Logan, Utah
• Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Mich.

• Brigham Young University at Provo, Utah
• Catholic University of America, Washington, D.C.
• D’Youville College, Buffalo, N.Y.
• Duquesne University, Pittsburgh
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• Utah State University, Logan, Utah
• Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, Mich.
U. of I. preaching conservation to halt spiraling energy costs

By Jan Dennis

Faint afternoon sunshine peeks through small windows, the only light in a roomy office where William Sullivan maps out environmental programs that seek to blend some green into the traditional orange and blue at the U. of I.

“I’m trying to tread as lightly as I can on the earth,” says Sullivan, who also curbs his energy use by biking a mile to his job as the director of the campus’s Environmental Council. “The other thing is I can’t just talk the talk.”

Sullivan and other U. of I. administrators have a lot of talking ahead of them, preaching energy conservation on a sprawling campus that saw its bills nearly triple from $25 million to $72 million as utility rates soared between 2002 and 2006.

Conservation is a linchpin of the first-ever energy policy approved last year for the Urbana campus, where officials say escalating power costs siphon much-needed money away from research, instruction and the university’s other core missions.

“We can do something enduring for this university by changing the culture and changing the cost when it comes to energy,” said Jack Dempsey, the executive director of facilities and services. “That money can go into academic instruction and the university’s other core missions.

“We have never really practiced any ways to reduce energy consumption because it was never an issue,” said Provost Linda Katehi, who led a task force that examined energy use on all three campuses. “We took energy as being a free good. Now, we’re trying to change that, and it could take a couple years before we can really say we are energy aware, that we conserve to an optimal point.”

The university already has started spreading the word. A Web site (www.energymanagement.uiuc.edu) has been launched promoting energy conservation, with newsletters and town hall meetings to follow. Chancellor Richard Herman has sent campuswide e-mails, including one urging students and employees to turn off as much power as possible over the year-end holiday break.

“We need to ingrain this in the campus psyche,” said student trustee Chime Asomug. “It’s easy for everyone to get behind a big campuswide sustainable energy project, like wind turbines, but it’s really hard to police ourselves when it comes to turning the lights off or turning the heat down when we leave the room.”

Along with calls for voluntary conservation, the new policy also offers financial incentives to encourage campus departments to cut back.

The university spent $2.5 million last year to repair or install meters to gauge energy use in the 90 buildings that account for about 90 percent of campus energy consumption. With meters in place, departments will soon reap the financial benefits if they trim energy costs, but will be forced to cut back in other areas if they overspend.

“To me, it’s tremendously exciting that we’re talking about a budgetary system that rewards departments that are working hard to conserve energy and taxes those that are wasteful,” said Sullivan, who served on a committee that developed the Urbana campus’s energy policy. “It’s exactly how we all operate in our own homes. If we leave the windows open and the furnace on, we pay the consequences, right?”

The energy plan also proposes tackling a roughly $500 million backlog of maintenance projects that contribute to wasted energy, including antiquated heating and air-conditioning systems and old, inefficient windows that bleed hot and cold air.

Research and veterinary labs, the biggest energy users because of venting to clear contaminants in the air and to accommodate animals coming in and out, will be studied to see if costs can be trimmed without sacrificing safety and operational needs.

The energy audit also could put motion sensors in some buildings and shut down others completely at night to trim energy costs when use dips, officials say.

“We have a culture of an open campus, where a student or two can go into any classroom, turn on the lights and sit down and work.” Dempsey said. “But maybe we’ll have to designate 20 rooms in one building instead of one room each in 10 buildings.”

Campus officials say students have been leaders in the push for energy efficiency and cutting-edge projects such as a new $60 million College of Business Instructional Building. The new building, expected to open in the fall, includes solar panels that will generate up to 7 percent of its electrical needs.

“Students have been trying to drag the campus kicking and screaming into this new world order for at least three years,” Ruprecht said. “They’re looking at global warming and realize the stakes are huge. The stakes are what kind of environment we leave for our kids and grandchildren.”

Stephanie Bogle, who chairs the Student Sustainability Committee, agrees. But she says climate isn’t the only issue driving students.

“The biggest incentive is probably that it saves them money,” said Bogle, who is studying for her doctorate in materials science engineering. “In my house, as far as convincing my roommates that we shouldn’t have the heat so high is that it’s cheaper. The pocketbook still rules to a degree, even among people who care about climate issues.”
Trustee gathers multiple peer perspectives to be informed advocate

By Laura Prusik

Chieme Asonye is a name some students at the Urbana campus of the U. of I. might not be sure how to pronounce but many recognize now. Asonye (his entire name is pronounced chih-MAY ah-SO-NE-yay) is well-known because he’s the only student who has an official vote on the university’s board of trustees. Students and student organizations express their ideas and concerns to him as their liaison with university administrators.

