

# YORKU

DECEMBER 2006



# class acts

York's Undergrad Achievers



**PLUS:** The Future of Books ■ York's Gender Gap ■ Greening the Campus





..... A biologist sees a pandemic.

..... A dietitian sees an excellent source of protein.

..... A philosopher sees what may have come before the egg.

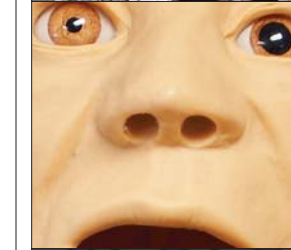
**QUESTION EVERY ANGLE. STUDY EVERY ANGLE. RESEARCH EVERY ANGLE. WELCOME TO THE INTERDISCIPLINARY UNIVERSITY.** A WORLD WITHOUT BORDERS NEEDS AN EDUCATION WITHOUT BORDERS. AT YORK, WE BREAK DOWN TRADITIONAL BOUNDARIES AND BRING TOGETHER THINKERS FROM EVERY DISCIPLINE TO TACKLE REAL-WORLD ISSUES. WE DON'T JUST SEE THINGS IN A DIFFERENT LIGHT, WE SEE THE LIGHT IN ITS ENTIRE SPECTRUM. FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THE INTERDISCIPLINARY UNIVERSITY, VISIT [YORKU.CA](http://YORKU.CA).



# INSIDE YORKU

THE MAGAZINE OF YORK UNIVERSITY

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# DECEMBER 2006

Why is southern Ontario so un-green? BY BERTON WOODWARD

# A New Leaf

**A**s a native British Columbian, I have long been puzzled by one aspect of southern Ontario in winter. There's little green to be seen. Ghostly trees devoid of leaves meld into the grey sky and the grey concrete to create a very grey landscape. Elsewhere in the great forested swathes of Canada, green reigns supreme, year-round. So I found myself asking, when I arrived in Ontario 11 years ago, why don't they plant more evergreens? The same question arose when I came to York, a decidedly deciduous place.

Now I've finally had my chance to ask an expert. York campus planner Andrew Wilson, profiled on page 24 by *YorkU's* Michael Todd, was ideally placed to answer, because though an Ontarian, he worked for 10 years as a landscape architect in the BC Lower Mainland, including at the University of British Columbia. The good news – to me, certainly – is that he's looking at getting more BC-style winter green on campus. But of course, as with anything in our natural environment, it's never simple.

First, why is southern Ontario so deciduous? "It's probably related to the whole pastoral tradition that is so prevalent in British culture," Wilson says. "You have broad green turf and stately deciduous trees." The early colonists were able to take advantage of the existing maple-beach forest, plus oak and ash, in preference to the evergreen hemlock, cedar and white pine that also grew here. So, he points out, even in ornamental plantings such as an avenue of trees flanking the road, you don't often see evergreens.



"And why not? It would be gorgeous to have an avenue of conifers."

Here at York, Wilson wants to bring in more year-round green. But he's respectful of the deciduous tradition – his job is all about stewardship. Thick evergreens can also be a security problem, creating a ground-level screen affording places to hide, though certain varieties have an open canopy. Some are picky about the vagaries of urban life – pollution, salt et al.

But the options don't stop at trees. There are also large bushes, and Wilson is looking hard at broadleaf evergreens such as rhododendrons. Planting those around the campus, he says, "would create a very different look."

Wilson sees what he's doing as fitting in very well with the new University-wide initiative known as Yorkwise. Designed to make the campus a better place by supporting sustainability and quality of life, Yorkwise stresses conservation, recycling, healthy eating, fitness, safety and more (see [www.yorku.ca/yorkwise](http://www.yorku.ca/yorkwise)). "All of this is about becoming more wise – about our impact on the campus, and on the planet," says Wilson. With, I hope, a wise move towards more green in the winter mix. ■

Send letters, submissions, comments and ideas to [editor@yorku.ca](mailto:editor@yorku.ca).

