

SPRING 2010

Saint Benedict's Saint John's

MAGAZINE



THE MAKING OF COPENHAGEN

CSB & SJU Students Create Film of Conference on Climate Change

COLLEGE OF
Saint Benedict



Saint John's
UNIVERSITY

Students explore New Zealand's majestic Milford Sound during their spring 2009 study abroad. CSB and SJU are ranked No. 2 nationally among baccalaureate institutions for number of students who study abroad in semester-long programs, according to a published report by the Institute of International Education. Photo by Chad Stanton '10





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CAMPUS CONNECTIONS

Jackson Fellow Trades Comfort Zone for the Poverty Zone

By Emily Bina '11



Mike and Professor Matt Lindstrom, director of the McCarthy Center for Public Policy and Civic Engagement.

For many college students, summer internships are spent engaged in menial tasks.

Don't tell Mike Johnson '10, SJU senior political science major. His 2009 summer internship at Southern Minnesota Regional Legal Services in St. Paul wasn't about making coffee or organizing file cabinets.

"I wanted to get out of my comfort zone, working for the poorest in our society," Johnson says.

Johnson was one of nine recipients of a 2009 Marie and Robert Jackson Civic Engagement Fellowship — a program administered by the Eugene J. McCarthy Center for Public Policy and Civic Engagement. Fellows are chosen across all academic disciplines and receive a stipend for 10 weeks of work at a non-profit organization of their choice.

Students are responsible for contacting internship sites, setting up interviews and confirming an internship placement on their own. The challenge is by design, says Marah Jacobson-Schulte, CSB/SJU director of service learning and co-director of the Jackson Fellowship.

"The Fellows are typically uncomfortable in the beginning, but this experience gives them a realistic picture of life after college," Jacobson-Schulte says.

Many of the Fellows gained life-changing experiences and new perspectives during the program. Johnson recalls his own life-changing experience.

One day he received a phone call from a woman named Deborah who did not qualify for most forms of housing assistance, but needed an apartment that could accommodate her and her quadriplegic grandson.

"At first glance, there wasn't much I could do for her, but I was so touched by Deborah's story that I worked the phones all day, getting small financial commitments from multiple community partners," he says.

He eventually got enough money for her to pay the security deposit on a new apartment in a much better living situation, and even negotiated an early release from her previous lease with no penalty.

"I was so happy at what I had accomplished, and when I called to tell her the good news, she broke down in tears thanking me for my work. I cried too," Johnson says. "I knew that I had made a difference in Deborah's life and knew that I wanted to make a difference in others' as well — I then figured out what I wanted to do with my life."

Johnson's story is typical of stories shared by Jackson Fellows.

"CSB and SJU are committed to public service and getting involved in the local and wider communities. That's exactly what the Jackson Fellowship accomplishes," Johnson says.

Emily Bina is a junior at CSB, majoring in communication. She was selected as a 2009 Robert and Marie Jackson Fellowship recipient and spent 10 weeks interning with SJU graduate Gary Eichten on Minnesota Public Radio's "The Midday Show."

Student Volunteers Explore Tanzania, and Their Own Futures

By Christa Schmidt '11

Last May, 10 CSB and SJU students traveled to Tanzania, East Africa, for a month-long service/immersion trip. They learned as much about themselves and each other as they learned about the people they went to serve.

A year ago, most of them had never met, and they had little in common. Their academic majors ranged from natural and social sciences, to accounting, elementary education, nursing and languages. Now, they are friends, and they say they will never be the same.

CSB senior Mikaela Dunn had already spent a semester in Greece and Rome. "Europe was great, but going to a developing country was much more meaningful because it helped me learn simplicity. Some people had so little, but they were so happy. Here, we have so much and still can't find happiness."

"They might not have much," SJU sophomore Brady Dietman says, "but they give it away, and they're happy to do it."

All 10 students are considering volunteering after graduation. Some, like Dietman, had already planned on volunteering.

"In Tanzania, I saw what I could do, and a little bit of what I might expect as a volunteer, and it really cemented my decision," he says.

For others, like CSB senior Cortney Bystrom, the experience has made them consider volunteering for the first time.

"I would have never considered volunteering before this trip," says Bystrom, an elementary education major. "Working in classrooms, it was really shocking to see how few resources they had, but they made the most of them. Everyone was really passionate about learning."