The board of trustees is the group of 12 policymakers for the university system, including the Urbana campus. Nine board members are appointed by the governor; three students – one from each campus – are elected. One of the students – on the current board, it’s Asonye – is granted voting rights by the governor. The board addresses an array of issues, including tuition, faculty retention, salaries, building development and energy policies.

Asonye, a senior in philosophy and pre-law from Chicago, has a deep interest in and love for global affairs and policymaking. In spring 2005, he was elected to serve a term in the Illinois Student Senate. “I consider myself a political scientist by trade,” Asonye said.

Asonye took office as student trustee in July 2007 and was elected with the second-largest voter turnout in the history of the university. He is the first black male to obtain this distinction. He represents his peers at all three campuses – in other words, about 80,000 students.

William Berry, associate chancellor, first worked with Asonye while Asonye was on the Illinois Student Senate and pushing to create a policy debate organization on campus. According to Berry, Asonye’s board vote underscores the diversity of American society, and that there is value in the differences among people.

“He uses his good offices to engage students in discourse and to try to represent the rich, diverse community to the university administrators,” Benson said. “He feels that he represents the entire campus. And he’s gifted with respect to the way he can reach people.”

Berry said that Asonye’s thirst for information makes it clear that he speaks from an informed perspective, rather than hot-air opinion. He added that Asonye’s efforts have made the other trustees see students as more than “just people who come to study and learn and leave,” but as people who have a stake in the present and future of the university.

“He has reminded the administration of the importance of listening to what students have to say,” Berry said.

Asonye has a strong passion for debate. However, he no longer participates in intercollegiate debate competitively because he said student trustee deserves all his attention and has forced him to reorganize his priorities.

In addition to his role as student trustee, Asonye is involved in several other campus organizations. He co-founded and is an adviser for the Illinois Student Senate. According to Benson, Asonye is driven by a progressive viewpoint that recognizes the diversity of American society, and that there is value in the differences among people.

“Tacos and Tequila,” during which white students wore costumes demeaning to Latinos.

“In response to this event, Asonye participated in meetings and events with administrators and officials.” Chris Benson, a professor of African American studies and journalism, first met Asonye at an open forum about racism, power and privilege, during which Asonye spoke and Benson co-moderated.

“He was very impressed,” Benson said. “He caught my attention. I was impressed when he had the courage to make the difficult decision to focus on as many campus issues as he would like.

In order to participate in the campuswide ceremony, students must order their academic regalia online at www.herffjones.com/college/graduation by April 21 or visit the Illini Union Bookstore between 10 a.m. and 3 p.m. on April 2, 8, or 21.

The Guide to Commencement Activities booklet will be sent to all students who have completed degree requirements since August 2007 and to all May 2008 degree candidates. If students have not received the guide by April 1, they should contact the Committee on Commencement at 217-333-4834 or commencement@uiuc.edu. The guide contains additional participation instructions, assigned ceremony times, ticket information, as well as other important information related to commencement weekend.

Information contained in the guide may also be found at www.uiuc.edu/commencement.
Avoid culture clashes abroad: Learn to mind your p’s and q’s

By Helen Mitchell

Making Their Mark

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Making Their Mark
Students interested in health professions bond in new community

By Shariya Forrest

A new living and learning community is bringing together students interested in medicine, and offering them programming, support services and valuable experiential learning in their chosen fields of study.

The Health Professions Living and Learning Community, launched in the fall semester, offers students who are interested in careers in medicine, nursing, physical or occupational therapy, veterinary medicine and related fields unique opportunities to explore their interests through specialized health sciences programming.

The health professions community is one of seven living and learning communities in the Housing Division on the Urbana campus. The communities offer academic programs; tutoring, advising and mentoring services; and experiential learning and social activities that support their interests.

Although many of the residents are in the pre-medicine curriculum, the community includes all health professions, and occupies two floors of Oglesby Hall. About three-fourths of the 110 residents selected the community when submitting their housing contracts; the remaining students were placed there based on their declared majors, said Marc Goldman, assistant director for academic programs in Housing.

“When we were preparing the community, we saw that as many as 3,000 undergraduates on campus are pursuing some sort of degree that would fit in the allied health field. So, there’s a huge student base to draw from,” Goldman said.

