

YORKU

APRIL 2008

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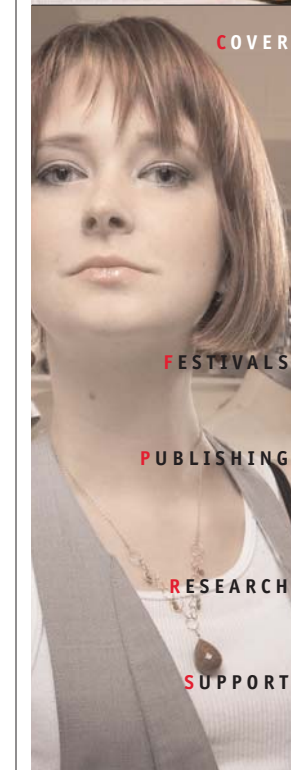
YORK TO THE POWER OF 50

INSIDE

YORKU

THE MAGAZINE OF YORK UNIVERSITY

COVER PHOTOGRAPHY: JEFF KIRK



- 4 Editor@YorkU** The mind of a stickler. BY BERTON WOODWARD
- 5 Leading Edge** The benefits of internationalization. BY MAMDOUH SHOUKRI
- 6 Universe** Pesky Particles...What They're Reading...Tracking the Wind...Fertile Issue...Campus Walking...Forget Cramming...Bee Cam...Exposing Exposures
- 12 Second Chance**
Edward Fenner is one of more than 9,000 mature students at York. His time here has proved enriching for him – and York. BY MARTHA TANCOCK
- 15 Reviving Existere**
As editor and publisher, Edward Fenner has upgraded a venerable arts journal.
- 16 The Upside of a Downsize**
For some older professionals, it can mean a new, better life. BY MARTHA TANCOCK
- 18 Show Time: A Fine Arts Gallery**
Meet four of the talented students taking part in York's Fine Arts Festival. BY MICHAEL TODD
- 24 Behind Muslim Girl**
Trained as a lawyer, Ausma Khan wound up editing a stylish international magazine that celebrates empowerment. BY MICHAEL TODD
- 26 Theatre Thinker**
Drama scholar Darren Gobert gets stellar reviews – and a major prize. BY MARTHA TANCOCK
- 28 Beating the Odds**
York computer science profs help women students succeed in a male-dominated field. BY DAVID FULLER
- 30 York People**
Motivator Tamara Gordon...student filmmaker Sarah Evans...kabaddi player Ravinderjeet Sarai
- 33 Giving**
How York's faculty association supports students.
- 34 Back Talk**
The power of stories. BY MATT SHAW

APRIL 2008

We can be a mean bunch. BY BERTON WOODWARD

The Sticklers

ONE OF THE PLEASURES of sifting through a copy of *Existere*, the Vanier College arts and literature journal, for our selections in this issue, was to discover the work of York English Professor John Blazina. A small sample from his delightful poems about the use – more properly, the abuse – of the English language is contained in our sidebar on page 15 about *Existere*, which has been revitalized by our cover subject, Edward Fenner. In the tiny *Existere* office, Fenner confided that he, like me, is a “stickler” – someone who aspires to very high standards of grammar and punctuation in writing or editing prose. We can be a mean bunch, we sticklers, given to snarls or deep sarcasm over a misplaced comma. But if that doesn’t poison the chalice, I think John Blazina should be made the sticklers’ poet laureate.

Here’s a stanza from his poem about sentence structure, “Ungrammatical Verse 1”, particularly useful for students:

The comma splice
is fine, is nice,
in letters or in poems,
in essays it’s a major vice
and must be stopped
at any price.

Here in Publications we have our own House Stickler. Copy editor Marie Kopf, who has a York BA in linguistics, checks all stories in *YorkU* and, most days, plows through the reams of information we produce in *YFile*, York’s daily online newsletter, and *YLife*, the version for students. Marie is the keeper of our holy writ, the York University Style Guide, the official usage of the University. Outside our confines, we sometimes find the



guide honoured more in the breach, but we have our allies. We fondly remember the staffer in a key Faculty who ruthlessly excised “programme” from the Faculty’s Web sites and publications in favour of “program”, York’s correct style.

Of course, to do their job, sticklers like Marie must have something to stickle about. Blazina, who teaches in the Faculty of Arts and at the Centre for Academic Writing, has thought about that, too. *Existere* published three poems in his “Ungrammatical Verse” series. Here is part of the fourth, subtitled “Bad Grammarians”:

Praise be to those who flaunt the rules,
Who claim disinterest in predication,
And loose there way were spell-check
fools,
And look to us for their salvation.
But we who man the borders, guard
the gates,
Who know appositives from absolutes,
Need them as much, or more, then
they need us,
Need blunderers, need sheep and
goats;
For whom would hire us (connois-
seurs of mess),
If not for sinners writing in the
wilderness. ■

Send letters, submissions, comments and ideas to editor@yorku.ca.

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redefine THE POSSIBLE.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KIRK

A visit to Mumbai shows the benefits of internationalization. BY MAMDOUH SHOUKRI

Going Global

ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF MUMBAI, between lakes Vihar and Powai, is the Indian Institute of Technology. It’s a sprawling campus, covering some 550 acres, and is surrounded by the low rolling hills of Sanjay Gandhi National Park. Like York University, IIT Bombay (as everyone calls it) is celebrating its 50th anniversary. And like York, IIT Bombay knows that its future lies in internationalization.

To celebrate its anniversary, IIT Bombay invited university vice-chancellors from around the world to help it map out a path to achieve international recognition as a leading research university. It’s no secret that York shares this ambition, so I took careful notes.

York has long understood the importance of reaching out to the world. Our goal is to educate students to become global citizens. We want them to be experts in their field, but we also want them to be aware that their field is part of a much wider world. Our efforts are paying off: York is emerging as a leader



tives provide links to local and international communities, and they open up opportunities for partnerships with outstanding institutions in other countries. For students, international oppor-

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in internationalization. A cornerstone of our University Academic Plan is to provide students and faculty with the means to participate fully in an increasingly interdependent global society. That’s why we’re encouraging the internationalization of academic programs, along with our important institutional linkages and student and faculty exchanges.

While York has grown into one of Canada’s largest universities, it is not yet one of Canada’s top research-intensive universities. To get there, we must maintain our prominence in areas of research strength, invest strategically and aggressively in niche areas, and diversify our research base and build our reputation through external partnerships. We also need to invest in research infrastructure and services to create highly competitive recruitment packages. This is key to attracting world-class scholars in strategic areas to drive forward York’s research performance.

Internationalization provides enormous benefits, both to the institution and to students. For the University, international initia-

Mamdouh Shoukri is York’s president and vice-chancellor.

tunities enrich their educational experience, exposing them to languages and cultures other than their own, providing new perspectives, and showing them, first-hand, the ways in which the world is changing. All of this gives students a com-

petitive edge in pursuing future employment opportunities.

As our world becomes more globalized, our graduates are more likely to find themselves engaged in work that involves other countries and other cultures. And here, York has a real advantage, being located in the fastest-growing and most diverse region of Canada, a mini-world where ideas with global perspective can be tested and implemented.

Of course, focusing on internationalization doesn’t mean York is moving away from the local communities we serve. Quite the contrary. We will continue to be guided by our distinctive values, and we will continue to build and nurture relationships at home. But the truth is that we cannot compete and win on the world stage if we don’t reach out to the world. And we cannot fulfill our core mission to serve society – both our local communities and the global community – without internationalization. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KIRK

UNIVERSE

PHYSICS

Pesky Particles

Two cutting-edge courses teach York students how to trap atoms

It isn't easy trapping atoms. Just ask York physics Professor A. Kumarakrishnan ("Kumar" for short) who has developed a course to help students do just that. Atoms are small, pesky, move quite fast (at the speed of a bullet unless you cool them down) and are invisible. In other words, capturing them is scientifically daunting.

But now York physics students have become the first undergraduates in Canada to trap atoms as part of two new upper-level physics courses called Experimental Techniques in Laser Physics and Atom Trapping Laboratory. The somewhat bland course names belie the cutting-edge nature of what students are doing. Kumarakrishnan says that over the last 20 years atom trapping has become one of the most exciting areas in physics. "There have been several Nobel prizes awarded in this field in the last few years," he says.

York students capture atoms in a state-of-the-art lab called the Optech Incorporated Advanced Optics Laboratory where lasers are used to cool atoms to super-cold temperatures (1/10,000th of a degree above absolute zero, or approximately -273 C). "This course is unique in Canada. Even in the US a couple of universities that do have atom trapping experiments have not developed a course as comprehensive as York's, which gives hands-on skills to students while also stressing data analysis," says Kumarakrishnan.