SJU senior Munkhbaatar "Mogi" Baatar also noticed the students' dedication to learning. He and other CSB and SJU students helped tutor kids until nine or 10 o'clock at night. Some of the kids had yet to leave the classroom.

Originally from Mongolia, Baatar also noticed similarities between Tanzania and his home country. "I was ahead of the game even before we got there. Watching everyone learn to wash clothes by hand was absolutely hilarious," he says. "Everyone in our group had really different personalities, but I think we all bonded really well, which is what made the trip so enjoyable."

Now back on campus, the group frequently gathers for Tanzanian *chakula* (food), practicing the bits of Swahili they learned and reminiscing about their experience.



Fashion Sense

Jenny Holmseth '10 transformed parts from an ordinary abandoned car into a whimsical evening gown, for her submission in the CSB/SJU Senior Preview, an exhibition of works by art majors.



Adam Koniczewski



Dan Anderson and Megan Priebe demonstrate a dip.



Br. David Paul Lange and Anna Bergstrom conclude their energetic cha-cha.



S. Trish Dick and Donald Pavelka glide around the dance floor.

Photos courtesy of CSB/SJU Ballroom Dance Club

Students Cut the Rug with Monastic Partners

By A. Durham '10

The monks of Saint John's Abbey and the Sisters of the Order of Saint Benedict are known for their trademark hospitality. Students at CSB and SJU have discovered another talent of these Benedictine men and women. They can boogie.

Last spring, on the occasion of the Feast of Saint Benedict, students from the campus Ballroom Dance Club joined hands with Benedictine volunteers to present "Dancing with the Monastics," a campus version of ABC's popular television show "Dancing with the Stars." The event was such a hit — attracting more than 350 spectators — organizers are planning another one for this year.

The network version pairs celebrities with professional dance instructors who compete weekly. The student event matched Benedictines with officers of the Ballroom Dance Club. Each couple performed one dance. A panel of judges scored the couples, and the winners, junior instructor Anna Bergstrom and Br. David Paul Lange, were announced at the end of the night for their precise cha-cha performance.

"The monastics are sort of like celebrities here, so it fits," says senior instructor Dan Anderson. "It humanizes them for the

people who see the event or see the pictures of nuns and monks doing lifts."

Sophomore club instructor Donald Pavelka describes an evening of surprises.

"A lot of the officers were surprised by how well all the monastics could dance. And the monastics were surprised at how much fun it was. It was a great way to get a lot of students and monastics together," Pavelka says.

S. Eunice Antony agrees.

"She was so kind!" S. Eunice says of her partner, sophomore instructor Megan Priebe. The duo danced a salsa and had their picture featured with an article published by the *St. Cloud Times* newspaper.

"Megan didn't give up on me and she encouraged me. It was a great way to connect with the college students. They keep me young," S. Eunice says.

"It was a fun night," she says, noting that the audience was a mix of monastics sitting next to students. "You didn't have to know each other; you just joined in the fun."

By evening's end, the fun proved contagious, with audience members and judges on their feet and dancing as well.

Like Magic, A Dream Comes True: SJU Student Shares Talents of Magic and Illusion with Campus Community

By Michael Hemmesch '97

Jared Sherlock knew exactly what he wanted. As a prospective student, he visited the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University with his parents. During a tour of the Benedicta Arts Center at CSB, Sherlock sized up the 1,000-seat auditorium. He imagined himself performing magic on stage there, before a packed house.

He described his grand plan to Kaarin Johnston, CSB/SJU professor of theater, who was giving the tour, and asked if it would be possible for him, as a student, to book the auditorium, collaborate with students, faculty and staff, and produce and perform a program of illusion.

She gave the right answer.

Fast forward two-and-a-half years to Jan. 22, 2010, opening night of Sherlock's two-night CSB/SJU debut, *Night Games*. Anticipation runs high among audience members in the sold-out Benedicta Arts Center. Sherlock's dream has come true.

Being on stage is literally magic for Jared Sherlock.

"Performing has always been a part of my personality from very early in my life," says Jared, an Indianapolis native and now an SJU junior. He started performing magic at the age of 8, trained with the Society of Young Magicians and very quickly started booking shows in a variety of local Indiana venues.

In 2000, he established his own Indiana-based production company, The Magic of Jared Sherlock. Critically acclaimed for its collaborative and affecting performances, the company features a high energy and eclectic show for audiences of all ages.

A magician at heart and humanitarian in training, he also established his own charitable foundation called "Arts Now," which helps people overcome obstacles and achieve their dreams. "There is nothing more rewarding than using your gifts and talent to change the lives of others. It is the ultimate reward," he says.