“Students have that professional mindset and are looking for any advantage they can get. And they see a community like this – that’s preparing them from Day One for a professional career or school, that helps them make connections with people who can assist them with applying to medical school – and see it as an advantage.”

The community provides students with a sense of place, connection and focus with peers who share their interests; educates students about the breadth of opportunities available in the health professions, and strives to build awareness about societal issues relative to health care, Goldman said.

Beginning with the fall semester and the community’s inception, a new course section specifically for the community’s students was added to the Molecular and Cellular Biology 199 course, which was new for the fall semester. A brief survey of the various health professions so students can see the wide array of occupations available.

Edgar Guzman, an 18-year-old freshman from Berwyn, Ill., began college uncertain about which career field he wanted to enter, and the survey course was a thought-provoking experience.

“It does open your eyes a lot, and it does make you think twice. It helped me narrow down” the possibilities, Guzman said.

A first-generation college student and graduate of J. Sterling Morton High School, Guzman, like many students, found that the volume of work and the approach to learning in his college courses differed radically from what he was accustomed to in high school. “I was really not ready for it,” Guzman said. “I had never heard anyone say ‘I like online homework or had to devote so much time to homework, either. In high school, the teaching was very prescriptive. College is not that way. You’ve got to think on your own a lot more.’”

And, the rule ofthumb that each credit hour

earned in a course translates into three hours of studying and homework outside of class holds true, except for courses in the pre-med curriculum, Guzman said. “Anything that’s getting you into the pre-med field, such as biology or chemistry, puts on at least double the amount of homework in an in-class setting,” Guzman said.

“Students may come into college with a goal of being a doctor but they may not truly understand what that means academically,” said Kasi Schueller, program coordinator for the health professions community and for the Women in Math, Science and Engineering living and learning community. “After their first semester of biology and chemistry classes, they may reassess and decide that being a doctor isn’t for them. But maybe there’s another profession in the allied health field – nursing or physical therapy – that is.”

Guzman, like his roommate, Jeremy Lacocque, and I like living with people who are so ambitious. They’re a studious group, but it allows me to focus, and because we started out this way I think we’re more likely to continue that lifestyle through the rest of college.”

Valerie Kramer, an 18-year-old freshman from Wauconda, Ill. was in the health professions survey class during the fall semester with many of her fellow residents from the living and learning community. “I thought it was really cool to take a class with people that I knew. It makes for more of a community. And it was the only class where I knew everybody, and we joked around and stuff. In my other classes, we didn’t really talk to each other.”

Kramer, who entered the university with her major undecided, plans to transfer to the kinesiology curriculum next year with the goal of becoming a physical therapist. She became interested in the profession after volunteering at a nursing home and observing physical therapists as they worked with her grandmother and other family members.

Service learning/experiential learning can make or break career decisions, and groups of students will have opportunities to observe, work in or engage in volunteer activities at local health-care facilities through a program that is under development. “We really want the students to have one-to-one patient interaction and to expose them to other areas in the medical field, such as health-care administration and marketing, that the students expressed an interest in during a survey we conducted during the fall semester,” Schueller said.

Another service learning program under discussion involves a partnership with the American Cancer Society.

For more information on the Health Professions Living and Learning Community, contact Schueller, program coordinator, at Florida Avenue Residence Hall, 217-244-5434 or healthprofllc@uiuc.edu.

Freshmen roommates Jeremy LaCocque, left, and Edgar Guzman are part of the Health Professions living and learning community in Oglesby Hall, which was launched in the fall in the Florida Avenue housing complex. Both are interested in psychology and plan to become psychiatrists.
Taking steps outside a comfort zone

Finding a group of friends, a community, a comfort zone is a key part of making the transition to campus life, especially at a large university. But it can also keep a student from experiencing the diversity of campus and learning from it.

“The thing that's great about comfort zones is you can step out of them, experience (other things) for a little bit, and then go right back,” says senior Andrew Nelson, a multicultural advocate in the residence halls.

Among the possibilities:

• Sample activities at a cultural house, or events sponsored by an ethnic student organization.

Start with something fun and bring a friend, advises Adele Lozano, director of La Casa Cultural Latina. Her cultural house, for instance, offers weekly salsa lessons; a "convo" (short for conversation) table night, where students can alternately practice English and Spanish, using games and other informal methods; and a weekly lunch program, with free food.

Contrary to misconceptions, students need not speak Spanish to visit La Casa or attend one of its events, according to Lozano, who does not speak the language fluently herself.