Why trap atoms in the first place? "Atom trapping is a hot field with wide-ranging applications such as atomic clocks – which tell time precisely enough that GPS satellites can locate someone on the earth's surface to within a few inches – along with applications in oil and mineral prospecting," says Kumarakrishnan. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KIRK

HOT FIELD: Teaching assistant Brynle Barrett in the lab

BOOKS

What They're Reading

York people reveal what's on the bedside table

Peter McKinnon

Theatre professor, Faculty of Fine Arts

"I've been reading two books recently. One is *A Year in the Life of William Shakespeare* by James Shapiro in which the author looks at the world of 1599, examining the books, politics, social life etc. that Shakespeare was likely to have come in contact with. It's a means of placing Shakespeare in his time and place rather than what many academics do, which is to exclude him from his environment on the assumption that he is so singularly unusual that he was beyond any single time and place. The other book is *How to Read a Church* by Richard Taylor. In it, the author dissects the church building and provides background meaning for all that it contains."

Leslie Greenberg

Psychology professor, Faculty of Health

"When I travel I usually read detective stories such as those by P.D. James or Minette Walters. I prefer British mystery writers – they tend to be less violent. I read books related to psychology in spurts, sometimes a few at a time and rarely cover to cover. My experience of reading novels at the end of the day is one of savouring this time in which I can get together with my 'companions' to share in their joys and sorrows and hopefully see them overcome their opponents. I am currently seven-eighths through *A Suitable Boy* by Vikram Seth, probably the biggest book I have ever tackled. My next book, waiting at the end of my marathon? *Divisadero* by Michael Ondaatje."

RESEARCH

Tracking the Wind

A high-tech radar system is taking over from weather balloons



It's a sky-high idea whose time has come. A group of researchers, including principal investigator Peter Taylor, atmospheric scientist in York's Faculty of Science & Engineering, and Wayne Hocking from the University of Western Ontario, have been funded by the Canada Foundation for Innovation and the Ontario Innovation Trust to construct a multi-million dollar network of "windprofiler" radars throughout Ontario (especially in parts of "tornado alley") and in Quebec. What's the big deal? Well, the radars, which look a bit like an array of fancy old-fashioned TV antennas, are able to detect and track high-level winds in the upper atmosphere that formerly could only be "seen" using a weather balloon and a radiosonde. A radiosonde is the instrument attached to a weather balloon that transmits information on pressure, humidity, temperature and winds as it ascends.

"Balloons are pretty awkward things," says Taylor. "They take hours to prepare and launch and are only flown twice a day from a very limited number of locations, whereas windprofiler radar operates 24/7. There is only one radiosonde site in Ontario, at Pickle Lake, whereas we already have two new windprofilers and two more nearing completion in the province." Taylor says the new radar is able to measure winds with a high degree of accuracy and detect clear air turbulence, which can cause jet airliner accidents. Data from the windprofilers should improve our ability to predict violent storms and tornadoes.

"What happens in the upper atmosphere at 10 to 15 kilometres determines to some extent what goes on down here on the ground," says Taylor. Data from one of the windprofilers has already been used to study the transfers of stratospheric ozone into the troposphere (reported in *Nature*, Nov. 8, 2007).

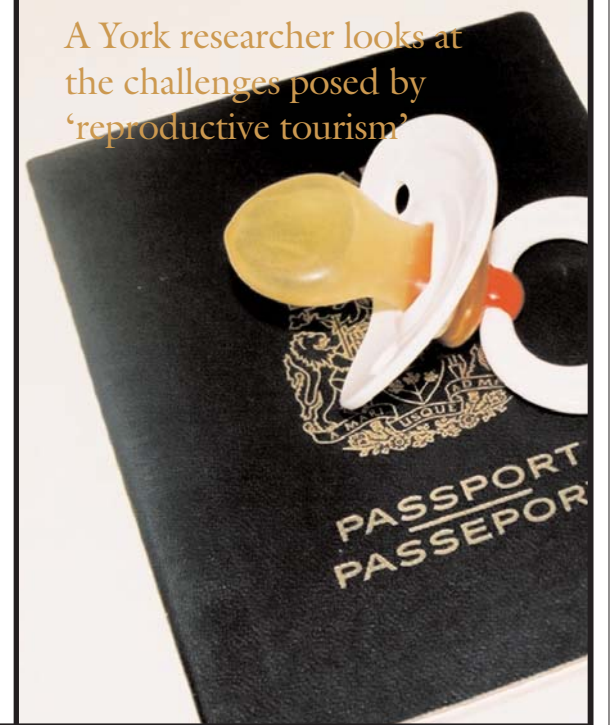
The \$6-million network of 11 windprofiler radars will be installed in Ontario and southwestern Quebec by the end of 2009. ■

UNIVERSE

SOCIOLOGY

Fertile Issue

A York researcher looks at the challenges posed by 'reproductive tourism'



Call it a last "resort". While some couples go on vacation for fun in the sun, others go to fertility clinics in places such as Barbados that promise a chance to become pregnant in resort-like settings. Dubbed "reproductive tourism", it's a burgeoning industry, thanks to the Web, that's raising all sorts of ethical and legal questions, says Penny Dowdoff, a York PhD student in sociology. Dowdoff is researching the subject by analyzing Web sites that write about it and studying fertility clinics that advertise such services.

"Reproductive tourism was a phrase coined by Knoppers and Le Bris in 1991," says Dowdoff. "Basically it refers to the travel by individuals from one country or jurisdiction – where treatment is not available – to another country or jurisdiction where they can obtain the kinds of medically assisted reproduction they desire. While most feminists would posit that women have their right to self-determination over their own bodies, the development and the globalization of new reproductive technologies pose complex and unforeseen challenges worldwide."

One of those developments is a two-tier system where those who can afford the treatments can jump to the front of the line, notes Dowdoff, who intends to interview people who leave Canada to receive in vitro fertilization or artificial insemination abroad. She's also examining individuals who sell their own reproductive material (sperm or eggs), an act that is illegal in Canada but legal in the US and other jurisdictions.

"Global capitalism has brought a new consumer culture," says Dowdoff. "Women and their partners operate in this marketplace – as buyers and sellers. It's a recent phenomenon and raises new issues for women's rights." ■



PASTIMES

Campus Walking

It's great exercise, and a great way to network

Human beings have been walking since time immemorial. And no wonder. It's the simplest, most straightforward exercise you can get, and for students on a budget, its equipment demands are decidedly low-tech. That's why York's Health Education & Promotion unit started a Weekly Walking Group (WWG) for students in 2005. It's been a big hit ever since.

"WWG is a great alternative for students who may not be fans of the traditional 'gym workout,'" says Leah State, peer health education coordinator for the Centre for Student Community & Leadership Development.

York student Aleksandra Sagan is a walking group leader. "Aside from exercise, walking gives students the chance to familiarize themselves with the campus and a chance to network with peers and senior students," she says. "You can find out a lot about what's going on at York by talking to others." She says the group treks an average 4.5 km per walk (about 45 minutes). "Keele campus is a fantastic place to do this. It's so big that there's no need to backtrack. It keeps things fresh."

All walkers receive a free pedometer, info package, walking log and stretching information. There's even a place for students to lock up backpacks etc. while they hit the trail. Walks always begin at the Bennett Centre for Student Services. For more information, check out yorku.ca/healthed. ■

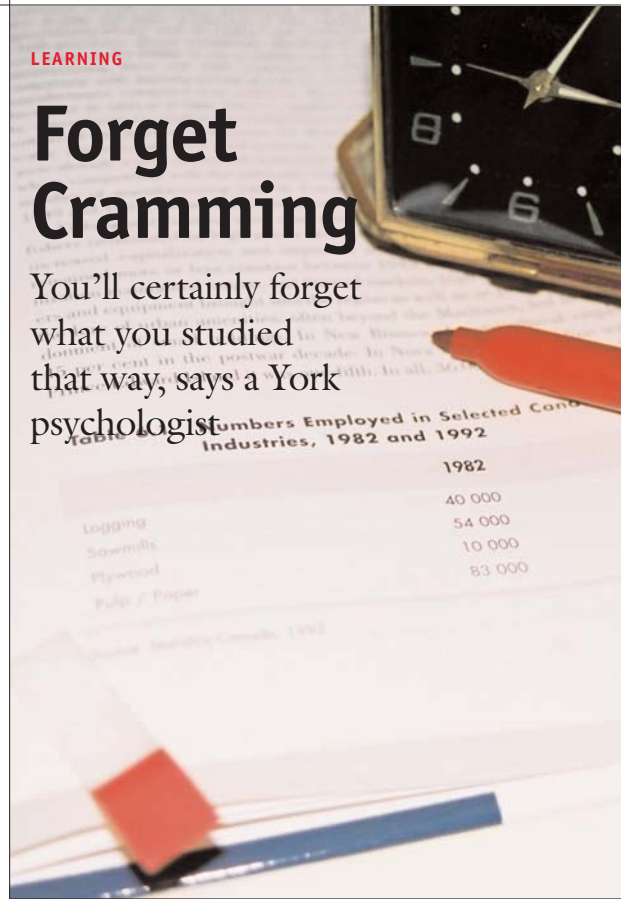
PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF PETER TAYLOR

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RSQUARED

LEARNING

Forget Cramming

You'll certainly forget what you studied that way, says a York psychologist



North Americans are a cramming culture. It seems we're always trying to pack more into our waking hours. But when it comes to cramming for an exam – as a memory retention technique – things don't go well.