Sherlock's show, *Night Games*, fused modern magic and illusions with comedy, dancing, storytelling and rock concert lighting to create a modern day variety show.

The production involved nearly 40 CSB and SJU students, faculty and staff. "The faculty and staff worked tirelessly with me to provide the personnel necessary to run a production of this magnitude. This is the first-ever student-run production in the fine arts program and it has been an amazing collaborative effort," he says.

Sherlock is pursuing an individualized major in entrepreneurship and theater at SJU to help him prepare for the business side of his productions. He recently performed at the inauguration concert for Fr. Robert Koopmann, OSB, SJU president, and at halftime of a SJU basketball game.



Photo courtesy of Jared Sherlock



Students meet Guatemalan indigenous rights activist Rigoberta Menchú, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992. Back row (left to right): Alex Ludescher, Chris Morgan, Mike Lenczewski, Doug Trumm, Becky Suhr, Sarah Wildenborg, Kate Westlund. Front row (left to right): Jordan Differding, Stephanie Wegmann, Laura Wildenborg, Maria Gau, Markie Crosby, Rigoberta Menchú, Ellery Eggermont, Shannon Conk, Megan Woodruff.

A Chance Encounter: CSB and SJU Students Meet Nobel Prize Winner

While studying in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, in spring 2009, CSB and SJU students read Rigoberta Menchú's book, *Me Llamo Rigoberta Menchú*, as a way of understanding an indigenous perspective of Guatemala's civil war. Menchú is a Guatemalan indigenous rights activist, known for her documentation of Guatemala's 36 year-long civil war. In 1992, she received the Nobel Peace Prize for her work. Since then, she has organized an indigenous political party in Guatemala, and she ran in the nation's 2007 presidential election.

During their four-month stay in Guatemala, the students heard that Menchú was speaking at a nearby village, and they hopped on a bus to see an internationally known figure.

"The gathering was located in a very small town. The sudden appearance of 15 Americans definitely took the rural Guatemalan village by surprise!" says CSB senior Stephanie Wegmann.

"To be able to meet Rigoberta Menchú in her home country, at a rural indigenous political gathering, and listen to her relay her message in Spanish, rather than English, was the most genuine experience we could have possibly asked for," Wegmann says.

First-year Students Bring Variety, Big Dreams to Campus

By Allison Garrity '10

The first year of college can be a mix of adventure, adjustment and transition. The following profiles of first-year students offer a sampling of the diverse interests and experiences our students bring to campus, and the dreams they hope to pursue.



NATE KING

Athlete, firefighter, woodworker, nursing major. Nate aspires to be a flight nurse — a medical attendant who accompanies paramedics in helicopters. He also trains to become a firefighter at SJU. In the little time between work, school and firefighting, he manages his own business, Northwoods Rustic Furniture, where he creates original furniture with wood he has cut down and debarked. On campus he works at Abbey Woodworking. Although very busy he says, “You gotta do what you love.”

LINDSEY GIDEON

Lindsey has dreamed of being a cardiothoracic surgeon since she was 9. She lists as reasons a desire to help others, a passion for medicine and the mentoring by a local physician. Once a doctor, she plans to set up clinics in Africa or South America and establish a sustainable health care system. Attending a liberal arts college was a big deal for her when she was looking for colleges. A few weeks into the semester she had an aha moment. “I was here and it just felt right.”



BEN SEEFELDT

Ben has found his second home in the CSB/SJU theater department. Although he is majoring in computer science and philosophy, he spends most nights rehearsing for a stage production. He has little spare time; and that’s just the way he wants it. “I like to be really busy. I don’t feel like I am accomplishing things if I’m not busy. CSB and SJU keep me very busy.”



PAIDAMOYO CHIKATE

A native from Zimbabwe, Africa, Paida came to CSB and SJU to fulfill her dream of becoming a lawyer like her mother, aunt and uncle. She appreciates that, at a liberal arts college, she doesn’t have to major in political science to attend law school. She is exploring psychology and sociology as possible majors. Ultimately she hopes to help her country. When she left, her homeland

was in political upheaval. Once she is a lawyer, she hopes to start a program where she will help support students to come to the United States to attend universities.