• Take a class that offers the opportunity for conversations with students from different social and cultural backgrounds.

The Program on Intergroup Relations, for instance, offers courses for discussing race and ethnicity, as well as gender issues (no "male-bashing"), liberal and conservative viewpoints, religious diversity, disabilities, social class and sexual orientation.

The courses “seek to create understanding, as opposed to debate,” says Domico Cobb, a PIR staff member and one of the course facilitators.

Another possibility is Jim Anderson's class on “Race and Cultural Diversity in American Society,” which the education history professor has taught since 1992. Anderson's priority is an environment “without penalty” in which to discuss these issues.

• Seek out programs offered in the residence halls.

Each residence hall is assigned a multicultural advocate, an undergraduate staff member who works with resident advisors and hall directors to organize programs and discussions related to issues of diversity and social justice.

“We're big fans of questions,” and questions that “don't always have answers,” says housing staff member Sandie Castanza, who oversees the program. The goal of the program is making sure every member of the community feels welcomed and included, she said.


Diversity

Continued from page 2

Crittenden said. ("They think that we live in this
color-blind society, that people don't judge and
persons don't discriminate. It's not the case, it's just
sort of been swept under the carpet.")

Crittenden grew up in a working class family in the small town of Chambersburg, Pa., where blacks were a small minority in both the community and the schools he attended. For his bachelor's and master's degrees, he went to Penn State, and in between the two degrees worked as a reporter in upstate New York. He said he has always had a
diverse group of friends.

At the U. of I., he is part of the student advisory
committee for Inclusive Illinois, a campus initiative to reduce intolerance and improve the campus climate.

Another member of that student advisory
committee is Matt Doherty, a senior in advertising from Palos Heights, Ill., and one of several students
on the committee working on a campaign to promote Inclusive Illinois.

Doherty attended a Catholic high school on the south side of Chicago and many of his friends also came to the U. of I. He was seeing many of the same faces he had seen in high school, he said.

But Doherty, unlike many students, wanted to
get out of that comfort zone and meet a lot of new people. He got involved in activities with students on his residence hall floor, joined a fraternity his sophomore year, got involved in the campus chapter of the American Advertising Federation, where he found a diverse group of students.

Yet when he got involved with Inclusive Illinois and discussions about the promotional campaign, Doherty, who is white, found he still had a lot to learn about diversity issues and the experiences of other students.

In particular, he remembered a brainstorming session early in the process in which a diverse group of students shared their stories. “You'd hear a story and you'd sit back and be like ‘Wow, that happened to you!’ There are some things (that happen to students) that are honestly horrible, and no one should have to deal with that,” he said.

“Boors have just opened up to things I never even thought about. I kind of felt ignorant that in the past I've never experienced these conversations before – you know, took the time out to – and I think that happens to everyone on campus,” he said.

For Samarth Bhaskar, who spent the first half of his childhood in New Delhi, and the second half in Bloomington, Ill., those kinds of conversation and interaction have been part of his U. of I. experience almost from the beginning. And given his background, that makes a certain amount of sense.

But the sophomore, majoring in international studies, also was quickly pulled into activities as a
freshman by two sophomore friends and roommates, one white and one Asian American. Both were part of the Asian American Association on campus and told him he'd have to join.

Bhaskar has since found roles not only in that organization, but in the Indian Student Association, in another student group called TEAM (for Together Encouraging the Appreciation of Multiculturalism), and on the student advisory committee for Inclusive Illinois.

In many of these roles, his motivation is the same. "I want to be the person who goes out and invites people to come in and experience these cultures," Bhaskar said. "I want to go out and tell people there's more to campus than you might imagine, there's more to this student body than you might imagine. There's more to the world than you might imagine."

In fact, the world beyond the campus and beyond graduation should be key concerns for students as they consider the opportunities offered by campus diversity and the consequences of intolerance (such as might be demonstrated in viewing some Facebook pages), says Gail Rooney, director of the campus Career Center.

As the U.S. workforce becomes more diverse, and forces of globalization continue to shape the economy. “that ability to be culturally sensitive, that ability to communicate amongst people who come from different perspectives is going to be extremely important,” Rooney said. “If students are not learning that now, not preparing themselves, I don't think they're preparing themselves for the workforce that's coming,” she said.

"That ability to be culturally
sensitive, that ability to
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I don't think they're preparing
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that's coming."

