

Outlook

Oakton Community College Vol. 9, No. 1, 2011



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At the opening of the 2011 academic year, President Margaret B. Lee inspired members of the Oakton community to “do good work.” She remarked, “None of us can do good work alone. It takes all of us to carry out the mission that we share, the promises we commit to keep when we work in this place. . . . Whatever our roles or titles are, we share in work that changes lives.” This issue of *Outlook* vividly captures some examples of mighty “good work”—from an unusual tandem course based on the hit series *The Wire*, to a lunar robot competing at NASA, to a professor who recognizes the importance of pursuing a lifelong dream. Inside and outside the classroom, members of the Oakton community work together, puzzling out answers to problems and demonstrating the power of collective thinking and collaboration. These stories underscore the ethos of Oakton—and the “good work” that engenders intellectual curiosity and an unbridled passion for learning.

—The Editors

Oakton Community College

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Founded in 1969, Oakton Community College (District 535) includes Maine, Evanston, New Trier, Niles, and Northfield Townships and serves the residents of Des Plaines, Evanston, Glencoe, Glenview, Golf, Kenilworth, Lincolnwood, Morton Grove, Niles, Northbrook, Northfield, Park Ridge, Skokie, Wilmette, and Winnetka.

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Cover: Members of Oakton's Engineering and Physics Club visited the Science and Arts Academy in Des Plaines last April to show off HOPE, the 'lunabot' they designed for NASA's Second Annual Lunabotics Mining Competition in May.

Opposite page: Oakton's production of Manjula Padmanabhan's *Harvest* told the dark and terrible tale of Om (Jonathan McFarlane), who seeks to raise his family's standard of living by contracting to "donate" his body organs to wealthy westerners.

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Drug gangs. Corrupt police officers. Is this any way to teach management and English? For professors Tracy Fulce and Will Crawford, fans of *The Wire*, the answer is an emphatic yes.

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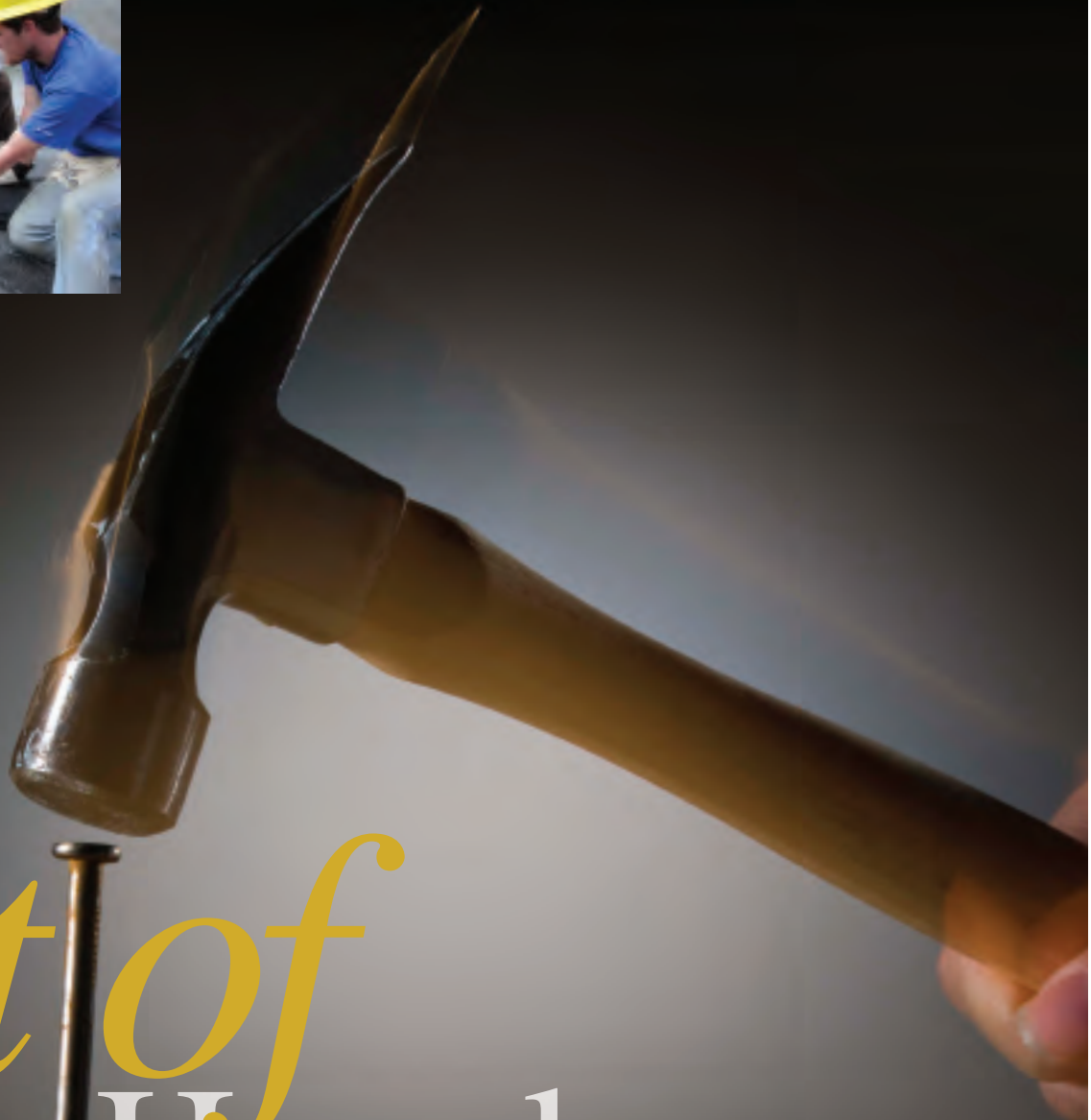
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Out of
Homelessness
One Nail at a Time