JENNIFER STREGE

Jennifer hopes to become a military intelligence officer. A member of ROTC and the reigning Miss Perham, she has that rare combination of ROTC discipline and artistic moxie. She started playing the piano at age 5, and has performed in several choirs. As Miss Perham she promotes her platform, Wrap Our Warriors, through a program called Quilts of Valor that raises money and creates quilts for veterans. In June she will compete for Miss Minnesota. “I’ve always had a certain direction that I was going,” and Saint Ben’s and Saint John’s have allowed her to follow the path she has created for herself.



XIAO WANG

Xiao is the ideal liberal arts student, open to new experiences and ideas. “It allows you to stretch out and make yourself a whole person,” he said. An electrical engineering major from China, he has joined the trap shooting club. He also enjoys watching football, although he wonders “why it’s called football when guys are tackling each other. No one’s feet touch the ball!” He also is interested in exploring the Catholic religion, because, in China, “not many students are interested in religion.”



CSB Student Launches

“I never would have thought that I would have ended up doing an internship for NASA. It’s really exciting.”



Internship at

NASA

By Mike Killeen

Juliana Vievering is very much grounded when it comes to her future.

But yet, she sounds a little like “Star Trek’s” Capt. James T. Kirk from the bridge of the starship Enterprise when she talks about the Motivating Undergraduates in Science and Technology (MUST) Project scholarship given to her in 2009 by NASA.

“There is so much out there, it’s kind of overwhelming — but in an exciting way,” says Vievering, a sophomore at the College of Saint Benedict.

Just don’t count on her exploring space anytime soon.

“I would love to be the person behind the scenes, studying everything,” Vievering says.

She will intern with NASA this summer. She had a choice of working at 10 different NASA centers, and has applied to work at Goddard Space Flight Center in Greenbelt, Md.

“Goddard kind of caught my interest, because it does a lot of the studying of space, which is what I’m interested in,” Vievering says.

She was one of 100 undergraduate students from a pool of 600 selected for the program, which awards scholarships to students pursuing degrees in science, technology, engineering or mathematics. She receives a scholarship, the internship, tutoring, access to NASA Webinars and lectures, and mentoring from faculty and peers.

She and the other members of the MUST Project gathered

in August 2009 in Orlando, Fla., to get an orientation to the program.

“I was the only one from Minnesota. There were not too many Midwesterners there,” Vievering says.

One of the highlights was a visit to the nearby Kennedy Space Center.

“That was really cool, because we got to do more insider stuff than what a person might normally get. We got to walk inside the Vehicle Assembly Building, and the space shuttle Discovery was out on the launch pad (39A, ready for an Aug. 28 liftoff),” Vievering says.

“That would have been a cool experience to see it lift off, but it was exciting to see it on the launch pad,” she says.

CSB had always been Vievering’s first choice for her undergraduate studies, but she had considered becoming an architect and had applied to several schools that offered that program. But she stuck with CSB and decided to major in physics and math.

“I felt I would have more options open to me coming here and choosing a major rather than focusing on one particular path,” she says. “I think it’s really interesting to see how interested the world is in liberal arts schools. I think it’s an intriguing thing for many people.

“I never would have thought that I would have ended up doing an internship for NASA. It’s really exciting.”





THE MAKING OF COPENHAGEN

From Dream to Distribution

By Ben Besasie '12

Forget Christian Bale in “Batman,” Julia Roberts in “Pretty Woman,” and Tom Hanks in “Forrest Gump.” Nevermind the Hollywood glitterati. The film to watch this year features a more understated star known as Mother Earth, and she plays roles ranging from dramatic to mysterious to horrific.

In the past year, a group of CSB and SJU students decided to turn their concern about the future of the planet into positive action. Steve Dahlke '12, Paul McDivitt '11, Theresa M. Lehn '10, Justin Roth '10 and Xuyang Tang '10 formed the Environmental Responsibility Coalition and took the initiative to film a documentary. Maddie Hansen '13 later joined the group, assisting with planning and editing of the film.

They decided to focus on the people, ideas and solutions at the December 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP15) in Copenhagen, Denmark. Advised by Ernie Diedrich, CSB/SJU professor of economics, the students pooled their talents from a variety of academic interests, including environmental studies, art, biology, theater, film, economics, psychology and management.

“The Making of Copenhagen” follows these students as they move their story from dream to distribution.

Visioning the Dream

Why do a documentary?

The students wanted to provide an overview of the worldwide impact of Mother Earth’s changing climate. They also wanted to focus on solutions. A documentary seemed the best way to capture imagination and motivate change.

