



# Experimental College

at Tufts University

Spring 2000

## Thirty-Five Years of Innovation

1999 marked the 35<sup>th</sup> year of operation for Tufts University's Experimental College.

The celebration culminated at Homecoming where an Ex College tent welcomed the Tufts extended family with cider and a chance to look back at the college's accomplishments. A time line, a collage of the Ex College's justifiably renowned posters, and a collection of Ex College bulletins were all on display.

Later, the celebration moved to the Aidekman Art Center's sculpture court where alumnae gathered with current faculty, administrators, and students to reminisce about the past and speculate on the future.

ies, Arabic, Introduction to Computers, and Homelessness in America - as well as such programs as Explorations, Peace and Justice Studies, the Communications and Media Studies minor, EPIIC, and Perspectives.

## The Distler Family Endowment

The Experimental College has been graced by the creation of The Distler Family Endowment for Innovation in the Workplace. Steven Distler, A '74, has established a generous endowment to "support courses which will help students understand the world beyond the university."



Michael Wang, A '99, (far right) explains the Ex College "Family Tree" that he and Ken LaRose, E '99, (second from right) created before they graduated last spring. Natalie d' Aubermont, J '00, Ex College Board member, Jonathan Strong, Ex College Board Chair, and Robyn Gittleman, Director of the Ex College, look on.

Along with the displays from the Ex College tent, visitors enjoyed the "Family Tree," a symbolic representation of the Ex College's impact on the undergraduate experience at Tufts throughout the years (see photo and caption).

Leaves on the tree included such courses first taught in the Ex College as American Sign Language, Jazz, Dance, Women's Stud-

course is *Managing the Workplace: Change and Challenges*, designed and taught by Patricia Offenhauer, a historian and consultant to MIT's Sloan School and the Harvard Business School. Students are exploring innovative management approaches (involving employees in workplace decisionmaking, high-skills training, and gainsharing) and looking, as well, at resistance to the new ways.

Each year, the Experimental College Board will seek out specially crafted course proposals relating to the professions, especially those proposing to analyze the ever changing conditions brought about by technology, entrepreneurship, re-engineering, globalism, the role of not-for-profits, and the impact of the internet on these areas as we move into the next century.

This spring, the inaugural Distler Family

## The Video Lab

The latest "experiment" in the Ex College is the Video Lab, Tufts first center for documentary, multimedia, and alternative film practice. Designed from the ground up to use new, cost-effective *and* high-quality Digital Video technologies, the lab has gotten off to very good start thanks to support from an anonymous donor.

In fact, according to Howard Woolf, Associate Director of the Ex College and the lab's developer, it's already operational and is being used by the Ex College's *Making Movies* film study/practice class and by seniors completing production-based projects in Communications and Media Studies and in American Studies.

As the lab moves forward, the emphasis will be on collaborations with faculty and professional staff. Initial efforts include plans to document the world of *avant garde* classical music to attempt full-motion, full-screen video delivery over the Web via Internet 2.

Not only will the lab focus on practice, it will also engage students in critical thought about the future of media and culture. What happens when broadcast quality Digital Video and a next-generation Web become commonplace? Will a renaissance ensue or will it be pandemonium...the democratization of mass media that has been predicted for so many years or the ascendancy of the tabloid mentality? the crackpot? the demagogue?

## Inside...

- Interview with Ex College Visiting Lecturers Susan Thomas and (Cuban citizen) Alexis Esquivel
- Check Out "the Cutting Edge"
- Emeritae Still Going Strong
- Tenth Annual Opening Up The Classroom

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## Of Note

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### Highlighting Activities of Special Interest

#### Book Chapter

Director, Robyn Gittleman, and Associate Director, Howard Woolf, have coauthored a chapter about peer-teaching programs in the Experimental College that will be included in the forthcoming book, *Student Assisted Teaching and Learning*. The book, which is a model of collaboration across more than a dozen universities, is being published by Anker and is due out this spring.