EVERY EVENING the Oakton Builders passed a nail around the circle. As it made its way from hand to hand, each member shared stories and thoughts garnered from their day spent creating homes for those who have none.

The 12-member group had traveled down to Oak Ridge, Tennessee, during Oakton’s spring break to work with Habitat for Humanity. But the journey really began last fall when student Nick Frankel and Marvin Bornschlegl, a coordinator in Oakton’s Human Services and Substance Abuse Counseling Programs, spearheaded the process of becoming a Habitat college chapter. Perhaps best known for its affiliation with former President Jimmy Carter, Habitat has brought volunteers and partner families together to construct more than 400,000 affordable homes around the globe.

College chapters are required to “educate, advocate, fund raise, and build,” and plans immediately got underway to incorporate three of these goals into one ambitious project: a temporary “shanty town” erected on Oakton’s Skokie campus to raise awareness about homelessness and collect donations. But to round out the picture, the chapter still needed a building project.

Oakton Builders is part of Habitat’s Lake County Affiliate, which does offer volunteer opportunities. But groups must cover their own costs, and ironically, it

was less expensive to leave home. In the end, Tennessee’s Anderson County Affiliate offered the best fit.

Funded by t-shirt sale proceeds, general donations, and a grant from the Student Government Association, the team hit the road in March—accompanied by Bornschlegl and Nancy Schneider, an instructor of human services. “Habitat has always been one of my charities of choice,” Schneider notes. “When the call went out for faculty advisors, I jumped at the chance.”

The trip was a revelation. “I didn’t know anyone when we left Chicago,” says student Katie Rosenberg, “but by the end of the week, I felt like my team members were family.” On the first day, the group took a hike along the Appalachian Trail. “That’s when we started to bond,” recalls student Ryan Jarta. “Parts of the trail were pretty treacherous—we really had to rely on each other for safety. That trust carried over into the rest of the week.”

Back from the hike, the Oakton Builders set to work. One group re-roofed an entire house. Those who were happier with their feet on the ground tackled landscaping and yard clean-up at a second house. And a third group lent a hand at Habitat’s resale store, which had been partially gutted by fire. “That was my job,” recalls Rosenberg. “I was moving boxes, furniture—even toilets—out of the smoke-

damaged area. Everyone had such a positive attitude and just wanted to help.”