During the spring of 2009, SJU graduate John Smith '09 was inspired to promote environmental sustainability after attending the Power Shift '09 climate summit in Washington D.C. He talked with Dahlke about the importance of COP15.

Together they interviewed CSB and SJU students and formed the Environmental Responsibility Coalition (ERC) to film a documentary. “We needed to form a well-rounded group with experience in film, travel and environmental sustainability,” Dahlke says.

The ERC began work on the documentary outline after speaking with polar explorer Will Steger and environmental activist Bill Mikibben. Following those



Steven Dahlke

A sad Greenpeace snowman carries a message at the Climate Justice March.

conversations, the students saw COP15 as a way to make a difference.

While filming in Copenhagen, they wanted to turn a scientifically acknowledged problem into personal activism. Rather than speaking on the inconvenient truth of climate change, the ERC chose to focus on solutions. “We have decided we don’t want to scare people into action, we want to inspire people into action,” Dahlke says.



Sophouen T. Chhin

Student film crew (Left to right): Maddie Hansen, Xuyang Tang, Theresa Lehn, Paul McDivitt, Steven Dahlke, Justin Roth

With COP15 as the focal point, the documentary would present ideas from a wide range of people from around the world, providing a global perspective.

“These students know what the stakes are for humanity and want to expand the hope needed to change humanity’s course,” Diedrich says.

With an outline of the film in hand, the students moved to the next, and stickier question — financing the trip. They met with college officials to come up with funding totaling over \$10,000. The President’s Office and Institutional Advancement from each campus as well as the environmental studies department all pitched in funds.

“I was so excited when we found out we got the funding. It was such a big relief to finally know that all the work wasn’t going to waste,” Dahlke says.

Fulfilling the Dream

After an eight-hour flight, and multiple outline revisions, the students arrived in the midst of world leaders, politicians, activists, youth, scientists, environmentalists, press, filmmakers and just plain everyday people gathered from more than 200 countries to discuss the future course of the planet.

“I think I’ve met a person or more from at least 30 different countries in a period of just 24 hours,” Roth says.

They traveled with two high-definition cameras, lights and boom microphones. The students stayed in hostels and spent the rest of the time in the uproar of global events, but not without a few missteps.

“In the beginning the ERC group started off lost and confused, but I really feel like we have figured out how each person works best,” Roth says.

Assignments ranged from interviewing, to filming, to organizing.

“I’m more like the accountant . . . I do anything to help with the tasks,” Xuyang says.

Within the first few days, the students received accreditation passes to the COP15 conference. With the passes came free transportation and access to activities.

First, the students attended the International Conference of Youth, where youth delegations from all over the world convened to coordinate and unite the youth voice. They also filmed footage from Klimaforum09, an event where non-gov-

ernmental advocates discussed solutions to climate change for a green future.

“I am continually being humbled by all of the amazing stories and people I learned about every day,” Lehn says.

Press tours to Middelgrunden Offshore Wind Farm and Lolland, a sustainable community with new renewable energy technologies, added variety to their documentary.

The students traveled to the Island of Samsø, where its 4,000 residents have used wind power to completely eradicate its carbon footprint. The students captured this style of living to illustrate what individuals can do to pursue the green dream.

They combined numerous interviews with a variety of visuals — scenery, rallies, unconventional shots of city life and innovative technologies — to capture the atmosphere of Copenhagen.

“Mainly, we want the viewer to feel like there is hope for the future,” Roth says.

After their brief 14-day experience in the epicenter of environmental sustainability, they tracked back to campus to put their footage into action.

Sharing the Dream

They found the story, scraped together the funding and filmed the footage.

Now the documentary has come to life.

“They have shown a great entrepreneurial spirit in putting together this awareness-increasing venture,” Diedrich says.

After capturing 25 hours of raw footage, they spent countless more hours meeting



Steven Dahlke

Justin Roth '10 photographs windmills on the island of Samsø.

three times a week to condense their video into a 45-minute documentary.

After producing the final cuts of the film, the students took part in an Independent Learning Project, resulting in presentations of their film on campus and venues across the region including the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities.

“I feel more comfortable knowing my role in this wider planet, and how I can fit in to the confusing and complicated concept that we call existence,” Dahlke said. “If anything, the climate change issue has brought the world closer.”



Steven Dahlke

Flaming Pandas from the World Wildlife Federation rally at the Climate Justice March with over 100,000 people.