#### Internet/Pedagogy Project

Aaron Beaston-Blaakman, a Research Associate for Advanced Studies in Social Welfare at Brandeis' Heller School, has been asked by the Ex College to design and teach a special course testing the value of the Internet for teaching. A specialist in healthcare delivery systems, as well as a computer programmer, Aaron is putting together a syllabus that takes a "traditional" course on healthcare in the U.S. and self-consciously incorporates on-line elements that both he and his students will be experiencing *and* assessing.

Last fall, Aaron taught a precursor of this course for the Ex College, *Human Behavior in Cyberspace*.

#### "Greenspan 101"

If you were thumbing through the *Boston Globe*, on Thursday, March 2nd, you'd have seen a photo of Tim Stratford, the instructor of the record shattering Ex College class, *Understanding the Stock Market*. Selected from among literally thousands of courses offered at area colleges, the Stock Market course was central to a story, "Three Class Acts," that talked about how "a trio of popular courses shows the breadth, and depth, of campus offerings today."

Featuring interviews with Tim and with students in the class, the story shows a major tenet of Ex College "philosophy" in action: that popular issues can be successfully taught in a serious, analytical fashion.

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## On the Cutting Edge...

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The Experimental College lives up to its name. We're still experimenting with some of the most unique courses Tufts has to offer. For example...

*First-time instructor, Omer Trajman, talks about trying to teach a "paperless" course called Inside Your Computer*

Students taking *Inside Your Computer* are discovering how computers work, not only through readings and discussions but also by using them for the class everyday. In this way they are learning the ins and outs of personal computer design from the ground up.

Though many students were surprised to be met with Quantum Mechanics on the first day of class, they've become comfortable thinking about connections to such things as logic gates and will continue until, by the end of the course, they assemble their own computers.

But this is not just a class about computers, it is a class *involving* computers as well.

The traditional classroom environment has been shattered. Each student participates via a computer -- either in Neal Hirsig's Multimedia Lab in Jackson where class is held, from home, or from anywhere in the world, for that matter.

Using the new *CourseInfo* class software ([crs.ase.tufts.edu](http://crs.ase.tufts.edu)), which premiered at Tufts last semester, and an Internet chat program called Microsoft Net-Meeting, the entire class is held in cyberspace. Attendance is taken on-line; group chats are held to discuss the various topics and

assignments; homework is handed in, graded and comments returned all without a single sheet of paper.

While students are piecing together an understanding of what's ticking, they can start making the connections to what these devices that they're learning about can be used for.

Most students have a basic understanding of how computers work: every incoming student at Tufts has e-mail. The Ex College is helping them build on this knowledge by integrating computers into the learning environment.

*Ex College teaching veteran, Ronnee Yashon, gives students a chance to shape their own class in Problem Based Learning*

In keeping with the mission statement of the Experimental College, Robyn Gittleman and I began, some two years ago, working on a plan for a new course. We both were interested in an exciting teaching style called Problem Based Learning or "PBL."

This method, now being employed mainly in medical schools, allows students to look at a case or problem, decide what has to be discovered to solve this problem, find that material, and, finally, come up with a solution. Not only that, PBL allows stu-

dents to decide, with help from the instructor, how to organize all aspects of their learning environment.

Because Experimental College students tend to be highly motivated, sensitive and enthusiastic about new changes in teaching style, we knew they would be receptive.

With some plotting and planning, we offered the course in Fall of 1998, and students from across the disciplines met once a week, working on such problems as transplantation, new reproductive techniques, and DNA forensics.

The class was offered again the following fall. This time it took an odd and interesting turn.

After working in the original way, we hit a wall. The students in the class couldn't decide on a single topic as the focus for the assigned large scale, final problem. Finally, one student suggested that they do all of the problems on the list -- that each student pick one and research it on his or her own and then share the findings.

Because I had advertised the course as theirs to shape, I went along.