“It was truly amazing to see how quickly the students formed bonds and came together,” says Schneider. “Other volunteer groups couldn’t believe that most of us had just met.” “They were awe-inspiring,” Bornschlegl adds, “with so much to offer Habitat—and each other.”

Which brings us back to the nail. As students and advisors gathered each evening to reflect on their experience, the nail served as a kind of “totem,” guiding discussion and connecting members. On the last day, they stood by as that nail fastened the final roof shingle. For the homeowner family—a single mother and her daughters—that nail was the final step in their journey out of homelessness.

The experience energized the group, with many of the participants planning a second trip—this time to the Habitat Affiliate in Holland, Michigan—and work continues on the shanty town project. “It’s so important to offer service opportunities to students,” Jarta says. “Because once they get ‘hooked,’ it’s a habit that can last a lifetime.”

Above, from left: Danny Dillon, Nancy Schneider, Kyungmun Kwak (Josh), Ellie Mercado, Alfred R. Hegyes, Patrick Sherman, Nicholas Frankel, Elizabeth Perricone, Robbie Zoline, Lety Herrera, Ryan Jarta, Jenny Rhine, Marvin Bornschlegl, and Katie Rosenberg. Opposite page, inset: Lety Herrera (left) and Danny Dillon (right) assist in roofing a Habitat home.

Sheep Thrills



RON THOMAS counts sheep—but not to get to sleep! Four years ago this professor of management at Oakton and his wife Jill said goodbye to their suburban and confining domicile in Niles, Illinois, and headed to the country with their three Anatolian Shepherds to pursue a lifelong dream—raising Katahdin Hair Sheep.

Their destination, Savanna Farm, sits on 8.5 acres of prairie nearly 40 miles north and east of the College. Nestled in a secluded, idyllic area just south of the Wisconsin border, Savanna Farm boasts a pond; hundreds of mature oaks; a robust fruit orchard with apple, pear, and cherry trees; hummingbird gardens; and enough pasture land to accommodate a flock of 50 ewes, lambs, and a ram.

Thomas can identify each one in the herd—Amaretto... Aristotle... Bailey... Beyonce... BonBon... Buttermilk... Coal... Crystal... Listen Missy... Millie... Mocha... to name just a few—and they respond when called, bleating and thundering toward their owner who may have some clover or other treat up his sleeve.

Katahdins, an amazing breed developed in north central Maine by Michael Piel, do not produce a fleece and therefore require no shearing. In cold weather they grow a dense winter coat that sheds in the warmer months. The sheep devour 25 bales of hay each week, delivered to the farm by a nearby agricultural service.

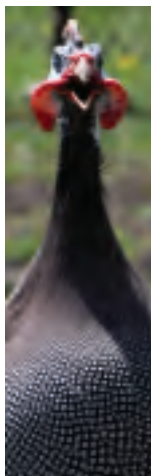
Thomas sells between 15 and 20

of his Katahdins each year for breeding, and he takes great pride in the exceptional quality of his livestock. “Savanna Farm is chemical-free,” he notes, “and the sheep receive the best of care. In fact, our animals are an integral part of our family and home.”

For Thomas, teaching at Oakton and living on a working farm provides the ideal way of life. Before leaving for the College to face his students, he bottle feeds three lambs in the barn—Elly May, Ebb, and Ebony—and checks on six guinea fowls that provide natural pest control by eating ticks, flies, and other pesky insects.

“The guinea fowls rule the pasture,” Thomas chuckles, “and their distinctive and edgy call provides a first alert to imminent danger such as a coyote.” He also puts out some hay for Bacchus the ram, taking care to keep his distance from this rather aggressive and high-spirited 300-pound member of the clan.

While farming remains tough work with its around-the-clock responsibilities, Thomas considers his days on the Savanna Farm to be a perpetual vacation—and the perfect antidote for stress. “We just don’t feel the need to get away,” he explains, pointing over his shoulder at the gently rolling land with barely a neighbor in sight. “After all, how many people do you know who get to cuddle and feed baby lambs?”



