Esteemed Anthropology Faculty Member Ralph Luebben dies

Ralph Luebben, 88
died October 19, 2009.

Many of you knew Professor Ralph A. Luebben, who taught anthropology at Grinnell for many years, served as the first chair person of an independent Department of Anthropology, and inaugurated the Grinnell Summer Archeological Field School, among many other contributions to the department and the College. He is survived by his wife of over fifty years, Janell.

We invite you all to send in a memory of Ralph we can include in a memorial tribute to him that will appear in the spring issue of the departmental newsletter. Please send your reminiscences by January 30 to Sondi Burnell, program assistant to the Department of Anthropology, at burnell@grinnell.edu.
Museums and Contested Public Memory in Derry, Northern Ireland

by Caitlin Wells '08, Media Relations Fellow

There are always two sides to any conflict. For Maja Gamble '11 and Tom Elliott '11, studying the two sides of the ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland taught them about the struggle to forge a common identity after the violence has ended.

Gamble, an anthropology major, and Elliott, a double major in history and anthropology, worked with Doug Caulkins, anthropology, on a Mentored Advanced Project called “Museums and Contested Public Memory in Derry, Northern Ireland.” As part of the project, they spent several weeks in Derry, Northern Ireland, learning about conflicts over how to portray the past and create a shared history for the troubled country. They hope to present their findings in a panel of three papers at a professional conference later this year.

Caulkins first became interested in the project several years ago while touring Northern Ireland as part of the Grinnell-in-London Program. During a visit to the Tower Museum in Derry, education officer Margaret Edwards told him about the museum’s exhibition on the 400th anniversary of the Plantation of Ulster. The Plantation consisted of the British Crown sending large numbers of Scottish Protestants to settle in then-heavily Catholic Northern Ireland in an effort to bring it under British rule. This mass resettlement created many of the religious and cultural conflicts that exploded in violence between Catholic and Protestants in Ulster during the Troubles, which lasted from the late 1960s to the signing of the Good Friday agreement in 1998. Derry was the site of Bloody Sunday, one of the most significant and well known events of the Troubles, in which British soldiers fired on a Catholic civil rights march, killing 14 protesters and wounding 12 others.

“That decision to bring in Protestant populations from the other island of Great Britain was, in a sense, the precipitating cause for the more recent Troubles,” said Caulkins. “I was very interested in the way that they might construct a commemoration, and asked Margaret if she would allow me to come with a group of students to study that decision.”

Although they went with the intention of only studying the Tower Museum, the group soon broadened their approach to include Derry’s sectarian museums, which represent a distinct Catholic or Protestant viewpoint. These included the Museum of Free Derry, which depicts the Catholic side of the conflict, and the Protestant-centerd Apprentice Boys Museum and Heritage Tower.

Brian Lacey, a well known archaeologist and scholar of Derry, pictured with Tom Elliott and Maja Gamble.
We had all these great museums where they’re actively presenting their history,” says Elliott. “So we went over and would talk to any employees that would talk to us, about the goals of the museum, the challenges they faced, just to see what they had in common and what was different.

They found great differences between how history is portrayed by different museums, and how the same event can be depicted in entirely different light depending on the agenda of the museum.

“The Tower Museum we found has a very explicit agenda for creating a shared memory, whereas the sectarian museums are interested in telling their story,” says Caulkins. “It’s their story, they own it, and they don’t trust others to tell their story.”

Gamble noted that this is evident in how the museums represent themselves in relation to others.

“A lot of museums may see the other museums as trying to keep the old wounds open, like the Heritage Tower in a very Protestant area would say the Museum of Free Derry is trying to keep the wounds of Bloody Sunday open,” Gamble says. “But these museums themselves say that they’re trying to tell people about the past so they can move past it and move beyond that violence.”

Elliott noted that, despite the museums’ differences and some remaining tensions between Catholics and Protestants, many of the people they met shared a common commitment to peace and a sincere desire not to return to the violence of the Troubles.

“They have a real focus on never letting that happen again,” said Elliott. “It’s still very recent in their memory.”