— Gail Rooney, director of Career Center
New Informatics minor gives technical edge to non-computer science majors
One out of every four jobs will be IT-related by the year 2012, says the Bureau of Labor Statistics. With that trend in mind, the UI. E. began offering an Informatics minor to all of its students this semester. The bottom line: The new informatics program will focus on computational skills that are accessible to non-computer science majors. 

“Students from many disciplines report that as they compete in the job market, technical skills often make the difference in landing a position,” says Marc Snir, director of the Illinois Informatics Institute (IIT). “The goal is to teach students to become better creators and users of computing technology and to think critically about technology’s role in society,” says Marc Snir, director of the Illinois Informatics Institute (IIT), which manages the minor. Students from many disciplines report that as they compete in the job market, technical skills often make the difference in landing a position, says Dena Kerner, an IIT associate dean, as well as associate director of IIT. She says an Informatics minor from Illinois – known worldwide for its computer science program – will give U. E. students a definite edge.

Every field has been touched in some way by technology. Informatics studies the application of information technology to the arts, humanities, social, physical and biological sciences. But Informatics is as much about people as it is about technology. It also considers the social and psychological aspects of IT. What impact does a particular technology have on us? Ideally, students should apply for the minor prior to the end of their sophomore year, and there are no prerequisites for Informatics, students should have a basic familiarity with computers. More information is available at https://www.informatics.uiuc.edu.

Please post

Illinois to compete in 2009 Solar Decathlon
It’s back to the drawing board for the engineering and architecture students – and all the others from across campus. The U. of I. will return to the National Mall in Washington, D.C., to compete in the 2009 Solar Decathlon.

The U.S. Department of Energy selected Illinois, which placed ninth overall in the 2007 competition, as one of 20 teams for the next contest.

Elenemhouse, Illinois’ 2007 entry (featured in the fall 2007 issue of postmarks), won two of the 10 contests: market viability and comfort zone. The overall winner was the Technische Universität Darmstadt, Germany. The University of Maryland and Santa Clara University finished second and third, respectively.

Teams for the fourth Solar Decathlon – from Canada, Germany, Spain and the U.S. – will receive $100,000 to design, build and operate an energy efficient, fully solar-powered home.

The biannual project was started as part of the President’s Solar America Initiative, which aims to make solar power cost competitive by 2015. The U. of I.’s 2007 entry is on view at the Chicago Center for Green Technology.

Hundreds of students participated in the 2007 project and hundreds more will be involved in the 2009 entry from architecture, business, engineering, communications, and art and design.

The School of Architecture will develop the initial architectural designs for the U. of I.’s next entry this spring. Students interested in working on the 2009 project can do so in an independent study design class.

Administrative posts

Jesse “Tony” Clements
Director
Division of Campus Recreation
201 E. Peabody Drive
Champaign, IL 61820
217-333-5153
jclement@uiuc.edu
Supervises the campus “playground,” the Division of Campus Recreation, which offers programs in aquatics, club sports, group fitness, intramural activities, personal training, outdoor adventures, ice skating and special events; oversees the massive $83 million dollar renovation project of two large recreation centers on campus, which expanded or renovated nearly 440,000 square feet of state-of-the-art wellness and activity facilities; co-chairs the Culture of Wellness Committee, which has united academic and auxiliary professionals in bringing about a heightened wellness awareness for the campus community.

Curt McKay
Director
Office of LGBT Resources
323 Illini Union
1401 W. Green Street
Urbana, IL 61801
217-244-3277
curtb@uiuc.edu
Provides support, advocacy and resources to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender students and their straight allies. The Office of LGBT Resources creates a safe space for LGBT students to explore their sexualities, gender identities and expressions and be themselves, helping them navigate the coming-out process; presents LGBT-related programming to the U. of I. community, and works to create a welcoming and inclusive campus community for all.

Brian D. Farber
Director
Office for Student Conflict Resolution
Associate Dean of Students
Division of Student Affairs
300 Turner Student Services Building
610 E. John Street
Champaign, IL 61820
217-333-3680
bfarber@uiuc.edu
Supervises and advises the various hearing officers and committees charged with adjudicating violations of the Student Code; supervises the Campus Mediation Program, which assists students in finding peaceful resolutions to conflicts with an unbiased third party; advises the Tolerance Program, which responds to acts of intolerance within the campus community to emphasize the institutional values of tolerance and inclusiveness.

Esther Patt
Tenant Union Coordinator
Office of Dean of Students
326 Illini Union
1401 W. Green Street
Urbana, IL 61801
217-333-0112
epatt@uiuc.edu
Coordinates the Tenant Union program, which assists university students who rent privately owned apartments and houses. The Tenant Union helps students before they rent to check complaint records for area landlords and review lease contracts. The office also advises students about dealing with specific problems and will contact landlords to resolve problems if a student files a written complaint.