The results were interesting. Some presentations were great, got the class engaged, and were able to build groups to do further work from among those whose reports hadn't been so well received.

It was the perfect PBL ending.

## Cuba Today...Myth and Reality

While the country witnesses the Elian Gonzalez saga and living rooms are flooded with the sounds of the Cuban music "boom," the Ex College is offering Cuba: Its Music, Culture, and Art.

In order to make the course happen, Susan Thomas, an opera singer and Ph.D. candidate in musicology at Brandeis, worked diligently to secure a visa for her co-instructor, Alexis Esquivel, one of the most important young painters in Cuba today. Happily, Alexis was given the approvals needed to come to the U.S. and teach. He is staying with Susan and her husband.

The Ex College's Jason Schuchman sat down with Susan and Alexis to discuss their experiences.

**Jason: The class is going well?**

**Alexis:** I think it's going well. The thing that I was most worried about was the language issue, but that seems to be fine.

[Note: Alexis does not speak English. Susan translates as needed. However, 3/4 of the class understands Spanish.]

**Jason: Have either of you taught before?**

**Susan:** I've taught a lot as a grad student, here at Tufts and at Brandeis. But this is my first time teaching for the Ex College.

**Alexis:** As part of my social service, instead of being in the military after graduating from university, I was trained in art pedagogy, so I gave classes in art and art history, and I've given a few classes apart from that.

**Jason: How did you two meet?**

**Susan:** We met three years ago during my first trip to Havana. An ethnomusicologist who is a mutual friend of ours introduced us. I had just finished writing a paper on the use of female allegory in representations of Cuba during the Spanish American War, and on the wall at Alexis' house was a painting of basically everything I had worked on. It depicted a woman tied to railroad tracks among multiple Statues of Liberty. It's a powerful piece and got us talking about how we were interested in similar Cuban themes. I returned to Cuba several times, and we continued to collaborate.

**Jason: Alexis, Susan just mentioned some of your work. What are the major themes you deal with?**

**Alexis:** I try to approach my art with a critical posture. I try to look at present Cuba but also at the past in terms of social criticism: racial relations, gender relations, the different mediums that politics are put through, what Cuban reality has been like

since the dollar was legalized, which happened in 1994. The legalization of the dollar has had a drastic cultural effect.

**Jason: Such as?**

**Alexis:** On one hand it's letting people follow their individual initiative, something which people didn't have before. On the other hand, it's created a class system, a social class separation.

**Jason: Is this your first time in the States?**

**Alexis:** It's my first time off the Island.

**Jason: But even though you've not been away from Cuba, you've had your work displayed in other parts of the world.**

**Alexis:** Yes, I've had exhibits in the Philippines, Spain, and the U.S....Los Angeles.

**Jason: What differences have you felt in terms of the ways that art is treated?**

**Alexis:** In Cuba, there is a ministry of culture that regulates everything. It directs cultural activity. There is no interior market to buy or sell art. And right now the interest in Cuban culture has opened things up a bit. But there are very few private galleries. Most Cuban art is purchased by foreigners.

**Jason: Is your work censored?**

**Alexis:** There are certain limits of expression, and the art world has to respect those limits.

**Jason: Let me get back to your course. What are the goals for the course?**

**Alexis:** Well, there are many interesting things about Cuba, and we'd like to build a communicating bridge so that people can learn about Cuba from different sides, from both sides.

**Susan:** Another thing is that when we first started creating the class, we watched a lot of videos. Alexis noticed from watching Cuban music videos how much I wouldn't get as an outsider, and how I would interpret things in a different way. So we became really interested in how culture gets interpreted from the outside. It's problematic. People are becoming experts in Cuban music from this side without having any direct contact. We're mostly trying to show people how "big" a culture it really is.

**Jason: Out of curiosity, what do you think about the Buena Vista Social Club?**

**Alexis:** The musicians in *Buena Vista* are better known and famous now, but they're not popular in Cuba. The music they play is traditional and people like it, but the music that moves young people today is what's happening in contemporary dance music.