Grinnellian Innovation in Detroit

Mickal Haile ’11
Elizabeth Miller ’10

What happens when the industry on which a city has built itself disappears? This is the dilemma that Detroit, the Motor City, faces with the decline of the American auto industry. The state of economic uncertainty in Detroit has created many social as well as economic problems. The collapse of the auto industry has affected every area of life within the city, including massive job losses, and according to the 2000 census (before the recession hit), a quarter of the city’s population lives below the poverty line. The current situation in Detroit resists old strategies of combating poverty and social injustice. Instead, Detroit requires new ideas; to this end, a coalition of students and professors, led by Doug Caulkins, put the principles of applied anthropology to work. The Society for Applied Anthropology promotes “interdisciplinary scientific investigation of the principles controlling the relations of human beings to one another, and the encouragement of the wide application of these principles to practical problems” (sfaa.net). To use applied anthropology is to relate real social problems to anthropological theory, and to draw on theory to find new solutions to these issues.

The Detroit Social Innovation Project was a joint undertaking during the summer of 2009 between Grinnell College’s Wilson Program for Leadership and Enterprise and the Center for Nonprofit Management at Lawrence Technological University in Southfield, Michigan. The project’s goal was to arrange six ten-week socially innovative internships in the nonprofit sector for Grinnell College students in the summer of 2010. My partner, Mickal Haile, and I spent several weeks meeting representatives of nonprofit organizations and listening to their analysis of Detroit’s current situation. Our time there allowed us to make contact with many innovative nonprofits in the area, and we had the chance to examine Detroit’s challenges through the lens of applied anthropology. We found organizations taking new approaches to combating poverty, using such strategies as microfinance in
underdeveloped neighborhoods and farming on vacant lots within the city limits.

However, to dwell on the problems of Detroit would be to ignore the city’s potential for growth. While not to undercut the difficulty caused by the city’s economic collapse, there are unique social justice opportunities presented by the case of a city forced to confront and challenge its own identity. No one in Detroit underestimates the great deal of work that needs to be done, but the people of Detroit are resilient. It’s even in their city motto: “Speramus Meliora; Resurget Cineribus”—“We Hope For Better Things; It Shall Rise From the Ashes”.

Our “exploratory mission” turned out to be quite productive. While we don’t yet have a final count, at the moment we have established twelve internship positions for Grinnell students this summer, ranging from work in urban planning to a food kitchen providing garden plots. We believe that the exacting nature of nonprofit work in Detroit provides an excellent, if challenging, experience for Grinnell College students, and it is the most challenging work that is the most rewarding. The Detroit Social Innovation Project has so far proved to be a successful use of applied anthropology, and we hope it will continue to be an enriching experience for both Detroit nonprofits and Grinnell students.
From the Mighty Acorn: Teaching with Nuts

John C. Whittaker
11/2009

On a warm day late in September, my North American Archaeology class sits on the sidewalk in front of Goodnow Hall and grinds acorns. In this part of the course, we are discussing pre-agricultural foraging people and the different ways of life that were shaped by local food resources. The prehistoric Californians and their recent descendants supported relatively large and stable populations not by raising corn, but by gathering acorns. Acorns have some of the same advantages as cultivated grains: they are highly nutritious, reliably plentiful, and can be stored for use during seasons when they are not available fresh. These properties allowed people to rely on a resource enough to form large village communities and develop complex social organizations and elaborate material cultures. In class, we discuss such theoretical issues, but actually processing and eating wild foods stimulates further questions.

A more indepth look into Prof. Whittaker’s class will be featured in the Spring issue. Look forward to learning how to process acorns, recipes, taste-testing results and what to do with those small white squirmly grubs.

Professor Whittaker shows students how to start a fire with flint and steel, in his North American Archaeology class.
Summer Field Work Communication

This past summer Chuck Hilton did anthropological field work in northern Kenya as a member of senior personnel with The Violence of “Small Wars,” Poverty, and Health in Three Pastoralist Communities in Northern Kenya Project sponsored by the National Science Foundation. Principal Investigators are Bilinda Straight of Western Michigan University and Ivy Pike of University of Arizona. The project is investigating the short- and long-term effects on health of livestock raiding in northern Kenya pastoralist communities. The field season began in mid-June and ended in late July. The following are several emails he sent back to the Department.