For the past two summers, CSB and SJU students have applied to spend a summer living in a hut, far from civilized comforts, with no electricity and only cold running water — sort of a land of Oz without the lions and tigers.

What's the catch? A scientific research experience like no other. Situated at more than 12,000 feet above sea level and surrounded by majestic Andean mountain ranges and cloud forests, the Ecuadorian Highlands are home to shy Andean bears. These animals spend most of their time foraging within the cloud forest, occasionally venturing into the high altitude to supplement their mostly vegetarian diet with the giant ground bromeliad, a plant related to the pineapple.

Since 2003, Kristina Timmerman, CSB/SJU associate professor of biology, has studied Andean bears and their consumption of the puya plant at the Mazar Wildlife Reserve in the southern Andes near Cuenca, Ecuador.

Last summer, students Connor McIntee '10, Jenna Pollard '10 and Melissa Bach '10 spent two months in this remote area with the professor, gaining experience in biological field research beyond the classroom. Their participation was funded through CSB/SJU Biology



Connor McIntee (from left), Melissa Bach and Jenna Pollard examine the remains of a puya plant that was consumed by an Andean bear.



The research team enjoyed stunning views of the Andean mountain ranges as part of their summer

ECUADORIAN Students, Research

Student Research Fellowships. In addition, Alastair Tulloch '10 volunteered during the last month of the field season.

“I like introducing students to a new culture and giving them a social and scientific experience that would be difficult to do otherwise,” Timmerman says.

Her studies focus on the puya plant's availability to the Andean bears. These plants are native to the Andes Mountains,

reaching one meter tall in vegetative growth and up to four meters tall with their flower spikes.

Results from the 2009 field season suggest that bears rarely travel more than 100 meters of escape cover in order to eat this plant. The 2010 field season may investigate why travel from escape cover is limited. Other studies involve tracking how often the bears eat the puya plant.



Photos courtesy of Kristina Timmerman

research experience.

HIGHLANDS: and Bears – Oh My!

By Ben Besasic '12

“This research is important because habitat destruction is the biggest threat for the animal,” Timmerman says. “No one has done any work on the bears’ use of the high grassland. There was a gap of knowledge in the way they use the resource.”

After a five-hour flight from the states, students undergo a week-long orientation in the city of Cuenca, Ecuador. Then they travel three to five hours to the research

station, where they spend three weeks in grass-walled huts and hiking the mountains to collect data.

The huts include a rudimentary kitchen, a flush toilet, shower, hand-made beds, and cold running water but no electricity. Propane gas, hauled in via horseback, runs the hot shower and the stove.

“Waking up at 6 a.m. every morning to the sun shining through the grass walls of

our sleeping hut, then walking outside and being surrounded by miles upon miles of mountains — as far as the eye can see, was amazing,” Pollard says.

A typical day included hiking up to 12 miles a day, working up to eight hours in the field, and then ending with a bowl of hot soup and a competitive card game of rummy. They all became very comfortable being isolated from society and acting as their own small community.

“Most of all, I enjoy being in the middle of nowhere writing up the day’s data and reading a good book by candlelight at night,” Timmerman says.

The students also report multiple benefits from their experience.

“This opportunity was perfect for me as I was able to live in the mountains, interact with Ecuadorians and study biology,” Pollard says.

The students had the opportunity to design and conduct their own research project. Data results from this study have been accepted as a presentation at the National Conference on Undergraduate Research in April in Missoula, Mont.

“I was able to learn about what ‘real’ research is like,” Bach says.

This research is more than bears and biology; it is a lifetime experience. They, definitely, were not in Kansas anymore.



An Andean bear climbs a puya plant.

mediawise

FACULTY SHARE THEIR EXPERTISE

By Mike Killeen

Most days (and nights), you can find some pretty interesting conversations at Brother Willie's Pub at Saint John's University.

But for people who love reading newspapers, a fascinating panel discussion took place Oct. 28 at the Pub, during the "Politics and a Pint" series sponsored by the Eugene J. McCarthy Center for Public Policy and Civic Engagement.

Three panelists spoke about the seemingly difficult future of newspapers, which includes reductions both in news staffs and budgets, as well as younger readers getting the content for free on the Web.

We decided to ask one of the panelists, Katie Johnson, associate professor of communication at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University, five questions about the future of newspapers.

Johnson has been a member of the faculty at CSB and SJU since 1997. She received her bachelor's degree in 1989 from Evergreen State College (Olympia, Wash.), and her master's and doctorate degrees from the University of Minnesota.