Putting It On the Wire



WHAT DOES IT TAKE to successfully manage a business? Is “success” defined by whether or not a business is legal? Do effective leadership skills apply only in the board room, or are they equally valuable in—for example—a drug-dealing organization?

Is this what students are learning at Oakton?

Well, yes—if the class is built around HBO’s award-winning series *The Wire*. Last spring, ten students approached the College’s “Principles of Management” and “Composition I” classes through the prism of the show in a unique “learning community.” Team-taught by Tracy Fulce, assistant professor of marketing and management, and Will Crawford, associate professor of English (pictured top right), the course used the series to cast a new light on management and communication.

Focused on Baltimore’s police department and the powerful Barksdale drug gang, *The Wire*, which ended its run in 2008, enjoys the reputation as one of the best television dramas ever produced. Fulce and Crawford are passionate fans, but when Fulce floated the idea of collaborating on a class based on the show, Crawford was a little surprised—at first. “I saw how the concept could work for English - the way one uses a book or a poem - but wasn’t sure about the fit for management,” he admits.

Fulce points out that *The Wire* brings many management concepts to life in an easy-to-understand way. “For example,”



From the *The Wire*, courtesy HBO/David Lee

she explains, “coercion—that is, motivating by fear—is a standard tactic described in management textbooks. It’s used frequently in *The Wire* – by cops and criminals alike.” Crawford was sold, especially as he already had seen how the use of music, films, and television shows could enliven traditional composition classes. In fact, *The Wire* served both their needs. “The content is really rich in terms of story line, character development, organizational behavior, management techniques, and communications,” says Fulce.

Throughout the class, the show inspired the coursework. “Tell me about Stringer Bell’s leadership qualities,” Fulce would ask, challenging students to consider the ways in which this character effectively manages a complex drug empire. Crawford’s paper assignments echoed the theme: “Write a five-page essay that evaluates a particular character or entity from *The Wire*.” He encouraged

students to analyze how characters communicate with each other—and how that interaction relates to leadership abilities. The two also drew on other sources to throw further light on the topic—from Rapper Nas’ *A New York State of Mind* to the films *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* and *Killing Us Softly: Advertising’s Image of Women*.

“Early on, the students didn’t see how *The Wire* related to their quest to become successful managers. What did Baltimore drug dealers have to do with that?” explains Crawford. But as he and Fulce worked through the material, they were able to make the connection. “All of the characters—criminals or not—want to live the American Dream,” he notes. And regardless of which side of the wire these characters are on, they use the same management and supervisory skills to achieve that goal.

“Most powerfully,” Crawford continues, “when criminal characters finally do escape ‘the street’ for Wall Street, they often find that it’s no less corrupt than the world they’ve left behind.”

Fulce and Crawford both consider the course a success—certainly, discussions were lively and student feedback was positive—and both believe that *The Wire* remains a valuable teaching tool: one they plan to use again. “During my time at Oakton, this team-taught class has been one of my most satisfying collaborative work experiences,” concludes Fulce. “I think we were able to really do something special.”



Holding Out HOPE



MOVING TEN KILOGRAMS of “lunar material” doesn’t seem like an insurmountable challenge (that is, once you reach the moon), but what if you couldn’t use a shovel? What if you had to move the material in 15 minutes, from a distance of 60 meters away—using a robot to accomplish the task?

That’s the hurdle students in Oakton’s Engineering and Physics Club sought to jump when they headed to the Kennedy Space Center in late May with their own robot, appropriately dubbed HOPE, for NASA’s Second Annual Lunabotics Mining Competition. Of the 72 colleges and universities that entered the contest (including institutions from India, Spain, and Bangladesh), Oakton was one of only 37 that actually made it to Florida—and the only community college in the mix.

The trip was the culmination of more than six months of work—and it wasn’t always easy. NASA’s key requirement was to “submit an excavation device,

familiarly known as a ‘lunabot,’ capable of remotely scooping lunar dirt.” While NASA imposed no spending cap, Oakton’s team did the job on a budget of less than \$2,000 (by comparison, Florida State University spent \$25,000). “We may have been at a disadvantage financially, but I think that worked in our favor,” says student Mike Mazur, one of the project leaders. “The modest funds really forced us to think creatively.”