Greetings!
Sent: Tuesday, June 30, 2009 10:20 AM

Hi All,
Greetings from the semi-arid pastoralist lands of northern Kenya! My colleagues and I have been in the dry and dusty lands of Baringo, Turkana, and Samburu Districts visiting households that are participating in our Pastoralist Poverty, Health, and Violence study. Visiting the households has been rather revealing as we have Pokot pastoralists encroaching on the former lands of both the Turkana and Samburu. The raids and violence may escalate as the area is now in a drought that has dispersed a number of people but also raised tensions. Our Pokot, Turkana, and Samburu research assistants are really working well to conduct our biological as well as the psycho-social measurements that are part of the study. Of course, they want to do a good job in order to document the health effects in each of their communities. Still have to visit a number of our other participating communities out in the remote areas (3-4 hour drives over the dusty dirt roads where we may only be traveling about 30-40 miles). It appears that some of the summer rains have begun and we hope that they will provide some relief. Of course, it may be too late as a number of our contacts have already lost many animals in their herds.

In Baringo District the Pokot men still use bows and arrows. Everyone says that there are few wild animals in their areas. After driving many hours through those areas, it really is obvious. No monkeys, no zebras, no land-walking birds, no antelope, or impala. In fact, no dik-dik.

Hope all is well in the land of corn!

More field notes
Sent: Friday, July 10, 2009 7:29 AM

Dear All,
Thanks for the updates and info. This past week or so, we have been out to our Samburu and Turkana settlement sites highly affected by cattle raiding and violence. Mostly we are trying to spot-check the amount of observer error associated with our nutritional anthropometric measurements. We have also been trying to get a feel of the type of on-the-ground conditions that our Kenyan research assistants have to experience. Some have it hard with lots of hiking up steep plateaus to get to households while our Turkana team seems to just walk across the street from their hotel into what appears to be a large Turkana refugee settlement. We sheared the u-joint for the front drive shaft assembly on our Land Rover Discovery. I took off the drive shaft thinking that we would have no problem driving into town on rear-wheel drive, but we did not move. Had to send our other vehicle to town to get a new u-joint but we are still lacking a necessary drive shaft ball joint. Four of us ended up spending the night in a “manyatta.” Bilinda was especially concerned about getting her three children out of the area when the driver of a motorcycle stopped to tell us that bandits had just shot at him about 1 km up the road. We rolled the Land Rover out of site. Probably sounds more dramatic than it really was. We have a big meeting with our research assistants to discuss the observer error and some of the field problems that we are seeing as well as training them on a new procedure using anemia sticks.

We are seeing clear evidence of the drought as there are many dead animals in our research areas and hearing reports of informants who are sick. Not sure but it seems that a number of Bilinda’s informants may also have cholera. Is it a wonder that Pokot, Samburu, and...
Turkana warriors are raiding over scarce water- and pasture-points. 
Hope all is well. More later.

Final field season notes and circumstances
Sent: Thursday, July 30, 2009 9:03 AM

Howdy Folks,

Well we have just returned from Kenya. We are still assessing the productivity of our field season, particularly how several of our Kenyan research teams have been conducting the psycho-social interviews, one of the key elements of this study. Anyway, we will get it all straightened out in the long run.

Our return from northern Kenya was not as trouble free as we had wanted. We left northern Kenya early on Saturday morning to head back to Nairobi where we were scheduled to leave on late Tuesday evening. After being on dirt roads for over three hours and shortly after hitting the tarmac, the ball bearings seized up on one of the pulleys for the serpentine belt, knocking us out of commission with still five hours of driving to go. We ended up getting towed “Kenyan style” by a “matatu” Nissan safari van back to a place called Robert’s Camp on the shores of Lake Baringo, a remote spot but a destination for many of the safari groups. Not too bad to be stuck at a place where you can watch hippos come out of the lake at dusk and during the day look at all sorts of water birds. So, we were “forced” to rent the only accommodations available for us, a cottage on the lake shore. It was a “really horrible place” with a big front veranda facing the lake with a perfect vantage point for viewing the hippos coming out of the water, a big dining table, and lots of big comfy chairs and a sofa. But seriously, we were lucky that they had a vacancy as the place was very full and given that we had wanted to visit one of the national parks like Nakuru (with all of its flamingos) or Amboseli in the last few days of the trip, we decided to take advantage of the circumstances. At least this time we managed to break down in paradise where we could get cold Cokes and beer. Besides, who really wants to spend the remaining days in Nairobi with its traffic, pollution, and worries of theft.