According to recent research results published by York psychology Professor Nicholas Cepeda, cramming might help you pass a test but you won't retain much of that knowledge down the road for when you might need it. Cepeda found in a review of more than 100 years' worth of research literature (from 1885 onwards) hardly any of cognitive psychology's insights into improving instructional techniques (vis-à-vis learning and retention) filtered down to the classroom.

"So we decided to do some experiments around learning enhancement to see what we could discover that might enhance learning and retard forgetting," says Cepeda. His recent study of 1,350 people revealed that study material needs to be relearned at least one month after initial learning in order to achieve a maximum retention level one year later. "Cognitive psychologists have known for a long time that multiple exposures to material are the key to long-term retention," says Cepeda, "but we didn't know how the process worked – until now."

Cepeda's study now gives a precise measure of the most effective time intervals between initial learning of material and later relearning of it that will produce maximum retention (up to 50 weeks in his current study). Bottom line? "Cramming gives you the illusion of mastery over the material but you don't retain it long term." ■

BIOLOGY

Bee Cam

A sophisticated camera helps identify each species in 3D



How do you describe a bee? Because most are small, it's hard to delineate colour and structural patterns verbally, notes York biology Professor Laurence Packer, whose research focuses on bees, especially their puzzling global decline. Just in the Toronto area, bumble bee species have fallen from at least 15 in the 1970s to – at most – 10 today.

So to help track and catalogue bee populations (800 species in Canada), Packer's lab has purchased a specialized "bee camera" that's able to take pictures of bees in different planes of focus. A computer then merges the images allowing researchers to see a bee's image in virtual 3D – better than you would see them with your eyes in the field or under the microscope, Packer says.

"With this camera we can catalogue and share high-resolution images rather than bagging up bees and sending them off for identification. It's especially useful since we're working on an identification key for bees of Canada in order to create a bee database." This will enable Packer's lab to predict pollination changes resulting from global warming in both agricultural and wilderness situations.

The camera also reveals morphological structures throughout the specimen which are otherwise hard to see, and are important in identification. "For each species of bee we want a species page so a user on a database can click and point and see it accurately," says Packer. "The camera gives us images of higher quality than we could get under a microscope. And, of course, it will be easy to share images with other researchers." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RSQUARED

UNIVERSE

HEALTH

Exposing Exposures

Researcher Ann Novogradec looks at esophageal cancer and the environment



It might seem odd that a student with a Bachelor of Administrative Studies in marketing would end up studying the environmental causes of esophageal cancer, but that's what happened to Ann Novogradec, who is now in her fifth year of CIHR-funded PhD studies in York's Faculty of Environmental Studies.

Novogradec says her interest in marketing came from growing up in a family business. "My parents ran their own successful custom upholstery business," she says. Sadly, it was also a personal experience that sparked her interest in studying esophageal cancer. Halfway through her undergraduate degree, her father was diagnosed with what would turn out to be a terminal case. "I grew immensely interested in the disease, the people who are diagnosed with it, and the environments they are exposed to," she says. After her father's death, Novogradec

continued her studies, taking her MES where she refined her research direction with the help of York professors such as Louise Ripley and Harris Ali.

"My outlook on business changed considerably. The new face of business – for me – included exposures to hazards, threshold limit values and risks associated with the manufacturing and use of various products – not just marketing techniques, sales, efficiency and profits."

Novogradec found there was very little mention in current research of involuntary exposures that people undergo on a daily basis, while lifestyle and voluntary exposures were benchmarked in the literature as the main causes of many cancers. She hopes her research will offer insights into the study of esophageal cancer by comprehensively exploring both the living and working environments of esophageal cancer patients. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRYAN MCBURNEY

A LINE NEW LIFE

Edward Fenner is one of more than 9,000 mature students at York. His time here has proved enriching for him – and for York.

BY MARTHA TANCOCK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KIRK

IN 1982, A YEAR AFTER HE GRADUATED from Central Technical School in Toronto, Edward Fenner was certified to be a computer repairman. But an economic recession killed his chances and he found work selling books at a department store and moonlighting as an armed courier. Then the mechanically inclined kid who liked writing answered an ad for a technical writer – and launched a career as a communications consultant. Now, more than 20 years later, he is reinventing himself again, as a mature student at York.

He's not the only one. Twenty per cent of York undergraduates – 9,177 in 2007-2008 – are mature students. Aged 25 and over, they come, like Fenner, to boost their credentials or fulfill a dream. Often juggling jobs and families as well as school, many have made sacrifices to be here and are supremely motivated to succeed. They bring life experience and skills that enrich the classroom and campus alike. But their needs and concerns vary markedly from those of younger students straight out of high school. Which is why hundreds have flocked to join a mature students' group Fenner founded shortly after he started at York, and why the University recently opened the Atkinson Centre for Mature & Part-time Students (ACMAPS).

Fenner enrolled at York in 2004. Since the mid-1980s, he's paid the bills as a freelance writer, editor and publications manager for corporations and governments. For years, he was senior managing editor, publishing liaison and information strategist for General Motors of Canada's defence products division – his biggest client. More recently, he's had contracts with IBM Canada, software developers and international publishers, producing technical manuals, user guides, educational materials and marketing communications. Though the money flowed, it never flowed consistently. "It was either feast or famine," he says. He started applying for company positions. "I just didn't want to be chasing the



freelance tail all the time.” Yet he could rarely parlay his contracts into permanent jobs – because he didn’t have a university degree. “Over and over again, I’d end up training my new bosses, who had far less experience than me but a degree in some unrelated field,” says Fenner, still frustrated at being bypassed.

Then he turned 40. “I want to go back to school,” he announced one day to his wife Linda, a part-time teacher. He wanted the credentials to qualify for the jobs that had so far eluded him. He’d always rued dropping out of the broadcasting program he’d started at Centennial College in the mid-1980s. This time he would stay the course. With Linda’s encouragement, he registered at York. He would do a major in professional writing and a minor in science & society.

Money would be tight. Though he would continue to work, he would have to make more time for school. So he and Linda sold their house with the big garden in a picturesque village northeast of Toronto and moved into a smaller, maintenance-free townhouse closer to York and near a bus route. They don’t go out much and won’t replace their old car. But these are temporary privations until Fenner graduates in 2009 – or 2010.

It may take Fenner longer to earn his honours BA than originally planned. He is not only throwing himself into his studies, he’s exploring his creative side – and volunteering for one project after another.

Fenner has thrived at York in ways he never expected. The once average high-school student is now earning As and winning scholarships. He’s not just polishing his professional writing skills, he’s penning prize-winning poetry and plays – “doing the kind of writing I always wanted to do.”

‘Over and over again, I’d end up training my new bosses, who had far less experience than me.’

But he’s really poured his heart and soul into extracurricular projects. Most recently, he breathed new life into *Existere*, an ailing student literary and arts journal (see story opposite), and helped launch e-MAGINED, a new electronic magazine on international education for York International.

But Fenner’s pet project has been the York University Mature Students Organization (YUMSO). Over the past three-and-a-half years, he has logged more than 1,500 volunteer hours – most as founding president of this club. Like so many older students, he felt isolated and intimidated when he started at York and wanted to meet other adult learners. YUMSO quickly burgeoned to over 600 members and became an advocacy and support group as much as a social club. Fenner has organized orientations, started speakers series, launched a Web site filled with useful information and set up a page on Facebook where members could network. He has spent hours mentoring newcomers and become a vocal advocate for mature students on and off campus.

For his efforts, Fenner won the Deborah Hobson Student Leadership Award in 2007. And he’s just been made a Fellow of Vanier College.

Last fall, York opened the Atkinson Centre for Mature & Part-Time Students. The centre offers information, advice, support, peer mentoring and a place to meet for the thousands of students over 25. In the past, the former Atkinson College catered exclusively to the needs of mature and part-time undergraduates when most worked full time during the day and took courses at night. But “the demographic has shifted,” says ACMAPS director Norma Sue Fisher-Stitt, York’s associate vice-president, academic learning initiatives. “Now, the nature

turn to page 16

Youth and Experience

Age distribution of York students (2007)

Mature students are defined as 25 and over.