Do most people care about the demise of newspapers? If not, why should they?

I'm not sure it's on most people's radar. Yet, in my opinion, what's happening in journalism today is pretty significant. I want to make a distinction, though, between the "business of news" and the function of creating "quality journalism." Much that passes as news today is not particularly newsworthy, in my opinion, so I don't really care about its demise. As an academic, and one who holds no stock in any news organization, my primary interest is in sustaining the kind of journalism that serves democracy, regardless of the form it takes. There is significant turmoil in the newspaper industry today, for sure.

The causes are debated, but basically it boils down to the collapse of the advertising-driven, for-profit economic model that has supported the newspaper industry for a long time. Still, I think people should care about the demise of the newspaper industry if, for no other reason than today it is often newspaper journalists, especially at "prestige papers" like the New York Times, who are doing the original reporting on matters of national and international importance (in addition to local reporting). Their work seems to set the news agenda and filter down to other newspapers and television news stations around the country. In general, staff cutbacks in newspaper

We have to remember that it is not simply the introduction of the Internet that caused the current crisis for the newspaper industry. So charging for Internet news content would not necessarily be a sufficient solution. The Internet is only one small aspect of the newspaper industry's current challenges.

If I remember correctly, however, some newspapers did try to charge for access to online content in the early days of the Internet. Many of them found that people were unwilling to pay even then. Today, news organizations realize that they can't simply shift content online without addressing the cracks in the underlying

"I would like people to care about the potential demise of quality journalism rather than about the demise of newspapers per se."

Katie Johnson, associate professor of communication

newsrooms have seriously hampered reporters' ability to do the necessary legwork associated with the kind of journalism that serves democracy. I would like people to care about the potential demise of quality journalism rather than about the demise of newspapers per se.

Let's give newspapers a mulligan, a term for a do-over. Given what we know now about newspapers on the Web (more and more readers getting their news electronically for free), what should newspapers have done in the mid-to late-1990s when they started putting their content on the Web for free? Should they have charged a fee?

advertising-sponsored business model. Unlike the finite advertising space within a newspaper, advertising space online is abundant. As a result, online ad rates are a fraction of the rates charged for print. So, online newspapers have to figure out a way to meet operating costs as they shift content online. I don't think readers would be willing to pay the amount that would be needed to cover the loss of print advertising revenue.

Again, as someone most concerned with journalism that serves democracy, I worry about charging for online news content at all. It just heightens an already existing concern I have with unequal access to broadband services. I wish talk about

charging for Internet news content would be preceded by public policy discussions of issues such as universal broadband access, the development of community Internet networks for those communities too small to be profitably served by existing Internet service providers, and important issues of net neutrality. We should talk, too, about fully funding public libraries so the segments of the population that cannot afford private access to the Internet would at least have public access options available.

How have cutbacks in newsroom staff hurt the quality of journalism?

As we talk about cutback in newspaper newsrooms, it is important to remember that, according to the Pew Research Center's 2009 Report on the State of the News Media, the newspaper industry overall remains profitable. Although operating margins are certainly dropping, the serious plight of many publicly traded media conglomerates leading to staff cuts are partly the result of recent business practices and not that news organizations are losing money. For example, according to several published reports, in 2008 McClatchy recorded an 18 percent profit margin overall, but still cut its workforce by nearly one-third in order to finance the \$2 billion acquisition of Knight Ridder in 2006.

Although the reasons for cutting staff may vary among newspapers, the trend is nationwide. According to the Pew Research Center report, daily newspapers have lost "about 17 percent of their news staffs since the start of 2001." The report goes on to say that "drastic cuts in news staff and news space ... equates to a significant erosion of the serious, accountability reporting that newspapers do more than any other medium." With fewer reporters available, news organizations are increasingly unable to cover their communities in a way that serves democracy.

What do you see as the future of "citizenry journalism?"

Citizen journalism can take many forms, but it is essentially when non-journalists participate in "news" conversations in new and different ways — sometimes from outside of the confines of traditional media, sometimes from within. For example, in many parts of the country, citizen journalists have begun to post information on Web sites, covering their local com-

munities in ways more traditional news organizations are not. Political blogs have sometimes illuminated gaps in mainstream news coverage, pushing coverage within traditional news organizations. I watched in wonder last summer, as Twitter played an important role in coverage of the aftermath of the Iranian election.