After three days of the mechanic giving us the run-around, we finally got the Land Rover fixed. Of course, we did all the repair work ourselves after we managed to retrieve our part (“the sample” that must be presented at the parts store) in what were extended follow-ups to chase down our part conducted on our behalf by relatives of Kenyan project manager. Got everything put back together the night before we had to make the final five-hour push back to Nairobi in order to fly out. We ended up with very little time to take care of the last minute things we had wanted to do in Nairobi. We did manage to make our flight even with our driver getting lost on his way to the British Institute of Eastern African and showing up half an hour late. Nothing like a little drama to add some stress and tension to the final days of the field season!

Later, Chuck

Top Photo: Data collection for a Samburu participant
Top Right: Samburu lowland house
Bottom Left: NSF Team members: Adamson Lanyasuna, Bilinda Straight (Co-PI), Matthias. Oesterle, and Ivy Pike (Co-PI)
Bottom Right: Data collection for a Turkana participant.
(Photos Courtesy of Chuck Hilton)
My Summer Internship at the CDC

By Becky Lyons ’10

Recently a family friend asked me about my major, anthropology. He said to me, “If I didn’t have to worry about money, I would study anthropology too… like Indiana Jones.” I explained to him that he was an archaeologist, that archaeology was a sub-field of anthropology, and I was inclined toward a career in cultural or medical anthropology. He laughed, “Why would you want to study that? How are you ever going to find a job with that?”

Although I am pretty sure at this time that I won’t be an archaeologist or an academic, I do know that I love the field of anthropology. Have my past three years of schooling been for nothing? Not at all. Especially since over the summer I have discovered an area of study that I am particularly interested in. It is a field where I can utilize my anthropological studies to bring about positive change: environmental and public health. This past summer I was selected for an internship in the Center for Disease Control’s National Center for Environmental Health Collegiate Leaders in Environmental Health in Atlanta, Georgia. I lived with other CDC interns at Emory University and I was assigned to a project with the Division of Environmental Hazards and Health Effects. I worked for epidemiologist, Dr. Matthew Murphy, on his project “Investigation and Communication of Drinking Water Exposures in the Navajo Nation.” I studied and learned about the culture of the Navajo people; their traditions, practices, and beliefs, to ascertain how to best communicate the CDC’s results of drinking water tests and to present intervention strategies that could best work for them. I did this through not only research, but traveled with a public health team to the Navajo Nation to train community health representatives on how to disseminate the results on the water contaminants. There are many social, political, and historical issues that connect people to the Navajo Nation. Many Navajo still live on homesteads far apart from one another and access to piped water is difficult if not impossible. I created two packets of training materials on choosing safe water sources and how to effectively haul and store water healthfully. I also wrote up an evaluation on household water treatment practices. During this

same internship I also was assigned to research and give a presentation on Urban Heat Islands, for which I was awarded the “CDC’s Best Built Environment Presentation.” I gave the presentation to fellow interns as well as professionals involved with the CDC.

Since I have always been interested in the human environmental interaction and in applied anthropology, this summer internship combined both of these interests to make a difference in the lives of others. More importantly it helped me learn about myself and what I want to do after Grinnell.

Above, my fellow Collegiate Leader in Environmental Health Interns and I during our last week of interning. There were 14 of us from different schools chosen out of 260 qualified applications.
Things have been busy lately for Eric Carter. He has been working on two major research projects, continuing to write a book manuscript entitled *Enemy in the Blood: Malaria, Nationalism, and Development in Argentina*, and just starting a new project called “Transplanted: Environmental Values of Latino Immigrants in the US.” Eric presented portions of the malaria book project at the Latin American Studies Association conference in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, last June; and at University College, London, and the University of Manchester in the UK in October. On a related note, Eric presented a paper, “DDT and Malaria Control: Environmentalism vs. Public Health?” as part of the Faulconer Gallery’s “Molecules that Matter” exhibit in November. The new research project, on Latino environmental values, got off to a great start with the help of Anthropology major Chloe Sikes ’10, who completed a summer MAP on the topic. Chloe presented a prospectus of this multi-year project at the West Lakes Region meeting of the Association of American Geographers in St. Paul, MN, in October.