The original concept grew out of some unique experiments. “We used LEGO: a fun and easy way to work through a number of possible lunabot designs,” explains Mazur. “I felt like I was five years old again!”

Through trial and error, the group was able to finalize a model in just a few days. Then it was time to put the pieces in place. Most of the lunabot materials—wood, metal, brooms, even a garbage can—came from Home Depot and Menards. A bicycle chain and sprockets also came in handy.





Countdown to NASA

“In simple terms, our concept involved the brooms sweeping material into the garbage can,” Mazur says. To make the ‘bot work, the students reinforced the garbage can with metal, and placed a spinning axle at the front, with two sets of brooms attached.

“I was in awe,” said George Tootelian, instructor of physics and the club’s advisor. “The students worked incredibly hard, giving up nights and weekends. Many of them have ‘day jobs’ too, and they had to fit the work around that. All of them sacrificed an awful lot for this project and showed exceptional commitment.”

Designed to engage and retain students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), the NASA competition also included an outreach component that involved connecting the project with the local community. The Engineering and Physics Club chose to recruit Owen Dudney, a first grade student at the Science and Arts Academy in

Des Plaines, as a member of the team. Dudney met regularly with the club, offered design suggestions, and was the one who gave HOPE its name. In April, the Oakton team took the lunabot to his school.

Then, after a few last minute tweaks, it was off to Florida. Although considered an underdog by some, HOPE held its own during the competition. Of the 37 lunabots, HOPE was one of only 18 that made it to the mining area. With Dudney cheering in the stands, HOPE was successfully scooping up material when a communication glitch caused the robot to continue rolling forward. After a short climb up the wall of the pit, the ‘bot tipped over, effectively ending its participation.

A success? To the Oakton team, there’s no question about it. As Mazur points out, “After all, our lunabot’s treads worked so well that it was actually able to *climb* the wall! Other robots just bumped into it.”

“HOPE really did make an impressive showing against teams with far more resources—including the University of Illinois,” adds Professor of Mathematics Andy Roach, who traveled with the group. “Many of the other robots were formal senior design or graduate engineering projects—or even university-wide interdepartmental collaborations.”

“We had a shoe-string budget and HOPE was essentially an extracurricular project,” adds Mazur. “And still, Oakton was a viable contender in this international competition. We’re really proud of that.”

Above, from left: The Oakton team at NASA (front row), Valentina Krug, Owen Dudney, Mike Mazur, Faheem Memon, Kyle Uhl, John Shaba, and instructor George Tootelian; (back row) Professor Andrew Roach, Dan Kramer, and Blake Levien.

F d Matters



CHOOSING ORGANIC produce, eating locally, steering clear of wasteful fast-food restaurants: healthy eating is inexorably linked to a healthy planet. It's a multifaceted topic—one that rippled through campus last year as Oakton launched "Food Matters," one of the College's service learning initiatives.

Through service learning, students apply classroom knowledge to benefit the community—from working in a homeless shelter to helping low-income families prepare their tax returns. When Oakton received a \$3,000 grant from the American Association of Community Colleges to develop service projects with an environmental focus, the nexus between good nutrition and going green seemed like a natural.

To kick things off, the College sponsored a series of professional development workshops last fall covering such topics as the socio-economic impact of a "cheap food policy," health and nutrition, food production, and the "farm-to-school" movement. Gaining a deeper understanding of the environmental, social, economic, and personal consequences of current food production and distribution methods—and about healthy and sustainable alternatives—faculty took these concepts back to the classroom, weaving them into unique service projects.

Cost Matters

Assistant Professor of Economics Elena Ermolenko-Fein focused her class on investigating how demand, supply, cost, and regulation affect student food choices.

One team developed a survey that measured student demand for healthy meals. Not surprisingly, the price of food carried more influence than its nutritional value. To learn more about the "supply side" on Oakton's campus, a second team analyzed the dining options at the cafeteria—useful information for the College's Wellness Committee, which is consulting with food vendor Sodexo to widen the range of healthy options on its menu.