AGE	14-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-49	50-59	60+	TOTAL	MATURE
Undergraduate	10,995	25,905	5,273	1,535	903	1,081	292	93	46,077	20%
Graduate	0	801	1,973	1,272	704	663	283	46	5,742	86%
Grand total	10,995	26,706	7,246	2,807	1,607	1,744	575	139	51,819	27%

Reviving *Existere*

As editor and publisher, Edward Fenner has upgraded a venerable arts journal

EDWARD FENNER HAS BREATHED NEW LIFE into Vanier College’s arts and literature journal *Existere*. The 43-year-old part-time undergraduate brings 20 years of marketing and communications experience to his post as publisher and executive editor. Since it was launched in 1978, the student-run journal has had an uneven publishing history and variable design. Fenner decided it needed consistency, infrastructure and more revenue if it were to become a self-sustaining, quality publication.

Last spring Fenner recruited two dozen student volunteers and cast far and wide for submissions. He set up a virtual office on Facebook where volunteers could work together to select poems, short stories, essays and art work from hundreds of submissions for the fall issue. By summer’s end, the first issue in a year – a 96-page, six- by nine-inch, soft-cover, colour edition – was ready to go to print. Another issue was due in early March.

To raise *Existere*’s profile, Fenner created a Wikipedia entry highlighting its history and early contributors, such as poet bpNichol and novelists Susan Swan, Barry Dempster and Michael Redhill. He introduced honorariums for writers and offered subscriptions, and set up ongoing accounting and administrative systems to support them. He also sought advertisers and sponsors, increased the print run, expanded grant eligibility and stepped up marketing.

The outcome is a semi-annual journal with intriguing content. Here is a brief taste:

1. Country Squire Inn: My mother caves in and gets us separate hotel rooms
There are flowers on the bedspread,
cream coloured daisies painfully washed out
like my Oma’s dresses from years ago,
or the wallpaper in mom and dad’s
downstairs bathroom.
The hall smells like French fries and
chicken strips. The carpet is damp under
my socked feet, and brown
to hide stains.
The woman who serves me the beef special for \$7.95
says she doesn’t know anyone in Moosamin. She wears a bib
over her gravy stained blouse. The meat is gritty.
The potatoes smell like cigarettes.

*From “Snowstorm – Part 1” by Adrienne Gruber,
a Saskatoon master’s student in creative writing. Fall 2007*

Before yours I had only been to two other funerals, and both were closed casket. Curiosity overtook me. Approaching you after all but the immediate family had left, Michael attended your side with me, touched your hand and sobbed. “Cold,” he said. “She’s so cold.” I asked him if he thought you would mind if I touched your hand as well. With his permission I did, and I wasn’t as struck by your temperature as I was by your texture. You were hard. I expected death to be cold, but I didn’t expect the flesh to turn hard as clay so quickly. Hard and rough, lacking any elasticity, and your hair, where our hands moved next, your hair felt brittle and crisp like ashen wood. “Her nails will continue to grow,” Michael told me. “They’ll even grow underground.” I kneeled and made a sign of the cross and I think I asked you for forgiveness.

*From “At Your Service: In Memory of Beryl Ann”
by Priscila Uppal, York creative writing professor. Fall 2007*

When I was at York in my twenties – it’s the time in your life when you’re really cutting your teeth as a writer and you’re developing your voice and figuring out what it is you want to say. It’s a time in your life when you have to be willing to live on next to nothing.... That’s the time to take all the risks, when it’s not going to harm anybody if you’re living on baloney and rye bread for months at a time. But you also are giving up a lot if that’s the choice you make. That’s the period of time when your cohorts are choosing their careers and they’re generally making “sensible” decisions about what to do with their lives. The vast majority of people I grew up with went on to make livings for themselves, and I took a big risk with my life that, had I failed utterly, then sometime in my late thirties I would have to think about what I was going to do for the rest of my life.

*From an interview by Fenner with
writer Michael Redhill. Spring 2008*

Writers, please
don’t use apostrophes
in plural noun’s, possessive its’
or anywhere it give’s us fits.

*From “Ungrammatical Verse 2: Apostrophes”
by John Blazina, York English professor. Fall 2007* ■



COVER

of work has changed so much that people with jobs are taking classes day and night across all Faculties, not just at Atkinson.” And their numbers are growing.

Of York’s 46,000 undergraduates, almost 9,200 – or 20 per cent – are aged 25 and over. Some are as old as 78, but more than 90 per cent of them are between the ages of 25 and 50 and have been away from school for years. (Most of York’s 5,700 graduate students fall into that age range, too, but have not significantly interrupted their academic careers before pursuing their master’s and doctoral degrees.)

Mature students face very different challenges than their younger, fresh-out-of-high-school classmates. Most juggle part-time or full-time jobs as well as family responsibilities. Childcare, eldercare and flexibility at work are big concerns. And because they aren’t up to speed with doing library research, writing essays or working on computers, “butterflies are common,” Fenner says. “But the intimidation factor really kicks in when they see they are older than many of the profs as well as most of the students.”

Nevertheless, they quickly hit their stride. Highly motivated

to succeed, they do their readings, participate in class and work ahead on assignments. “They’re not here to goof around,” says Fenner. They might have been unexceptional students before, but they’re soon raking in As and high Bs, surprising themselves along the way.

“They know they want to be here,” says Fisher-Stitt. “They are making sacrifices to be here and are fully engaged in the process. They’ve been in jobs where they’ve realized the only way to progress is to get a degree. I’m constantly amazed and impressed at what they

will carry to do well.”

Some have such busy schedules they hit their classes then run. But Fenner urges those who can to get involved. “I tell them this is their time at school too and they should make the best of it.”

He has. “I’m spreading my wings, putting my toes in the water,” says Fenner. Coming to university “has been very much what I hoped it would be – an enriching experience. It’s reawakened my creative self and forced me to think more critically about myself and my direction. It’s provided me with more options. It’s redefined who I am.” ■

Mature students are motivated. ‘They’re not here to goof around.’

The Upside of a Downsize

For some older professionals, it can mean a new, better life. BY MARTHA TANCOCK

LOSING YOUR JOB can be a blessing in disguise, according to a York study on the impact of job loss on older workers recently published in the *Canadian Journal of Administrative Sciences*. For some, it leads back to university as a mature student.

There’s no question that job loss – due to restructuring, downsizing, dismissal or lay off – can be stressful and have a negative professional and personal impact. Yet a survey of 30 laid-off managers and executives conducted by Professors Jelena Zikic and Julia Richardson of the Atkinson School of Administrative

Studies found that job loss creates a chance for self-reflection, taking stock and time out.

Most of those interviewed had been long-term employees of consulting firms, banks, insurance agencies and manufacturing companies. Many had felt trapped in their jobs, under pressure to perform and unable to find the time or energy to grow professionally or personally. Job loss had provided them with a rare opportunity to take a step back, assess their careers and refocus on family and friends. Some said job loss had enabled them “to escape one life and embark upon another.”

“Many had reached milestones in their

career and this was an important moment for them to contemplate next steps,” says Richardson. For some, losing their jobs was a blessing in disguise, a chance to change careers or go back to school. For instance, an information technology manager who was continually on call in her previous job realized, after the fact, that she had hated her job. She took out a loan, went back to school and trained as a nurse.

“What our research uncovers is that the unemployed can be self-reliant,” says Zikic. “They are able to successfully explore and manage their career options, as well as engage in various learning opportunities.” ■

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and in collaboration with partners beyond the university, researchers at York are able to develop innovative ideas and work with policy makers and practitioners to create meaningful change and a more globally competitive Canada.

Examples of York’s current collaborations aimed at spurring innovation and regional economic growth include the Innovation Synergy Centre in Markham (ISCM), which helps Canadian companies realize their full growth potential and become globally competitive. Similarly, YORKbiotech, a regional innovation network and not-for-profit community development corporation, uses the power of convergence to help its partners deliver innovative, real-world solutions to real-world challenges. A third initiative, The Consortium on New Media, Creative and Entertainment R&D in the Toronto Region (CONCERT) will drive the creative potential of the region by facilitating innovative collaborations between the arts, technology and business.

These three initiatives are indicative of the unique and relevant way in which York Research is helping to shape Canada’s competitiveness and global influence. To learn more about how York’s approach to research is redefining university research in Canada and fueling Canada’s growth, visit www.research.yorku.ca.

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show time

Meet four of the talented students taking part in York's Fine Arts Festival.