# YORKU

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**EDITOR** Berton Woodward  
[bertonw@yorku.ca](mailto:bertonw@yorku.ca)

**MANAGING EDITOR** Michael Todd  
[mtodd@yorku.ca](mailto:mtodd@yorku.ca)

**ART DIRECTOR** James Nixon  
[jamien@yorku.ca](mailto:jamien@yorku.ca)

**STAFF WRITERS** David Fuller  
[dfuller@yorku.ca](mailto:dfuller@yorku.ca)

Martha Tancock  
[mtancock@yorku.ca](mailto:mtancock@yorku.ca)

**ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR** Cindy Wilce  
[cindyw@yorku.ca](mailto:cindyw@yorku.ca)

**COPY EDITOR** Marie Kopf  
[mkopf@yorku.ca](mailto:mkopf@yorku.ca)

**CONTRIBUTORS**

Alison Ellwood, Jackie Guenther, Sophie Kinachtchouk, Jeff Kirk, Andy Lee, Lindsay Lozon, Rsquared, David Visschedyk

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**CHIEF MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER**  
Richard Fisher

**PUBLICATIONS DIRECTOR**  
Berton Woodward

**ADVERTISING**

Tel: 416-736-5058

E-mail: [editor@yorku.ca](mailto:editor@yorku.ca)

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West Office Building, York University  
4700 Keele Street  
Toronto, Ontario M3J 1P3  
Tel: 416-736-5979  
Fax: 416-736-5681

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BY PUSHING BEYOND TRADITIONAL BOUNDARIES, GALILEO REDEFINED THE WAY WE SEE THE WORLD.



RESEARCH AT YORK IS DOING THE SAME THING.

York University is a leading research innovator in Canada. By working across disciplines and in collaboration with partners outside 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 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 in order to help its partners deliver innovative, real-world solutions to real-world challenges. A third initiative, The Consortium on New Media, Culture and Entertainment R&D in Toronto (CONCERT) will, in time, drive the creative potential of the region by facilitating innovative collaborations between the arts, technology and business.

Taken together, 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](http://www.research.yorku.ca).





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redefine THE POSSIBLE.

## LEADING EDGE

York's fundraising campaign is all about the next half-century. BY LORNA R. MARSDEN

# To the Power of 50

**I**n 1960, York's founding president Murray Ross described his vision for a new type of university – an interdisciplinary university. “A first task of York University,” he said, “will be to use the great traditional subjects to shed light on the problems of today's world... No one in his right mind would today oppose the need for a high degree of specialization. But to have specialization and nothing else is to possess but half an education...we shall try to break down the barriers of specialization.”

In October, York University launched its fundraising campaign “York to the Power of 50”. This campaign will support our academic priorities and culminate in the celebration of our 50th anniversary in 2009. What has been accomplished by our University over the past 50 years is extraordinary. But for York this celebration is more about the next 50 years than the last.



### By 2009, we plan to be a

By our 50th birthday we plan to be a leading international centre for interdisciplinary research and teaching. Our campaign is about the people who live and learn here, our alumni and our future students. Our 2009 target is to raise \$200 million, and thanks to our supporters' generosity, we've already reached \$110 million of that goal. Here's what we intend to do:

**Increase student access and recognize student achievement.** Education is a vital investment in the future of the world. Our donors understand this investment and are committed to ensuring that financial need does not exclude qualified students and that students who excel academically and those who give back to their geographic and academic communities are recognized. Our commitment is to significantly increase the number of new student awards and scholarships.

**Build our academic pool of research leaders and innovators.** Our interdisciplinary research and teaching faculty are the lifeblood of York University. We are committed to attracting and retaining these innovative faculty members from around the globe who will help York redefine the possible. Our goal is

### leading international centre for interdisciplinary research and teaching

to attract an interdisciplinary mix of international, innovative researchers and visionary teachers by significantly increasing the number of Chairs and professorships.

**Create the infrastructure for innovation.** Renowned faculty and talented students require facilities that meet and anticipate their needs. “Smart classrooms”, dynamic libraries, acoustically appropriate rehearsal space, graduate study rooms or science laboratories with access to current and practical research equipment – these are all essential elements for a truly fulfilling university experience. Our commitment is to create more high-quality environments where students and faculty can learn, research and achieve excellence.

**Develop pioneering programs.** Students, with the leadership of faculty, are exploring concepts and learning in new ways. Whether this means supplementing classroom learning with hands-on experience in a community agency, undertaking an innovative research project and sharing findings through publications and conferences, or developing skills via Internet programming, we aim to create more pioneering programs that explore new ways of teaching, learning and researching.