Eric is also excited to see increasing interest in geography among Grinnell students. His course, Geographical Analysis and Cartography, had its highest-ever enrollment. On a rainy day in late September, Eric took the class to CERA to map oak saplings with GPS receivers (see photo). Eric was also lucky to take part in a conference on using GIS (Geographic Information Systems) in liberal arts education in Saratoga Springs, NY, also in September. He presented “Promoting Spatial Thinking for Public Health,” a reflection on his experience teaching Health Geography and GIS. His collaborations with student researchers on GIS and health are starting to bear fruit: he presented a poster on research conducted with Daphne Lang ’09 (History/General Science) on the relationship between Lyme disease and land use change in Connecticut, also at the West Lakes meeting in October. Finally, Eric is preparing for his first co-teaching experience in the spring, a seminar in History and Environmental Studies on the Environmental History of the Midwest (with Mike Guenther, History). This course, part of a “Nature and Culture in the Prairie Region” cluster of courses, will integrate conventional historical methods with the relatively new field of “historical GIS.”

Students from Eric Carter’s Geographical Analysis course, at CERA in September 2009. Anthropology majors pictured are Dean Porter ’10 (second from right) and Ben Miller ’10 (fourth from right). Not pictured are majors Chloe Sikes ’10 and Kathryn Vanney ’11, who were busy surveying in the oak savanna.
Kirsten Anderson '00 has been awarded Grinnell’s Wall Alumni Service Award for her work as an AIF William J. Clinton Service Fellow in India. As a fellow she is working for Aid India’s English team to develop and implement Ready to Read, an English language reading program for disadvantaged primary school children throughout the state of Tamil Nadu. In the initial evaluation, only 8% of 1,200 students tested in the 5th grade were able to read English sentences, yet they had been studying English for 5 years. While this program is still in the action research phase, the intended outcome is to ensure that 80% of students in our methodology-applied classes are able to read sentences after approximately four months, or completion of the program. It is currently being tried with approximately 1,300 students in 41 schools across the state.

The latest and most exciting aspect of the entire project is the creation of an educational DVD series to complement the classroom materials. As the producer, Kirsten suddenly found herself on a set working with directors, actors and children (from local government schools) to create the pilot episode. It will be released in December 2009. Look for a teaser on youtube.com. To follow the developments of the Ready to Read program, please visit the program blog: http://www.ready2readprogram.blogspot.com/

To learn more about Aid India, please visit: www.eurekachild.org.

Quality over quantity: A local’s take
By Neil Weintraub ’86
Sunday, October 18, 2009

When we conduct our Northern Arizona Trail Runners Association Saturday morning group trail runs, invariably someone new to Flagstaff asks, “how far was that?” I glance over at my running pal David Blanchard, we both smile knowing the run was 6 miles, and we answer in unison, “it feels like 8.” After many years of altitude running in Flagstaff, I realized that tracking miles in the training log were meaningless. Running here is all about the effort, not the distance.

My first hard lesson in altitude running occurred on my first day in Flagstaff. In 1985 I was a student in the Grinnell College archaeological field school and my professors Kathy Kamp and John Whittaker rented a ranch house on the top of Campbell Avenue. Knowing a bit about the benefits of running here, I figured training throughout the summer would be a great opportunity to improve my race times. My first run headed east, downhill, and I can remember feeling strong. I turned south along Highway 89 toward the old Silver Saddle Saloon. Once there, I turned around, retraced my steps and began the slow ascent back up to the ranch. I sprinted the last 200 yards to give my lungs and heart one final jolt. Fortunately for me, my professor John had a few brown artifact bags that he quickly offered as I began hyperventilating. Those four miles felt like ten and my body took several days to recover. For the remainder of the summer, I decided that moving tons of dirt while excavating our site was all the exercise I needed. After that first day, the only trips I took were to the Silver Saddle Saloon with my colleagues at the end of a tiresome day of digging!

When I finally moved to Flagstaff in 1986, I set my heart on running my first New York City Marathon, a race that passes in front of the hospital where I was born. To train, I stuck to the prevailing wisdom of the late 1980s, running long and slow. As I continued to race, I began slowly improving. However it was not until I had read an article about scaling back distance in favor of quality runs when my times really plummeted. My best year of racing proved to be at 37, when I ran about 20 miles on three days per week. I not only finally broke my elusive 40-minute 10k barrier, but I also set personal bests at the 8k, 15k and half marathon. As I headed into the fall 2002 marathon season, I was sure to have a PR and finally qualify for the Boston Marathon. Unfortunately, pride got the better of me as I tried to out sprint local speedster John Bogen on a 200 yard repeat, and I pulled a hamstring.