BY MICHAEL TODD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KC ARMSTRONG

SPRING IS ALMOST UPON US, and what better time to throw off the winter blahs and take in some great young talent courtesy of York's Faculty of Fine Arts? The third annual York Fine Arts Festival is showcasing up-and-coming young artists in the visual and performing arts from March 11 to 31. The three-week extravaganza offers more than 30 public events, including theatre, dance, exhibitions, film screenings and classical, jazz and world music.

The Faculty of Fine Arts has long been a springboard for Canada's artistic talent, ranging from Hollywood actor Rachel McAdams (BFA '01) to longtime Cirque du Soleil choreographer Debra Brown (BFA '78). Among the students involved in this festival – and profiled here – are violinist Hannah Kwon, dancer/choreographer Kate Nankervis, costume designer Adrienne Carney and photographer Thomas Blanchard. Are they destined for fame? Who knows, but if, like Rachel McAdams, they do get there, you'll have had the chance to see them here first.



Kate Nankervis
4th year, dance
Dancer/choreographer

"Whether I'm dancing, performing or creating choreographic works I love how dance communicates," says Kate Nankervis, choreographer and member of the York Dance Ensemble along with Deanna Roffey (left) and Vanessa Cappello (right). What's the scariest thing about her work? "Making art is so subjective. The scariest part is staying true to yourself, but sharing ideas through dance is exhilarating – it's what brings me back to it each day."



FESTIVALS



Thomas Blanchard
2nd year master's, visual arts
Photographer

Nothing escapes Tom Blanchard's eye – or his camera. He's especially interested in examining the hidden nature of food products and commodities found in domestic life. "I'm aware of the many detrimental environmental and health problems that surround us, but often go unnoticed. Exploring this fuels my art." Blanchard's images are being featured at the Gales Gallery during the first week of the Fine Arts Festival.



Adrienne Carney
4th year, theatre
Costume designer

"I've always been a creative person," says Adrienne Carney, costume designer for *Metamorphoses*, Theatre @ York's final production of the season. So what would she do if she couldn't pursue a career in costume design and production? "I believe if you can see yourself doing anything else, then theatre is not the path for you, but if I had to be something else I'd be a spy or a Vegas showgirl."



Hannah Kwon
2nd year, music
Violinist

Even in her first year Hannah Kwon had caught the attention of York faculty. She was recognized as the best violinist in the York University Symphony Orchestra (she's now its concertmaster). Is it hard practising for hours a day? "I often want to give up," she says. "But I know I will feel guilty, so I can't let that happen. Practice really does make perfect!" she says with a wink. ■

Trained as a lawyer, Ausma Khan wound up editing *Muslim Girl*, a stylish international magazine that celebrates empowerment.

BY MICHAEL TODD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SEED9

AUSMA KHAN, editor of the glossy new magazine *Muslim Girl*, is the first to admit she didn't really have a tough time of it growing up female, Muslim – or anything else. But that's not so for a lot of other young Muslim women who didn't grow up in liberal democracies, she says. While the year-old, bimonthly magazine's primary demographic is North American Muslim women who are 18-24, Khan says she hopes its message and influence will reach around the world. In fact, it already has, as far-flung e-mails and letters to the editor attest. Moreover, last October, Khan was invited to discuss the vision of *Muslim Girl* with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice at the State Department's annual *iftar* dinner for the Islamic community.

"So many of the stories you hear about Muslims post-9/11 deal with some kind of violent episode, or suppression of human rights, or whether or not to wear the veil, etc.," says Khan. "But there's a lot more to Muslim life and culture than that, and that's what we need to make people aware of, especially young Muslim women. We want to empower them by putting some of the stories in the hands of young women themselves [through suggestions and contributions]. I think the onus is on Muslims, particularly Muslims who live in North America, to create alternative stories to represent themselves."

Khan's own story sounds a bit like an episode of "Little Mosque on the Prairie". Originally born in England, she grew up in the small town of Weyburn, Sask., (pop. 9,433) and then Prince Albert, Sask., before moving east to study law. After gaining her bachelor's and master's at the University of Ottawa, she received her PhD in 2004 from York's Osgoode Hall Law School, specializing in international law and human rights. She later moved to the US where, among other jobs, she lectured at Northwestern University in Chicago on human rights law and the politics of human rights. "Empowerment of individuals and minorities and the protection of individual rights was a focus of mine," says Khan. She is now based in Los Angeles.

So how did a small-town Saskatchewan girl give up a blossoming legal and academic career to become a magazine editor? "Good question," says Khan with a laugh. "But it's not as left-field as it might seem. I always loved writing and I've always been interested in individual rights. With *Muslim Girl* I can combine the two."

The publisher, execuGo Media, is a Toronto-based firm that previously specialized only in business publications. "*Muslim Girl* was their first venture into the world of commercial

publishing," says Khan. "They knew they needed an editor from within the Muslim community if they were going to have legitimacy, which is how I eventually came on board." A mutual friend put Khan's name forward.

Research shows there's a market of 400,000-500,000 young Muslim women who are potential readers, Khan says. Circulation currently stands at 25,000 in the US and Canada. So far there has been very little paid advertising. Khan says her challenge is to become self-sustaining by the end of 2008. "Advertising continues to be a challenge, one, because of our relatively small circulation and, two, because of our name/brand."

So what is the editorial mission? "Our publisher's editorial slogan is 'media that matters'," says Khan. "And *Muslim Girl* is no different in that respect. Our focus is very specific – to tell stories that young Muslim girls find interesting and relevant and life affirming and that celebrate their values. We want to inform, entertain, enlighten and educate them. Part of our reason for wanting to do that is, obviously, a politically charged climate in the aftermath of 9/11."

The magazine includes, like any young women's mag, regular features about pop culture, sports, health, music and international travel, along with a relationships column and fashion spreads featuring stylish versions of traditional dress. There are also personal, real-life stories about "amazing young Muslim women", such as one who worked with tsunami victims in Indonesia. Another article documented the adventures of a young woman who went to Malawi for two years as an environmental worker with the US Peace Corps. York health management student Jenna Evans was featured on the cover of the November-December 2007 issue. *Muslim Girl* clearly aims to have content that's fun, but not fluffy; serious, but not preachy.

While Khan says there may be some things the magazine won't cover – "we're not a political or explicitly religious publication" – that's because certain topics don't fit the editorial vision. The magazine doesn't shy away from articles or advice that deal with Muslim values, she says. For instance, there's a regular column called "Qur'an Notes", while another recent column questioned the justice of a double standard for boys and girls.

"We hope *Muslim Girl* gets young women in North America and around the world, who lead very different lives from the girls and women under regimes like the Taliban, to think about their lives and the lives of others and individual human rights," says Khan. "The bottom line is to try and live an ethical life." ■

Their Own Stories



RESEARCH

Drama scholar Darren Gobert gets stellar reviews from students and peers alike.

BY MARTHA TANCOCK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KC ARMSTRONG

DARREN GOBERT MISSES New York City. So every couple of years he returns for his fix – directing a piece of experimental theatre he’s fashioned from one of the classics. The York English professor can create quite a buzz in the Big Apple, as he did in 2002 when his cast brandished snarling chainsaws to chop down the orchard, symbol of czarist Russia, in his radical interpretation of Anton Chekhov’s *The Cherry Orchard*.

The 36-year-old with spiky black hair and a designer wardrobe can create a buzz on any stage. His students give him glowing reviews – and so do his peers. Last fall, the drama scholar shared the spotlight on the academic stage with four other outstanding young Ontario researchers to win a prestigious, \$20,000 Polanyi Prize. For good reason.

Only four years into his academic career at York, Gobert is about to knock 19th-century Russian Konstantin Stanislavsky off his pedestal as the acclaimed pioneer of modern method acting. Molière, Gobert will argue in a piece to be published in April, preempted Stanislavsky by about 250 years. The 17th-century French playwright and director was encouraging his actors to build character from the inside out – drawing upon their emotions, memories and experiences – long before the Russian director came on the scene.

Molière’s ideas likely stem from French philosopher René Descartes’ revolutionary 1649 treatise *Passions of the Soul*, the first discourse on how emotions relate to mind and body. In an upcoming book, Gobert will trace how Descartes’ understanding of emotions percolated through plays right up to the late Victorian period, when the psychoanalytic movement revisited his theories and

interpreted them anew.

Meanwhile, Gobert, book review editor of the journal *Modern Drama*, has recently edited a special issue on contemporary British drama. He also plans to write a book on Caryl Churchill, author of Broadway hits *Top Girls* and *Cloud Nine* and his “favourite living playwright”. And he’d like to write another about speech prefixes, those names in script margins that signal who speaks. This is no trivial pursuit. Over time, these prefixes have indicated characters, actors, roles (like the protagonist, or first actor, in ancient Greek plays) or been absent, as in plays by Gertrude Stein. So for Gobert they raise intriguing questions of identity.