Calendar

Spring Semester 2009
Spring vacation begins ................................. March 15
Instruction resumes ..................................... March 24
Instruction ends ......................................... April 30
Reading day .............................................. May 5
Final exams begin ....................................... May 6
Final exams end ......................................... May 9
Commencement ......................................... May 11

Summer Session 2008
Summer Term 1 instruction begins .................. May 12
Memorial Day (no classes) ............................ May 26
Final exams begin ....................................... June 7
Summer Term 2 instruction begins .................... June 9
Independence Day (no classes) ....................... July 4
Instruction ends ......................................... July 31, noon
Final exams begin ....................................... Aug. 1
Final exams end ......................................... Aug. 8

Fall Semester 2008
Instruction begins ....................................... Aug. 25
Labor Day (no classes) ................................. Sept. 1
Thanksgiving vacation begins ......................... Nov. 22
Instruction resumes .................................... Dec. 1
Instruction ends ........................................ Dec. 10
Reading day .............................................. Dec. 11
Final exams begin ....................................... Dec. 12
Final exams end ......................................... Dec. 19

Spring Semester 2009
Martin Luther King Day (no classes) ............... Jan. 19
Instruction begins ....................................... Jan. 20
Spring vacation begins ................................ March 21
Instruction resumes .................................... March 30
Instruction ends ........................................ May 6
Reading day .............................................. May 7
Final exams begin ....................................... May 8
Final exams end ......................................... May 15
Commencement ......................................... May 17

Spring 2008
Dear Parents,

I have the best job in the world. I get to watch our students harness and transform their idealism into reality. At Illinois, our goals for students are as ambitious as their own: to prepare them to tackle and solve the most difficult problems facing the world, including the challenges that concern energy, environment, health and food. We want them to become the kind of world leaders who have gone on to do everything from creating YouTube and PayPal to running companies such as Microsoft and General Electric. Most importantly, we want them to have productive and meaningful lives.

Additionally, I witness how our young men and women contribute their time and energy to the betterment of our region. Their outpouring of volunteerism in the Champaign-Urbana community and beyond is inspiring. Last year, 14,577 student volunteers donated 78,412 hours to 200 area agencies. How’s that for public engagement?

And, in many instances, our students – your sons and daughters – make significant contributions to the world even before they leave the university.

Here are just three recent shining examples (There are many more!): Patrick Walsh, one of our physics majors and member of Engineers Without Borders, recently won a Mondialogo Engineering Award 2007 for developing solar-powered LED lanterns for the replacement of kerosene lanterns in the developing world. These innovative lanterns could save 60 percent of a family’s lighting budget – a substantial part of overall spending – over the long term, thus benefiting those who live without a dependable power grid.

Many of the people who will use Patrick’s lantern live in Africa, where 14 of our students traveled over winter break with economics professor Richard Akresh to Burkina Faso, one of a dozen countries students can visit through the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences’ Courses Abroad program.

The students met with officials from various non-governmental organizations and government agencies in the capital city of Ouagadougou to learn about some of the agriculture, health and micro-finance projects recently launched in villages throughout the countryside.

For Jessica Horn, a graduate student in African studies, the overarching lesson was that “there is more to Africa than poverty and chaos.” Erin Woods, who is majoring in sociology and psychology, said, “The people in Burkina Faso are the friendliest, most generous people I’ve ever met.” Erin plans to use her experience for a career in international development. Erin has lost none of her idealism. She wants to make the world a better place.

Ian Clausen, a senior in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, is the first University of Illinois student in more than 10 years to be awarded a Marshall Scholarship, for graduate study in the United Kingdom.

Ian, who is majoring in religious studies and English, will begin studying in fall 2008 at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland to earn advanced degrees in theology and ethics and heresiology and ethics. His interest in theology and ethics – and the separation between them, as well as their political aspects – caught fire at the U. of I. when he took a course in early Christianity from Richard Layton, a professor of religious studies.

David Schug, program director for Scholarships for International Study, says the Marshall Program searches for “difference makers,” just like Ian. “Most students come to college and say, ‘Some day I want to do this or that,’ Ian came here and began doing things right away. He is a standout student, on a campus with many standout students, who will do great things in his life.”

Yes, our students do great things. They take it to heart when we tell them that Illinois is a place where you and I can change the world.

Sincerely,

Richard H. Herman