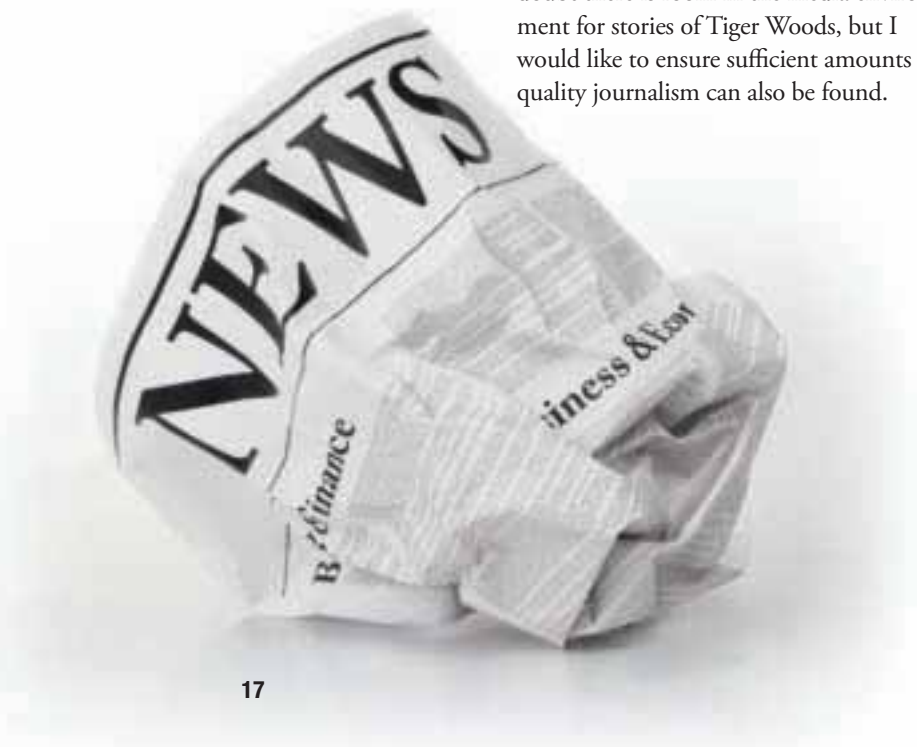
What I find wonderful about this trend is that it can counter the limitations of traditional news gathering practices. Research has shown that there are patterns to the coverage of most traditional news organizations resulting from the routines that journalists follow in the construction of news. Since news is often about things outside of our personal experience, we don't often recognize gaps in the coverage. Citizen journalism seems to address some of the gaps by, for example, drawing on different kinds of sources than would be commonly used in traditional news coverage. This allows for the perspectives of a wider range of voices to be heard. However, since there are no institutional structures to ensure citizen journalists meet standards of journalistic quality (e.g. verification/accuracy) citizens need to be smart about consuming citizen journalism. For instance, we need to recognize that citizen journalists may not reveal their vested interest in a topic upon which they are reporting. For this reason, I do not believe that citizen journalists should ever replace professional journalists who are trained to meet the standards of quality journalism. Overall, though, I think the evolving phenomenon of citizen journalism is incredibly exciting.

What will be the blueprint for a successful newspaper in the future?

Let me define success not only in terms of profit, but also in terms of how well the organization creates content that serves democracy. With this in mind, I think the newspapers that will be the most successful will be the ones that consider shifting to alternative economic models for financing newspapers. Although several models have been posited, one option might be found in the Newspaper Revitalization Act introduced by Maryland Sen. Ben Cardin in March 2009. This act would allow for changes to section 501 of the Internal Revenue Code to allow newspapers to be treated as 501(c)(3) organizations. Newspapers could then operate for "educational purposes" rather than as for-profit organizations. I feel strongly, though, that there should be more than one model for financing the news industry in operation at any given time. Each model will have its own strengths and weaknesses; having multiple models might best ensure a successful "free marketplace of ideas."

If I limit my definition of success solely to issues of profit, then the blueprint I see changes to create content that will draw and hold our attention. Then, success will be found in producing attention-getting stories such as "balloon boy" or Tiger Woods' infidelity.

This is not to say that content that serves democracy should not also be interesting and engaging, but changing the financial incentives of the new industry to be more in line with serving the informational needs of our democracy is important. No doubt there is room in the media environment for stories of Tiger Woods, but I would like to ensure sufficient amounts of quality journalism can also be found.



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