The cost team split up, half buying fast-food meals and half preparing similar meals using healthier ingredients at

home. The cost differential was substantial: three fast-food meals a day cost about \$18; sticking with home-cooked meals cost just over \$19 each week.

With data in hand, the regulations team identified policies that might encourage better eating habits on campus—from introducing internal competition to offering student discounts on healthier choices.

Soil Detectives

While the economics class focused on Oakton itself, Associate Professor Bess Kershisnik's chemistry class literally left the building to dig into healthy eating. Partnering with Walker and Dewey Elementary Schools in Evanston, they delved into the chemistry that keeps produce in the pink—or green, as it were.

Both schools had created small gardens to teach students about plant life and growing nutritious food. But healthy plants rely on healthy soil, and here Oakton's students were able to help. After collecting soil samples at each school, they met with the young gardeners to dish the dirt. To thrive, they explained, plants need soil with the proper proportions of loam, sand, silt, and clay—and the proper balance of chemicals such as potassium, phosphorus, and nitrogen.

Then, the students headed back to Oakton's lab. Once their soil analysis was complete, they returned to both schools, presented a final report, and made a few recommendations. Among other things, the group discovered that compost at one school contained too much orange peel, ultimately resulting in poorer soil quality.

Locally Grown

Ideally, everyone should eat locally: minimizing transport reduces gasoline use and CO² emissions. But where are the restaurants in Oakton's district buying their food? To find out, Professor Ron Thomas' Introduction to Business class designed a "Farm to Chef" survey that explored restaurants' use of fruits, vegetables, herbs, dairy products, eggs, and meat produced within a 200-mile radius.

Students conducted interviews at 43 area restaurants, asking chefs if they

purchased locally-produced food. If the answer was no, they asked why. Was it the price? A lack of seasonal variety? The difficulty of finding good, reliable farms? And if these stumbling blocks were removed, would the restaurant consider "going local?"

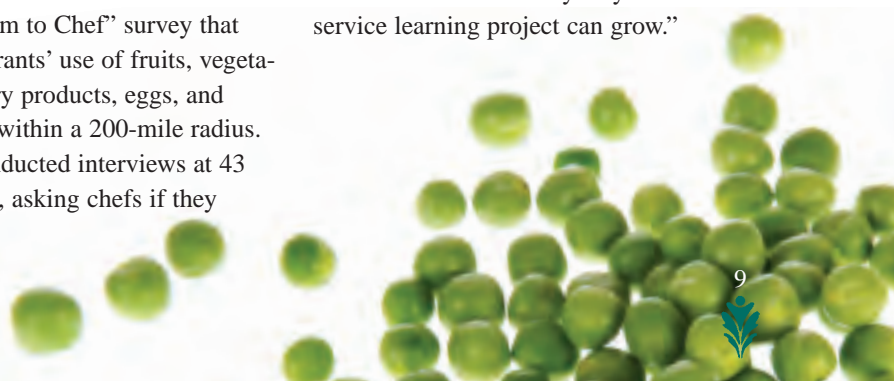
Preliminary feedback suggests that most restaurants do not buy close to home. For Thomas, a farmer himself (see page 4), it's an opportunity to raise awareness. He plans to share the data with the Illinois Department of Agriculture and its Farmers Market Network. "Most local farmers grow corn, wheat, and soybeans, and restaurants need a wider variety," he points out. "But they would certainly be receptive to sourcing food locally if it were easier to reliably find the products they need."

Healthy Eating in Plain English

For English Professor Virginia Gibbons, the way to incorporate ideas about healthy eating into her composition course seemed obvious: write about it! The first step was to invite staff from Evanston's Talking Farm into the classroom. This "farm with something to say" offers a range of programs to raise awareness about production and appreciation of locally grown food, and the organization played a key role in the Food Matters initiative.

After learning about about food production, nutrition, and building sustainable communities, students responded with opinion essays on everything from obesity in America to reforming current food production systems. Then, the class paid a visit to the Talking Farm.