York to the Power of 50 is the latest chapter in York's exponential transformation. I hope you will give this campaign your wholehearted support as York heads into its next half-century. ■

Lorna R. Marsden is York's president and vice-chancellor.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY COREY MIHALIUK



# UNIVERSE



TECHNOLOGY

# The Bionic Patient

York's nursing students practise on high-tech stand-ins

**S**imMan is no dummy. Sure, he might look a little out of it, but he and others like him in this simulated hospital environment – deep in the heart of York's School of Nursing – is one smart cookie. Be warned though. Kim Shadlock, manager of the Nursing Resources Centre in the Faculty of Health, prefers to refer to these high-tech wonders as mannequins. "We tell all our new nursing students that," says Shadlock. "Please don't call them dummies!"

Dressed in patient gowns and lined up in their beds, you can almost believe these mannequins could talk. In fact, they do – and more. They have pulses, heart beats, simulated breathing, moveable limbs and realistic skin (great for giving injections). They also "complain", faint, choke, and go into cardiac arrest. In short, they're ideal patients.

SimMan is programmed via a bedside computer by an on-site practicum coordinator who can create various patient scenarios students can react to (as they would with a real patient). "Training on SimMan is great for future nurses," says Shadlock. "Of course they're not a replacement for working with real patients; they're an adjunct."

York received funding for four of the \$40,000 high-tech humans (plus a SimBaby) to train future nurses, putting the school at the forefront of leading-edge patient-simulation technology. Says Shadlock, "I think using mannequins will have a significant impact on patient safety. They're a tremendous way to boost nursing students' confidence and promote critical thinking and problem-solving skills." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOPHIE KINACHTCHOUK

BOOKS

# What They're Reading

York people reveal what's on the bedside table

**Scott McLaren**  
York humanities librarian

*Lilith*  
By George MacDonald  
*History of the Book in Canada*  
By Patricia Fleming

"Every room in my house is full of books and the table beside my bed is no exception. At the top of that pile right now is George MacDonald's 19th-century fantasy *Lilith*. It recounts in a dream-like narrative the journey of Lilith – according to Hebrew myth Adam's first wife – towards redemption. I'm also reading in fits and starts the recently published *History of the Book in Canada*. It tells a fascinating story about writing and reading, publishing and distribution, collecting, and libraries in Canada from first contact onward."

**W. Forbes Cavanagh**  
Atkinson School of Administrative Studies professor; recent author of *10 Steps to Winning Texas Hold'em*