Grinnell College alum, Michael Galaty ’91, is the recipient of the Archaeological Institute of America’s 2010 Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching Award. http://www.millsaps.edu/news_events/releases/09/october/galaty_award.shtml

Galaty is an anthropology professor at Millsaps College and AAA member. The award will be presented to him at the AIA annual meeting in January 2010.
While I cannot explain the physiology for the above success, I am almost certain that the workouts combined with enough rest and recovery with elevation thrown into the mix allowed me to run less yet reap the rewards of someone putting in twice the mileage. So the next time I hear someone who needs to know the exact distance of a run, I’ll tell them to add a few extra miles in their log and keep their speed in check on the track!

In 2001, I co-founded Northern Arizona Trail Runners Association to offer free group runs to folks of all abilities. Every October, NATRA’s wildly popular Soulstice Mountain Trail Race puts a little extra soul in the stride of Flagstaff runners!

Mari Guttman ’09 [mailto:mariguttman@gmail.com]
Kathy - Thanks again for writing my recommendation for Grinnell Corps. This is an opportunity of a lifetime, and I am still in shock that I have been given this great chance to teach and live abroad. I am teaching oral English to first and second year university students. I teach 16 hours a week, and I have seven different classes, with around 30-35 students in each class. The levels I teach include three Pre-University English classes (made up of mainland Chinese students who are taking an extra year to take more courses before they enroll at MUST), three English Speaking Level one classes, and one English Speaking Level two class. My two higher level classes are mixed with students from mainland China as well as students from Macau.

Raging Cow Sighting
(from Neil Weintraub ’86 archaeol for Kaibab Natl Forest) AZ - Hi John, was just up at Bashas, and not a few minutes after running into Marsha, I saw a woman wearing a ragging cow shirt so I had to say something...anyway, her name is Robin Cleland graduated in 2007. Guess she is a graduate student at ASU. Anyway, thought you’d find that funny! Hope all is well! Best, Neil

Anneke Walker ’87 anneke [mailto:hrhlynne@ybb.ne.jp]
How did I spend my summer vacation? This year, my husband and I fulfilled a dream we had harbored for some time by visiting Cambodia. We wanted to see the magnificent temples, of course, but we didn’t want to be antiseptically isolated from the everyday life of average Cambodian people by remaining wrapped in the warm embrace of an organized tour. So we spent every evening volunteering at a school for street children and an orphanage. Both are run by the same person, a gentleman named Savong, and I had researched and donated to his remarkable enterprise before I ever set foot in Cambodia.

Spending time with the children and those who care for them was truly an eye-opening experience. I couldn’t help but think that the Western world could learn from these individuals, who have so little but are so warm and open, willing to share whatever they have. Fortunately, I am able to report that a good number of people who come to Siem Reap do volunteer and help. As just one example, we visited a children’s hospital founded by a caring photographer named Kenro Izu and completely run by donations. It offers totally free health care for children.

If anyone is planning a trip to Cambodia, I strongly recommend volunteering for a day at Savong’s school. The school depends on donations from volunteers, and the orphanage is in dire need of financial help. For more information, check out the website. http://www.savong.com/

Tricia Hadley ’03 [mailto:triciajhadley@gmail.com]
My sincere gratitude for all of your help in writing my recommendation letters and supporting my career endeavors. School is going great so far, and I know that medicine is where I am supposed to be. I also wanted to share with you the exciting news of a scholarship I received from the U of M. It’s called the Robert Leonard Hart Endowment for Public Service in Medicine, and it’s essentially a full-ride scholarship that is good for all four years of medical school (it pays for the $26,000/year tuition and fees). I was pretty stunned when I heard that I was nominated for the scholarship; the Dean told me that the donor wanted it to go to someone who has demonstrated commitment to public service, specifically someone who has worked with PeaceCorps or AmeriCorps. Even if it wasn’t me, specifically, I would not have been surprised that a Grinnellian was nominated. I owe many thanks to my undergraduate experience for encouraging and fostering this dedication to social responsibility.