As summer classes progress, Gibbons remains enthusiastic. "I'm hoping to get my summer students out of the classroom and into the community garden at Oakton's Skokie campus," she says. "As for the fall—who knows? But I'd like to do more. There are so many ways this service learning project can grow."



Another

Look
Look
Look



s Undergraduate Research Collaborative



Sea buckthorn by elgi

NINE YEARS AGO, Oakton broke new ground by launching one of only two community college undergraduate research collaboratives in the country. A year later, *Outlook's* first issue showcased the fledgling program (“Student Research Goes Molecular,” Vol. 1, No. 1).

Otherwise known as “Bio/Chem 240,” the unique program gives first- and second-year students the opportunity to tackle research generally reserved for more advanced students at four-year institutions. Indeed the URC has flourished—with some changes along the way.

Outlook's 2003 piece featured three very different, individual projects. But as Michael Carr, chair and professor of biology, explains, “It was difficult to make much progress in a single semester.” Now, the URC keeps the focus on one research topic over a number of years—but under this “umbrella,” students may head in any direction. It’s a hands-on experience: teams design their own experiments, collect data, interpret results, and present their findings at the College and in various other venues.

Battling Buckthorn

For the past three years, the Collaborative has turned its attention to buckthorn. This invasive plant has spread rapidly through the area (including Oakton’s Des Plaines campus), destroying native flora and wreaking havoc on the local eco-system.

Buckthorn probably arrived courtesy of Dr. John Kennicott, original owner of The Grove in Glenview. The good doctor imported the plant from Europe in the 1800s for use as an ornamental hedge, not realizing that buckthorn has no natural predators in Illinois. But exactly how *does* buckthorn muscle out native species? Students in Bio/Chem 240 are well on their way to finding out.

Here’s what we know: some native seeds refuse to germinate in the presence of buckthorn. Even with the plant

removed, the soil remains hostile to native species. The culprit appears to be chemicals in the buckthorn berry. This year one team researched whether native seeds could overcome the “berry barrier” if treated with a plant growth hormone. “Some treated seeds were able to germinate in the presence of berry extract,” reports Carr. “So the hormone does seem to help.” Work continues to validate these results.

A second team got the dirt on buckthorn-contaminated soil. One hypothesis is that the bacteria in the soil actually *changes* in the presence of buckthorn, affecting a plant’s root system and growth. Through genetic testing, students sought to identify the bacteria in buckthorn-tainted soil and compare it to bacteria found in native ecosystems.

A third group delved into the mystery of why native seeds don’t germinate in this soil by laboriously grinding up tomato seeds in liquid nitrogen, boiling the resulting powder, and measuring carbohydrate levels in germinating and non-germinating seeds. Preliminary data suggests that the native seeds’ metabolism alters in the presence of buckthorn berry chemicals.

Researching in the Real World

Today the URC enjoys a national reputation because of its unique advantages. For example, four biology and two chemistry professors guide the work—an atypical, cross-disciplinary approach. Structuring the work around a class is also unusual: generally students participate in research programs through independent study.

In fact, Oakton students often enroll in independent study once the course ends to continue their work. “They are passionate about their projects,” Carr says. “The class is four hours a week, but many students arrive early, stay late, and put in extra time.”

Another enhancement since the program’s early days is a full-time, ten-week,

paid internship for students at a range of institutions, including Northwestern University, Loyola University, and the Chicago Botanic Garden. Funded by grants from the National Science Foundation and Oakton’s Educational Foundation, students get a first-hand look at professional research, while employers gain skilled help—definitely a win-win relationship.

Inspiring Internship

For student Sheila Behzadi-Teshnizi, last summer’s internship at Illinois State University was transformative. “We researched a particular parasite that causes disease in humans,” she recounts, “and it truly opened my eyes to how classroom learning applies in the real world.” Behzadi-Teshnizi will pursue a degree in molecular biology, with an emphasis on research, when she transfers to Loyola University this fall, and she credits Oakton’s program with her decision. “The Undergraduate Research Collaborative had an enormous impact,” she says. “I knew nothing about research when I signed up for the class. Now, I absolutely love it.”