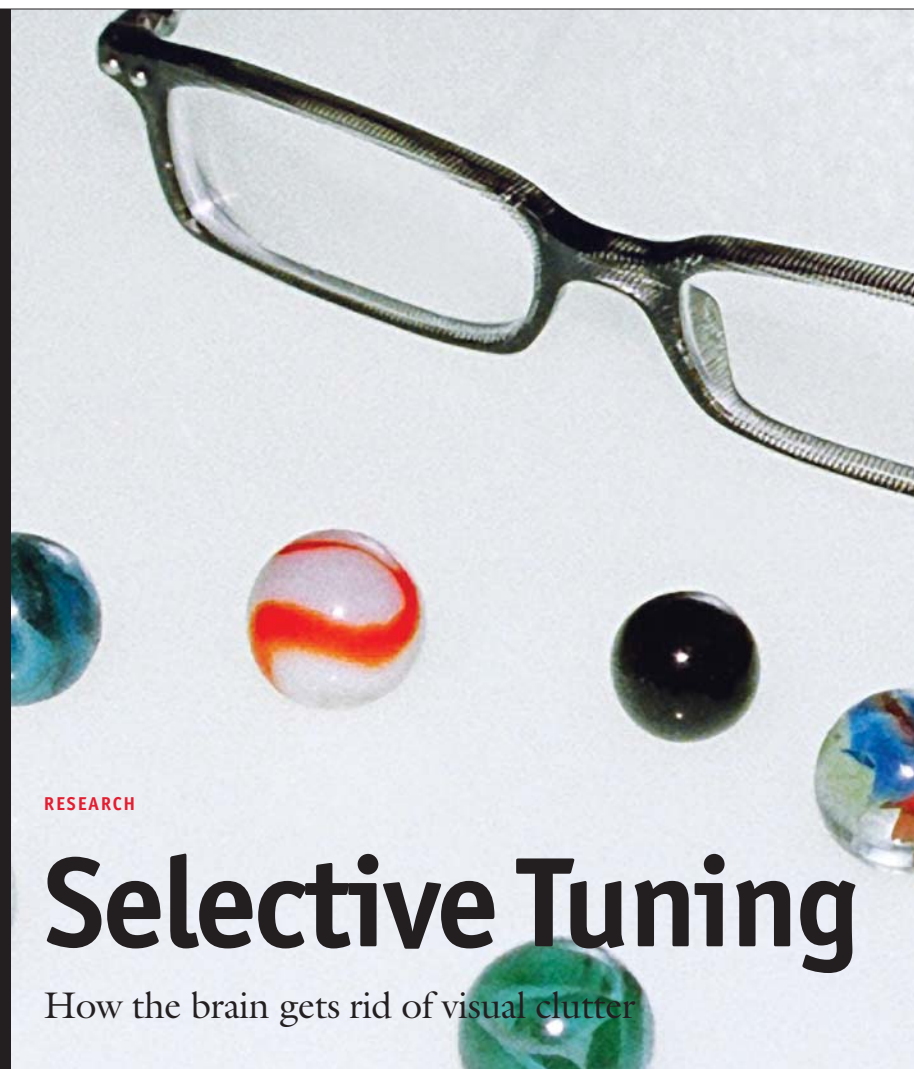
*The Book of Bluffs*

By Matt Lessinger

*Poker Tells*

By Mike Caro

"Since I married my interest in statistics and probabilities to my love of Texas hold'em poker by calculating card and pot odds useful in the game, I'm now studying the insights Lessinger and Caro offer in their books with respect to bluffs and tells (a 'tell' is a gesture, statement or idiosyncrasy made by someone which yields insight into their thinking). I expect their advice will have several applications in business, particularly negotiations."



RESEARCH

# Selective Tuning

How the brain gets rid of visual clutter

**P**ay attention! Unfortunately, that's not always as simple as it sounds. Just ask John Tsotsos. Ever since he read an article on computers and character recognition in *Scientific American* as an undergrad, York's Canada Research Chair in Computational Vision has been fascinated by how we humans see our world. Now Tsotsos, director of York's Centre for Vision Research and a professor in the Faculty of Science & Engineering, has solved a small piece of the human visual puzzle, tackling the age-old conundrum of how we select one object over another for visual attention.

"People used to think the brain used visual data in a hierarchical way. That is, we saw 'everything' but objects had a lesser place on the pyramid as you worked your way up to the top which was the focus of attention. But what we found was the brain actually *suppresses* objects to rid itself of visual clutter in order to focus. I call it selective tuning."

Tsotsos and his research colleagues at Otto-von-Guericke-University in Germany and the University of Iowa used a technique called magneto encephalography to measure changes in the brain's magnetic fields as it viewed a visual scene. They found direct neurophysical evidence of spatial suppression in a ring around whatever the brain chose to focus its attention on.

The team's findings have applications for the design of "heads up" displays used by pilots, where "visual clutter" could prove fatal, and Web pages – where it often proves annoying. ■

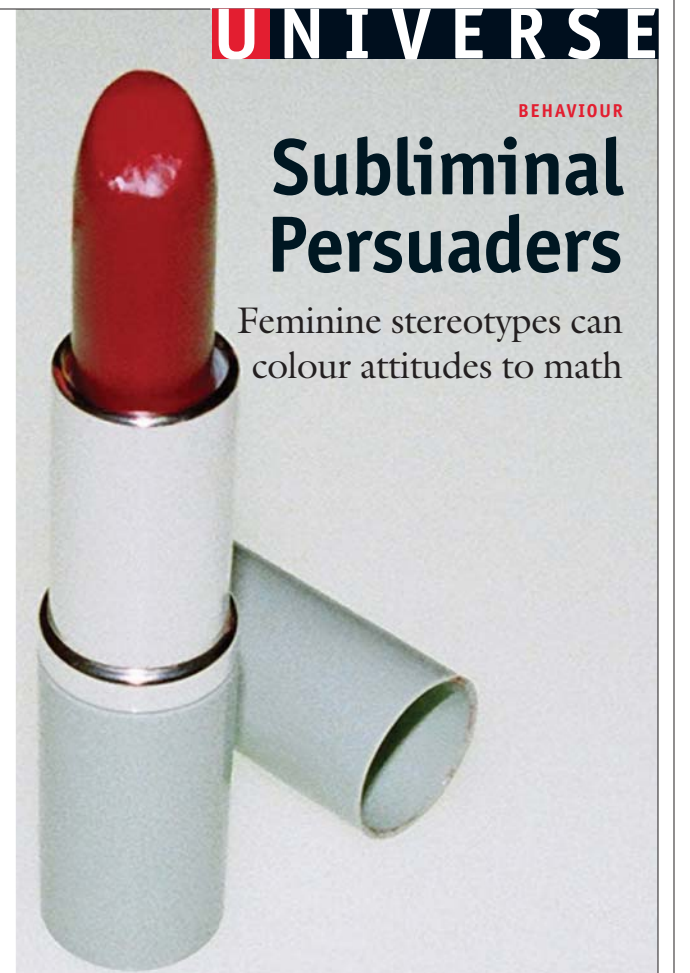
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RSQUARED