Andrew Derksen ’00 [mailto:derksen@chthonian.org]
I finally completed my dissatisfying Masters’ program in Entomology at the University of Florida. I still live in Miami and still track the populations of invasive insects - but now that I work for the state, my working environment and management are much improved. I am sometimes paid to hike around state and national parks, looking for ecologically and economically significant invertebrate pests. This can be remarkably cathartic, but I still need to crank out a few publications from my thesis, and then pick a doctoral program. I’m open to suggestion, but this time it needs to have a molecular and phylogenetic emphasis, and probably involve more paleontology.
Greetings from Macau!
It is 6 am on a Monday morning, and I am sitting bleary-eyed in front of my computer. I am incredibly frustrated, as I am watching my beloved Bears lose the season opener to the pesky Packers. Although professional sports games don’t normally happen at 6 a.m. in the morning, they do on a regular occasion for me, ever since I moved to Macau (a Special Administrative Region of China). With a 14-hour time difference between my hometown of Chicago and Macau, Sunday Night Football becomes Monday Morning Football and late night baseball games on the West Coast become background noise as I eat breakfast and get ready in the morning.

While most professional sporting events are offered live through the Internet, they can only be watched though a subscription or by paying an overpriced one-time use fee. However, thanks to the genius of my mother and a video chat program called Skype, I can watch the Bears and any number of sporting events live and for free. Our highly advanced and complex system works like this: if there is a game I want to watch, we run Skype’s video chat program. Once the video chat is up and running, my mother places her laptop on an ironing board facing the television. Voila! Not only do I get to watch sporting events live from my own house, but I can also hear my family’s shouting and cheering in the background.

When I am not watching my football team open (what is so far) a losing season at 6 a.m. in the morning, I am enjoying my new life in Macau. I am serving a year-long fellowship as a Grinnell Corps Macau Fellow, and I teach conversational English to university students. I teach seven classes, with around 30-35 students in each class, to bring the total number of students I teach to around 231. While I still have some difficulties remembering all of my students’ names, I have no problem remembering Watermelon, Orange and Banana in D30, Burger and Sub in D22, April-Tea and Dear in D04, and Viper and Lamborghini in D14. I guess maybe if everyone was named after a car, or food or month-drink, I would be much better with names.

Entertaining names aside, my students are wonderful and interesting individuals. I think they are fascinated with me just as much as I am fascinated with them, and we are constantly learning from one another. For instance, (among other things) they now know the differences between football and soccer, why Chicago is the best city in the United States, what toppings are on a Chicago-style hot dog, and where Grinnell College is on a map. In return, I now know all about the different styles of Chinese cuisine, the importance and rareness of being able to receive a college education in China (around 5% of college-aged people actually go to college), how community and family can sometimes be better than individuality, and why Beijing is a better city than Shanghai. While in the process of cultural exchange, I also like to think that my students’ conversational English has improved by leaps and bounds.

Besides teaching, the other important part of my Fellowship is exploration and adjusting to life abroad. Before Macau became a Special Administrative Region of China, it was a Portuguese colony and trading post for 400 years. Because of Macau’s history and location there is a very interesting blend of people, and as I walk around my neighborhood I hear Cantonese, Mandarin, Pilipino, Portuguese, and English (usually with an Australian accent). I love that I can visit a Buddhist...
Shrine or a Catholic Church in a five minute walk, and that the 24-hour McDonald’s is across the street from the 24-hour dim sum restaurant. Also, if I am ever feeling ill I have many medicinal options; when I visited the doctor I was given the choice of seeing a “western” doctor or a “traditional” doctor. It is this blend of Eastern and Western cultures that makes Macau very unique and entirely different from anywhere I have ever visited or lived.

Three months ago, when I first arrived in Macau, I had an endless list of differences between living here and living in the States. Now, however, I must put some thought into listing even ten things that are different. I like to think that this is because I’ve adjusted so well to life here that I no longer notice (or at least think about) the differences between home and Macau. For instance, I no longer think twice about looking right instead of left when I cross the street, chop sticks are like an extra pair of fingers, cook-it-yourself hot pot has become the new AJ’s Steakhouse, I’ve learned how to politely yet forcefully push my way through lines and crowds, public spitting no longer grosses me out, and I’ve started to use Cantonese phrases that I didn’t realize I knew.

While I have changed many daily rituals of my life since moving to Macau, I still feel the urge to watch American sports from a laptop placed on an ironing board thousands of miles away. However, if Chicago teams continue to play the way they do, perhaps it is a sign to shed yet one more holdover from home and instead direct my energy toward a local (winning) team that I can watch at a regular hour.

If you have any questions about the Grinnell Corps Program, or want to talk more about China, please feel free to e-mail me at mariguttman@gmail.com.