Oakton’s interns also have garnered high praise from their summer employers. “The feedback has been phenomenal,” says Carr. “This program clearly sets students on the path to be successful in a wide range of research careers.” The *New York Times* agrees. Its 2007 article, “For Achievers, a New Destination,” singled out Oakton—and specifically its undergraduate research experience—for special mention, noting that the College was one of those institutions “most frequently named as models” across the country.

With such stellar credentials, the next decade holds much promise. “Although Federal grant funding remains unpredictable,” Carr admits, “Oakton—and the Educational Foundation—are incredibly supportive. I’m confident that the program will continue to thrive.”



From Oakton's Stage... To the Stars

A GRIM-FACED group of congressional leaders listens as Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke warns that the U.S. Banking System will collapse without a substantial loan from the federal government. He has the figures to prove it. Stunned, Nevada Senator Harry Reid barks, “You ask us for \$700 billion dollars and all you give us is this paper?”

But look closely: that’s not Chairman Bernanke—it’s actor Paul Giamatti. And he’s pleading not with Senator Reid, but with Bud Jones: Park Ridge resident, Oakton theater student, and cast member in HBO’s recently-aired film *Too Big to Fail*, which chronicles the 2008 Wall Street financial crisis.

Jones is no stranger to the film set or the stage. Since the 1980s, he has appeared in local theater productions and commercials, and he’s had walk-on roles

in such films as *Public Enemies*, *A League of Their Own*, and *The Blues Brothers*. But playing a real-life character—with dialogue—alongside the likes of Giamatti, Ed Asner, William Hurt, and James Woods was something new. And he gives Oakton the credit.

A classic “non-traditional” student, Jones arrived at Oakton’s door after a 23-year career in the U.S. Marine Corps—serving as a ground officer and then as a pilot—and a successful civilian career in public relations and marketing. Acting had always been on the back burner, but retirement gave him the time he needed to put it front and center.

For two years, Jones studied with Patti Interrante, professor of speech and theater. “Bud was a great student, open and ready for anything” she says. “He took risks in class—and that helped him

prepare for the HBO film.” Jones agrees. “Oakton really helped me hone my acting skills. I learned more in Patti’s courses than I ever did in the business,” he notes. “They boosted my self-confidence and improved my line memorization skills.” Jones took full advantage of the College’s vibrant performing arts program, appearing in its 2010 *Play On* student playwriting festival, which features six one-act plays written and directed by community college students.

Oakton’s theater curriculum left him ready for just about anything, so when the opportunity to audition for *Too Big to Fail* came up last November, he didn’t hesitate. “I did the video audition on a Friday,” he remembers, “and by Monday night I was on a flight to New York. Why me? I don’t know. The director told me they wanted ‘fresh faces,’ not ‘New York’ faces.”

It was quite an experience. “I traveled first class and had my own dressing room with a star on it,” he recalls. “I even had someone styling my hair, handling my wardrobe, and providing food.” But the job could also be grueling, and in the end, an actor never really knows what will end up on the screen. When *Too Big to Fail* aired on May 23, that scene featuring Bernanke—which took, by Jones’ reckoning, ten hours to shoot—was reduced to three minutes of screen time. “That’s show biz, I guess,” he says philosophically.

Still, there are compensations: Jones did have a chance to hob knob with the stars. “William Hurt and Paul Giamatti are really down to earth people,” he reports, adding that Hurt, who has an interest in aviation, quizzed him about his Marine pilot days.

With his HBO appearance behind him, Jones is moving on to the next challenge. You can catch him this summer in *Suessical the Musical* at Des Plaines’ Footlighters Theatre Company. But his experience with *Too Big to Fail* is, simply, too big to forget. “It’s something I’ll treasure,” he says, “and Oakton played a big role in making it happen.”





That Day in May: Couch to 5K

Some 400 members of the Oakton community participated in the first annual Couch to 5K Run/Walk on May 12, 2011. Sponsored by the College's Wellness Committee, the event attracted administrators, faculty, staff, and students who began training in January. After completing the three-mile route around the Des Plaines campus, participants enjoyed an outdoor barbeque and live music from the Suburban Cowboys.