UNIVERSE

BEHAVIOUR

# Subliminal Persuaders

Feminine stereotypes can colour attitudes to math



**S**ubliminal advertising of the 1960s and '70s was supposed to quietly influence you to buy a Coke at the movie theatre. While most of those "hidden persuader" techniques have since been debunked, it turns out some covert triggers actually do work, and they have found a use in York psychology Professor Jennifer Steele's research.

"Flashing Coke ads so fast you couldn't see them at a conscious level was supposed to make you buy the product. It might have made consumers thirsty – but not necessarily for Coke," says Steele with a laugh. She has, however, found a more insidious aspect to the power of subliminal suggestion in her research into how "feminine" words – like pink or lipstick – can affect women and actually colour their attitudes toward math and science.

"Researchers have found certain suggestive words can elicit stereotype-consistent behaviours," says Steele. Knowing that, she was interested in whether or not subliminal suggestion would have a negative effect on women's attitude toward math or science.

Forty-six undergraduate women were shown feminine words for 80 milliseconds on-screen during a computer task. After subliminal priming, they were then asked to rate how pleasant they found tasks associated with math (an area traditionally dominated by men) versus arts-related tasks like analyzing a poem.

Women primed with feminine words showed a marked preference for arts tasks over math tasks, whereas women in control situations did not. "The results of priming are short-lived," says Steele. "But it shows that even if women don't endorse feminine stereotypes they can still be influenced by them through subtle triggers in their environment." ■

PSYCHOLOGY

# The Perils of Perfection

A study of grad students and depression highlights issues of achievement

**A**re certain personality styles more at risk for major depression episodes (MDEs) than others? The simplest answer seems to be yes. The question was studied in a

sample of graduate students in their mid-20s who had a previous history of major depression. When certain personality traits were present, along with dysfunctional beliefs around achievement, the chances of a recurrence of depression was significantly increased, according to two recent studies by Myriam Mongrain, a York psychologist in the Faculty of Health.

MDEs are defined as a depressive episode lasting more than two weeks and typically around three months. Symptoms could include "feelings of guilt, reduced motivation, pessimism, and – in grad students – sleep loss and anxiety attacks," says Mongrain.

She found that a key element in predicting a recurrence of an MDE among her sample – with a median age of 28 – was something known as a "cognitive vulnerability in the achievement domain" along with an "autonomous" personality orientation. "This group tends to really value its freedom, is self-critical, and has perfectionistic standards. Typically, these individuals are overly hard on themselves and base their self-worth on meeting unrealistic goals. This would make the inevitable academic stressors of graduate school particularly difficult for them, and even precipitate another major depressive episode."

Mongrain says her research on depressive vulnerability should aid both clinicians and lay people. "My research recently was written up in a major daily and I had a number of people write to me saying they recognized themselves in my work. That's often the first step to healing." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RSQUARED



# Goodbye, Chinatown

A York researcher traces the spread of Chinese businesses

**T**he era of mom and pop laundries isn't a dirty word in the brave new world of Chinese owned and operated businesses, but it certainly isn't the norm any more. In fact, Chinese businesses in the Greater Toronto Area are growing in ways and places some might not realize, and are no longer relegated to T.O.'s traditional "Chinatown" areas. That's the finding of a recent study by York geography Professor Lucia Lo and co-author Shuguang Wang of Ryerson University.