Gobert grew up in a northern Ontario mining town and had no clue his life passions would be theatre and philosophy. The bilingual working-class boy had acted in amateur productions but, even after three delirious years studying drama, philosophy and literature at the University of Ottawa, thought his future lay in law. Not so, he soon discovered. He dropped torts at McGill University’s law school, marched down the hill to the English department, found a mentor and started work on a master’s paper on philosophical issues in 20th-century German drama instead.

He’d finally found a way to blend his seemingly incongruous passions. “Suddenly I understood. I was interested in very abstract ideas but loved the practicality of theatre. I loved how everything immaterial becomes anchored in material conditions on stage. I wanted to throw myself into intellectual life but also into theatrical life. I wanted to pursue both at full throttle.”

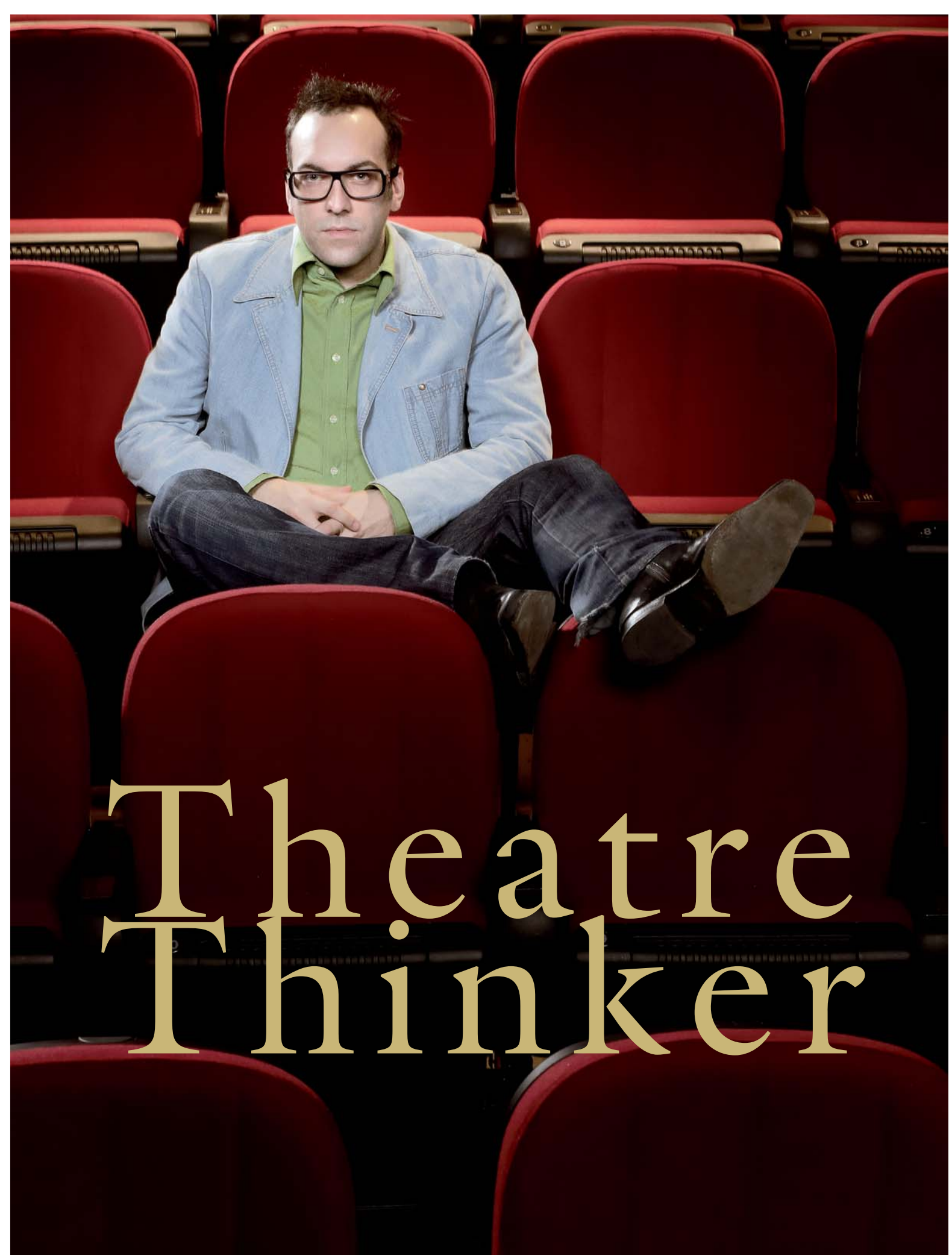
With an MA and a pocketful of scholarships, Gobert headed for New York. It was 1996 and he was 24. He would study

comparative literature at Columbia University and immerse himself at the same time in the real world of theatre. “One of the things I love about New York is it rewards hustle. I was hungry for it.” Within two years, he had formed his own company, *A Jovial Crew*, and was directing plays.

Eight years later, his PhD in hand, he landed a job in York’s Faculty of Arts, grateful for the freedom to roam far and wide intellectually. Judging by posts on ratemyprofessors.com, Gobert is a hit on the teaching stage as well. Always interested in the broad narrative, he draws links between ideas and drama from ancient to modern times. “He makes every text absolutely sexy,” said one student, who took his drama survey course. “Darren’s lectures were like intriguing plays that also amaze!” said another. “Great reading list and hot outfits.”

It’s true. Gobert doesn’t just deliver, he performs his lectures. Far from off-off-Broadway, he’s found a captive audience in the 125 undergrads who take his drama survey course every year. Before each class, “I think as if I am writing a script – what’s in the foreground, what’s in the background, what’s the grace note,” says Gobert. “I try to make it clear in delivery and I always dress to match the subject matter.” If he’s teaching *commedia dell’arte*, for instance, he might wear a patchwork shirt and trip or drop his papers when he enters. Or he’ll dress elegantly and talk formally when teaching Racine.

Students rave about the experience and give top marks to their “funny”, “passionate” and “challenging” prof who learns everybody’s name. Says one fan: “Taking a Gobert class should be a York prerequisite.” Now that’s buzz. ■



Beating the Odds

York computer science profs are helping women students succeed in a male-dominated field. BY DAVID FULLER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KIRK



POSITIVE NUMBERS: Arjomandi (centre) with master's students Stephanie Wilson (left) and Anna Topol

MANY EXPLANATIONS have been advanced for why so few women choose computer science as a field of study. Some people blame the unattractive stereotype of the solitary male geek writing code into the night. Others point to social conditioning that steers girls away from high-school mathematics. There are even psychologists, not all male, who promote the idea that women don't have the aptitude, though few others buy that argument. Yet somehow, only about 15-20 per cent of North American computer science students are female and the attrition rate is high. By the time the survivors get to graduate school, the number drops to around eight per cent. The current consensus on why amounts to this: most programs in computer science fail to address women's interests in what the machines can do, rather than how they do it.

Eshrat Arjomandi knows what it's like and now she's helping other women beat the odds with a support group at York called Women in Computer Science & Engineering (WiCSE), founded in 2004. Arjomandi, a professor in York's Department of Computer Science & Engineering, faced even greater obstacles as an undergraduate in mathematical engineering in pre-revolutionary Iran. She had dreams of becoming a mechanical engineer but couldn't get a requisite cooperative work placement. In her case, it was nothing as discreet as social conditioning blocking her way; no employer would hire bodyguards to protect her in an all-male factory. Even after she switched to computer programming, her path was blocked by a lack of graduate programs for either men or women. So Arjomandi came to Canada in 1971, received her PhD in computer science from the University of Toronto and joined York's Faculty of Science & Engineering (FSE) in 1976. Thirty-one years later, she can look back on a successful career, including a term as department Chair – although for most of those years she was the only woman in the room. What did it take to make it? “Persistence, not giving up,” Arjomandi says. “I realized I would never accomplish what I wanted to if I went back to Iran, so that wasn't for me.”

Arjomandi is no longer the only woman in her department. She now has five female colleagues, including Professor Melanie Baljko, who joined in 2004. Baljko's career journey was no less fraught with doubts. A gifted high-school mathe-

matician and artist who admits she did minimal studying, Baljko “loved the adrenalin rush” she felt after solving a difficult problem. But she also applied for a fine arts program, because she wasn't sure which path to follow. “I really enjoyed math and I was good at it,” she says of her high-school experience, where she flourished thanks to a male teacher who inspired her. “It was because of him that the possibility dawned on me that I could do this at university,” she says. But Baljko hit a roadblock in her first year of advanced math, due to what she later realized were underdeveloped study skills. “When I was struggling,” she says, “I thought, I don't belong here, I'm an impostor. It really did a number on my self-confidence.”