**Susan:** And the *Buena Vista* phenomenon is something we're going to look at in class. Its effect has been so powerful. Some students said they are taking the class because they saw the movie. So, its effect is something we can't ignore. Mostly we want students to know that the images they see are freighted with cultural politics. When they



*Twentieth Century*, oil on canvas, by Alexis Esquivel.

see something like *Buena Vista Social Club*, they need to question what the filmmaker is choosing to show and why.

**Jason: What would you like them to see?**

**Alexis:** The objective of the film was to bring back the memory of a lost past and activate nostalgia. To rescue the past is always a good thing. But it's made for an audience that doesn't know much about Cuba.

**Susan:** Basically we want to open people's eyes and their ears.

**Jason: I can't think of a better note to end on!**

## Opening up the Classroom, 2000

On Wednesday evening, March 8th, the Experimental College held its tenth annual *Opening Up the Classroom* program.

Representing almost every department, program and office in the Arts and Sciences, well over 100 faculty, students and administrators participated, by far our largest group ever.

Filling the Mugar Faculty Dining Room to capacity, faculty/administrators and students sat together for dinner and discussion of this year's theme: "You Decide! What if Tufts Turned to You for Answers?"

In a break from past programs, where everyone worked within the confines of a single-issue simulation (often set at Garrison University - a mythical New England liberal-arts college), this year's format gave students, faculty, and administrators the freedom to come up with their own solutions to a series of ongoing problems here at Tufts. Everyone who attended was allowed to choose from four major subject areas: Academics, Housing, Campus Services, and Outreach. And when it came time for dinner, participants were seated with others who chose to talk about the same issue.

After dinner, deliberations at each table resulted in a set of recommendations that Associate Dean of the Faculty, Susan Ernst, announced to the gathering.

These ranged from saying that "during Orientation it should be stressed by the academic deans to the entering students that 34 and 38 courses is just a start in a lifelong pursuit of learning" to suggesting that we

"clarify, communicate, and advertise current alcohol policies at Tufts" to a call for "increasing informal faculty involvement in residential life."

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## Emeritae Still Teach in the Ex College

Although Kent Tsutsumi of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Bill Barnes of the Fletcher School, and Seymour Simches of Romance Languages are all formally "retired," you wouldn't know it by the energy and passion they put into teaching through the Ex College's *Emeritus* program.

Each of their courses - *Earthquakes, Hurricanes, and Public Safety* (Tsutsumi), *The Globalization of Trade and Investment* (Barnes) and *Mentorship in Human Values* (Simches) - is built on decades of thought and experience.

With support from the offices of the President and the Provost, this program offers students a rare opportunity to work closely, in small-group settings, with these distinguished members of the Tufts faculty.

Seymour Simches' *Mentorship* course inaugurated the program six years ago. This is only fitting, given that he was one of the Experimental College's "founding fathers." Indeed, he has continued to teach the course every spring since then, introducing students to the work of Carl Jung and his concept of "the shadow," which, according to Professor Simches, "engenders racial and religious prejudice and, under certain political and economic conditions, leads to genocide."

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## Who's Who at the Ex College...

### STAFF

*Robyn Gittleman*, Director, Associate Dean of the Colleges

*Howard Woolf*, Associate Director  
*Tracey Tebrow*, Administrative Coordinator

*Jason Schuchman*, (A '99), Administrative Intern

### EXPERIMENTAL COLLEGE BOARD

1999-2000

*Natalie d'Aubermont* (J '00)

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*David Isles*, Mathematics

*Karen Lentz*, Computer Science/Electrical Engineering

*Sera Morelli* (J '00)

*Judy Staicer*, Drama

*Jonathan Strong*, English, Board Chair

*Vickie Sullivan*, Political Science (on leave)

### NEWSLETTER PRODUCTION

*Jason Schuchman*, Writer

*Ronnee Yashon*, Contributor

*Omer Trajman*, Contributor

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