Now, Arjomandi and Baljko, along with departmental colleagues Aijun An, Mariana Kant-Antonescu, Uyen Trang Nguyen and Natalija Vlajic, are working with each other and with York students to organize networking and support activities. The group also provides financial assistance for members to attend events such as the annual Grace Hopper Conference for women in computing science and engineering. Thanks to a bequest from journalist Catherine Cragg and funding from FSE, student WiCSE members Neha Durwas and Anna Topol were able to attend the Hopper conference in Orlando, Florida, last October with 1,400 other women engineers, academics and graduate and undergraduate students.

Arjomandi and Baljko see things improving, albeit slowly. “It's not all about the computers,” says Baljko. “Our introductory courses are not an introduction to programming, they're an introduction in how to analyze problems and be systematic about designing a solution to them.” Arjomandi says making the connection between computer science and the use of computers in fields such as business, fine arts, health and law will attract more women in the future.

A new digital media degree program, offered jointly by the Faculty of Fine Arts and the Faculty of Science & Engineering, has attracted equal numbers of male and female applicants so far. “I believe the time has come when women are seeing the impact of computer science,” says Arjomandi. Baljko agrees. “When you'd craft some program that would do something – I knew I wanted to do that.” And now, thanks to WiCSE and role models like Arjomandi and Baljko, it looks like more women students are coming to the same conclusion. ■

YORK PEOPLE

Tamara Gordon

Business student, motivator

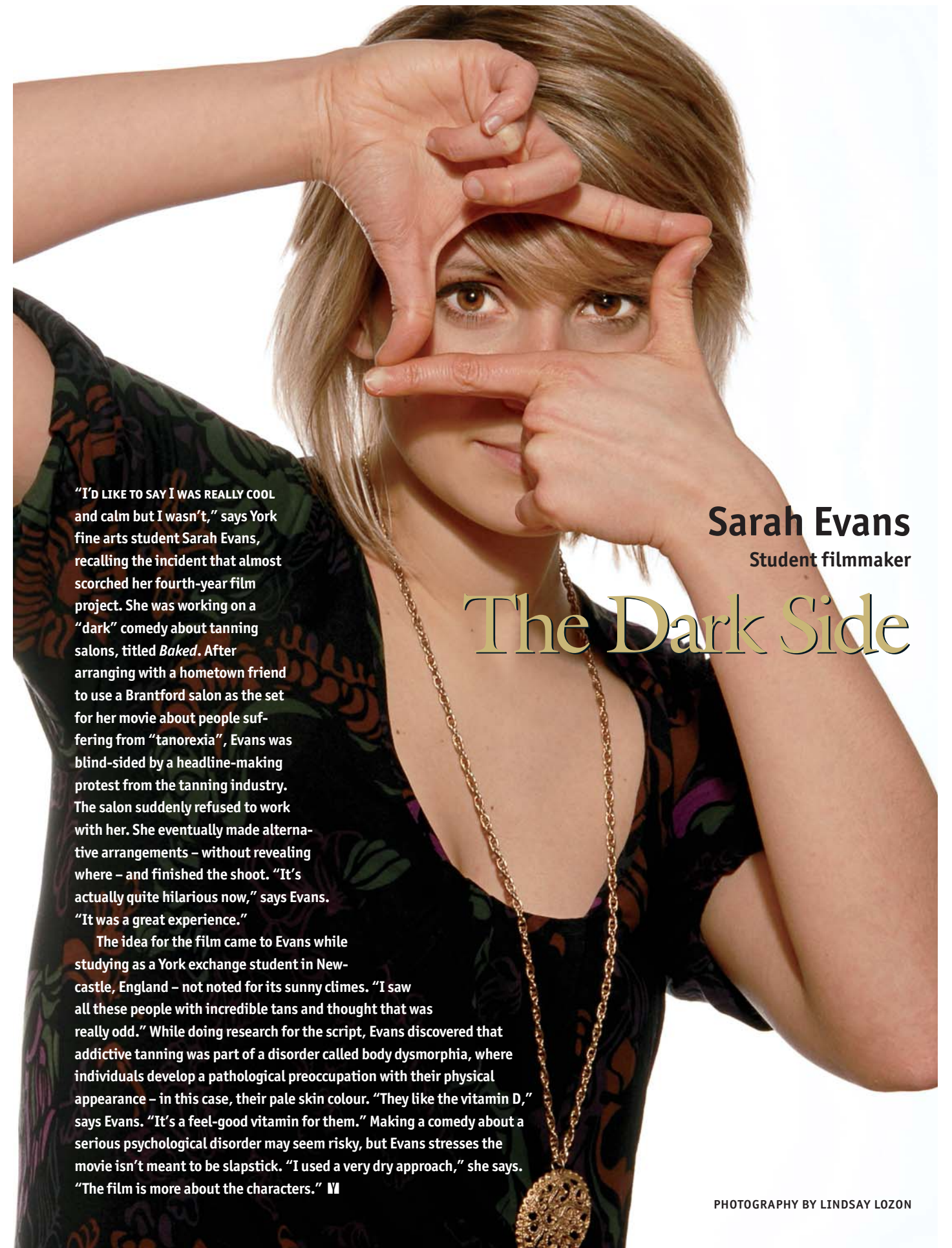
Angel on Wheels

LAST DEC. 12, Tammy Gordon wheeled to centre court at the Air Canada Centre during halftime at a Toronto Raptors game. As thousands watched, the 22-year-old York business student, whose dream of a basketball career died after a paralyzing high-school ski accident, accepted a Raptor Award for Community Service. All the passion the 5-foot-10-inch former Scarborough Lancer poured into playing hoops is now channelled into completing her degree, motivating others and “giving back” in true Christian spirit.

Paraplegic, diabetic, unable to use her dominant left hand and in constant pain, Gordon depends on her mother Marcia, an army of health care workers, notetakers and tutors, and a voice-activated computer to navigate daily life. Yet for four years, she has managed almost a full course load, maintained a high average, won scholarships – and made time for others. At York, she welcomes new students as one of Atkinson’s Team of Enthusiastic Ambassadors. At home in her high-rise – 2020 Don Mills Road – the future family lawyer has spearheaded a teen volunteer program and tutoring service, and free back-to-school barbecues, Christmas banquets and Canada Day celebrations. Her efforts have stirred a new sense of neighbourhood in the 15-storey, non-profit block – and won her *The Toronto Sun’s* affectionate title, Angel of 2020. ■



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KIRK



Sarah Evans
Student filmmaker

The Dark Side

“I’D LIKE TO SAY I WAS REALLY COOL and calm but I wasn’t,” says York fine arts student Sarah Evans, recalling the incident that almost scorched her fourth-year film project. She was working on a “dark” comedy about tanning salons, titled *Baked*. After arranging with a hometown friend to use a Brantford salon as the set for her movie about people suffering from “tanorexia”, Evans was blind-sided by a headline-making protest from the tanning industry. The salon suddenly refused to work with her. She eventually made alternative arrangements – without revealing where – and finished the shoot. “It’s actually quite hilarious now,” says Evans. “It was a great experience.”

The idea for the film came to Evans while studying as a York exchange student in Newcastle, England – not noted for its sunny climes. “I saw all these people with incredible tans and thought that was really odd.” While doing research for the script, Evans discovered that addictive tanning was part of a disorder called body dysmorphia, where individuals develop a pathological preoccupation with their physical appearance – in this case, their pale skin colour. “They like the vitamin D,” says Evans. “It’s a feel-good vitamin for them.” Making a comedy about a serious psychological disorder may seem risky, but Evans stresses the movie isn’t meant to be slapstick. “I used a very dry approach,” she says. “The film is more about the characters.” ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDSAY LOZON



Ravinderjeet Sarai
Kabaddi athlete

Tough Sport

LOTS OF YOUNG CANADIANS DREAM of a pro career in the rough and tumble sports of football or hockey. For York student Ravinderjeet Sarai, the dream is to earn as much as \$100,000 per season as a professional kabaddi player. Er, ka-what-ti?

It's kabaddi (pronounced kah-budee) and it's played by millions of people around the world. There are amateur and professional kabaddi leagues in India, England and the US as well as Canada. The Toronto league is this country's largest, big enough for the City of Brampton, Sarai's hometown, to announce it plans to build a 20,000-seat kabaddi stadium within two years. The centuries-old Indian sport involves two 10-player teams which take turns raiding their opponents' side of the field, one bare-chested player at a time. Once touched, a defending "stopper" must prevent a raider's return home by any physical means, short of punching or kicking, within 30 seconds. That usually means tackling or holding him.

Sarai, a former karate champion and sometime wrestler, has been playing the sport since he was 12 (he trained with Canadian Olympic gold-medal wrestler Daniel Igal) and plays with a Brampton team. He studies political science in York's Faculty of Arts and plans to take law after he graduates, but he also hopes he'll be drafted by one of the big Toronto clubs. "It's a very demanding sport," says Sarai. "You can be strong but if you don't have the stamina, you won't last long." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDSAY LOZON

YUFA Gives Back

How York's faculty and librarians aid students



CLOSE INVOLVEMENT: Evans

AT YORK, professors, researchers and librarians support students in more ways than you may think. The York University Faculty Association (YUFA) represents York's full-time faculty members and librarians. In their professional roles these individuals give back to students every day. As part of YUFA they go even further. In 1980, they formed the YUFA Trust and YUFA Foundation, and since that time have contributed more than \$1.8 million to students at York University via scholarships and bursaries, and by supporting York's innovative programs and research centres.

"Our involvement is not just financial," says Paul Evans, Chair of the trustees of the YUFA Trust and president of the YUFA Foundation. "We go to a lot of trouble to ensure the money we donate is used effectively." YUFA works closely with organizations it supports and is always ready to re-evaluate whether its giving is meeting the needs of students.

Most recently, YUFA donated an additional \$75,000 to the YUFA Foundation Undergraduate Scholarships, raising the annual amount given to leading academic students to \$3,500 each. Classical studies student Gabriel Hauser is a recipient of a YUFA scholarship. "Money can

be a very stressful concern, for students especially," he says, "and scholarships like this allow me to approach my studies with greater peace of mind."

YUFA has consistently increased the number of these scholarships to match the University's growing number of Faculties. Last fall a gift of \$30,000 to the York University Foundation ensured top students in York's new Faculty of Health would also have the financial support they need. The total number of YUFA awards given each year is now 15.

Not satisfied with supporting current students alone, YUFA helps future Yorkies as well. In 2005, YUFA's gift of close to \$400,000 helped create the YUFA Trust/YUFA Jane-Finch Community Scholarships, Awards and Bursaries. These awards are for students from secondary schools in the Jane-Finch community, with preference given to students who have successfully completed York's Westview Partnership Advanced Credit Experience (ACE). As participants in ACE, students spend a semester at York enrolled in a first-year university course. If the students later decide to attend York they may be eligible for a bursary. "The fact that the award comes from faculty makes it even more special," says Westview Partnership

coordinator Jackie Robinson. "The money certainly is important, but equally so is the emotional mindset that the award engenders. The students have a new sense of confidence and direction when they return to their high schools."

YUFA's recent gifts support York to the Power of 50, the University's \$200-million fundraising campaign already at more than \$144 million in pledges. Through the "Family Campaign" now underway, faculty members, staff and retirees are also choosing to support York to the Power of 50 through a donation, pledge or planned gift. For more information on supporting the Family Campaign or York to the Power of 50, call 416-650-8210 or visit yorku.ca/foundation. ■

CAMPAIGN UPDATE

Latest data on "York to the Power of 50", York University's 50th anniversary fundraising campaign:

TARGET: \$200 million

CURRENT LEVEL: Over \$144 million

TIME SINCE LAUNCH: 17 months

FAMILY CAMPAIGN GOAL: 2,009 donors

CURRENT: Over 1,700 donors

PRIORITIES FOR SUPPORT: Pioneering research and programs; student awards and scholarships; chairs and professorships; infrastructure.

If you've heard this one before, don't stop me. **BY MATT SHAW**

Story Power

LIKE MOST OF YOU, I'm a knowledge worker. In fact I have two careers, though it is dangerous to confuse the ethics and methods of the two. I spend the daylight hours working in marketing communications and PR. In the earliest hours of the morning, I write fiction. In one profession, I'm encouraged to make up stories. In the other, I'm expected to tell the truth. (You may have your own opinion which profession is which.)

What is common to these careers is something journalists have known forever: that the world's an unending series of

Stories literally shape the world and the way we interact with it. That's a skill worth learning.

stories. It's a truism of both literature and reportage that those who tell stories serve humanity by revealing basic truths about who we are.

Storytellers also have the power to shape narratives for their own benefit. You're probably not describing yourself as a storyteller on your resumé, but storytelling is big business. Even with the hubbub surrounding \$100-a-barrel oil, information is the world's most precious resource. There are plenty of stories explaining exactly why oil is so expensive. Which one do you believe? When information is scarce, leaked video clips of monks assaulted in Burma leave much of the story to be constructed, and the winner is the one who best presents it to the court of public opinion. And when information is restricted altogether (Google China, successfully manhandled by the Chinese government into providing only the information that government deems appropriate) or deliberately misrepresented (Wal-Mart, which hired writers to post fake blogs about a cross-country Wal-Mart shopping trip), people feel the ominous power of manipulative stories.

Never mind international newsmakers and spin; you wouldn't succeed if you couldn't tell a story. If, in a job interview, you couldn't explain through cause and effect and a little dramatization how well you could do the job, you wouldn't get it. If you couldn't explain to your significant other, convincingly, the benefits of buying a house, you'd continue paying rent. Trying to get out of a phone contract, or explain to a prof

why you need an extension? It's storytime.

Stories don't influence only our opinions of ourselves; they literally shape the world and the way we interact with it. That's a skill worth learning.

There's another thing storytelling can do.

Last summer, before participating in a reading, I ate lunch in a small-town bistro with several incredible Canadian writers. My publisher, Barry Callaghan, was among them. These people



have a tradition: within moments of sitting down at a table, they begin to tell stories (doesn't matter if they're true). Barry is one of Canada's greatest living writers, so when he looked at me and said, "Tell

us a story," I replied: "Sure."

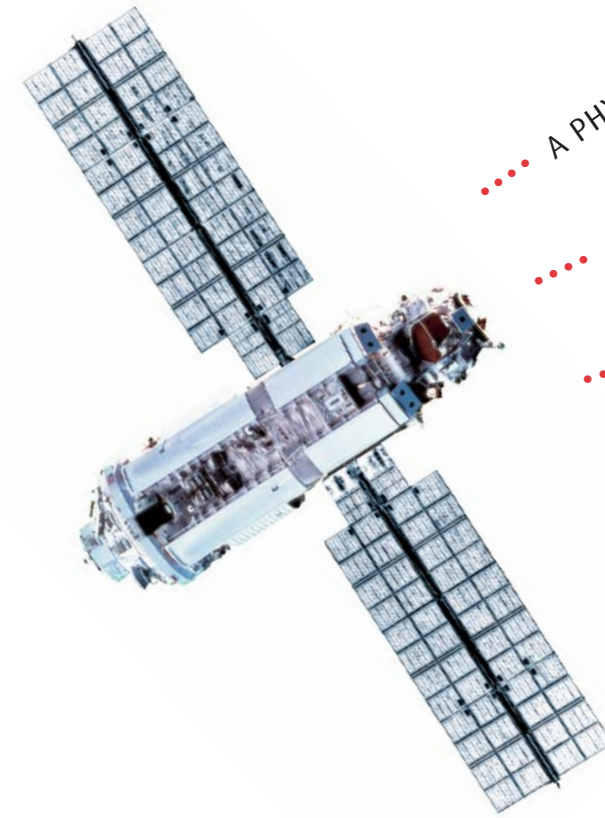
But I couldn't think of a story. Not one. To get me started, Barry suggested, "Tell us the one of your one-legged aunt, the whore from Buffalo." This wasn't a tale I thought I could tell with any authority. So I told him a story about my grandmother's dairy farm, where I had stayed occasionally as a kid. I told him how I once dared to ride a Schwinn bicycle over a forbidding brown bog of cow waste in back of the barns, a bog deep enough to drown in. I cleared the jump, but lost the silver bicycle.

Barry and the other writers seemed captivated by this. They paused. Then they hooted and laughed.

The next day, after the event, I saw Barry having a drink at a picnic table. My father had come to hear the reading, and I decided to introduce him to Barry. Interrupted mid-drink and startled from his thoughts, Barry couldn't think of a thing to say. So he shook my father's hand and boomed: "A pleasure! Your son, he told me the best story yesterday afternoon – a death-defying leap over the shit pit!"

My father could say nothing in response.

The professional communicator in me has helped me understand the immense, immediate and real power of the story in a way the fiction author never could. The author gently reminds me that the best stories, the most honest stories, do more than instruct, amuse, record or distort – they also give us pause. And sometimes, they just leave us speechless. ■



... A PHYSICIST SEES THE PULL OF GRAVITY

... AN ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENTIST SEES MELTING ICE CAPS

... A GEOMATICS ENGINEER SEES A REMOTE SENSOR

**QUESTION EVERY ANGLE.
STUDY EVERY ANGLE.
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Matt Shaw (BA '05) is the author of *The Obvious Child* and winner of the \$10,000 Journey Prize for emerging writers in 2006.