The continuing myth is that Chinese businesses are family-oriented firms clustered in the centre of Toronto and are mainly retail and service operations whose clientele is Chinese-Canadian. Lo's study paints a different picture.

Lo examined data from a 1997 Dun & Bradstreet business directory and found Chinese businesses of medium to large size were located in every part of the GTA and no longer

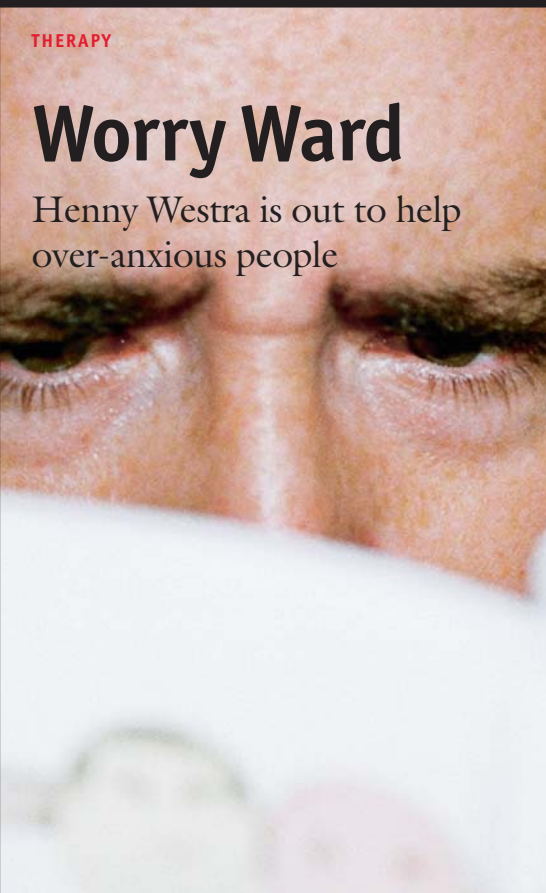
catered mainly to Chinese customers. "The 1967 Immigrant Act, which for the first time allowed immigrants of any race to enter Canada, along with the business immigrant program with entrepreneurial and investor components – much promoted in the '80s – caused considerable change in the size and structure of the Chinese community," says Lo. "And, most recently, mass global movements – of ideas and technology, people and resources – have also radically changed things."

Lo found that Chinese businesses are now represented in almost every sector of the economy, with the exception of the mining industry. Interestingly, she found a high concentration in manufacturing, especially of machinery and electrical/electronic equipment. "This diversification implies that contemporary Chinese businesses are no longer dominated by retail and service activities," she says. ■

THE THERAPY

# Worry Ward

Henny Westra is out to help over-anxious people



**E**ver worry that worry gets in the way of living your life? Well, your worries may soon be over, thanks to Henny Westra's Anxiety Research Clinic, located at York. Westra is looking for volunteers to help with her anxiety research. Along the way she may also be able to help clients deal with their own worries.

Anxiety is a huge mental health issue, she says. In fact, anxiety disorders affect one in four North Americans and are the single most common mental health problem. But oddly, worry is the anxiety disorder least responsive to cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), says Westra, a practising psychotherapist and York psychology professor in the Faculty of Health.

Some worry is a normal part of life, she says, but it becomes a problem when it interferes with life. "Constant worriers eventually find their worry freezes them from action. Yet worriers are actually ambivalent about their worry. On the one hand they might 'like' it because it seems to validate their behaviour," says Westra. "A mother, for instance, may see her obsessive worry about her children as proof of her love. On the other hand, worriers don't like anxiety's side effects – such as sleep loss and depression."

Westra has set up a three-year study to help worriers stick with CBT therapy (people with anxiety problems are often ambivalent about change). In "motivational interviewing" the therapist helps the client discuss the pros and cons of change before CBT treatment. "This seems to increase CBT's success later on," says Westra. She hopes to measure the usefulness of motivational interviewing as an add-on to existing psychotherapies through further research. Anyone interested in participating in Westra's study can call 416-736-5120. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RSQUARED

SIGHTS

# Mao's Hero

A bust of Norman Bethune recalls history in China – and Canada

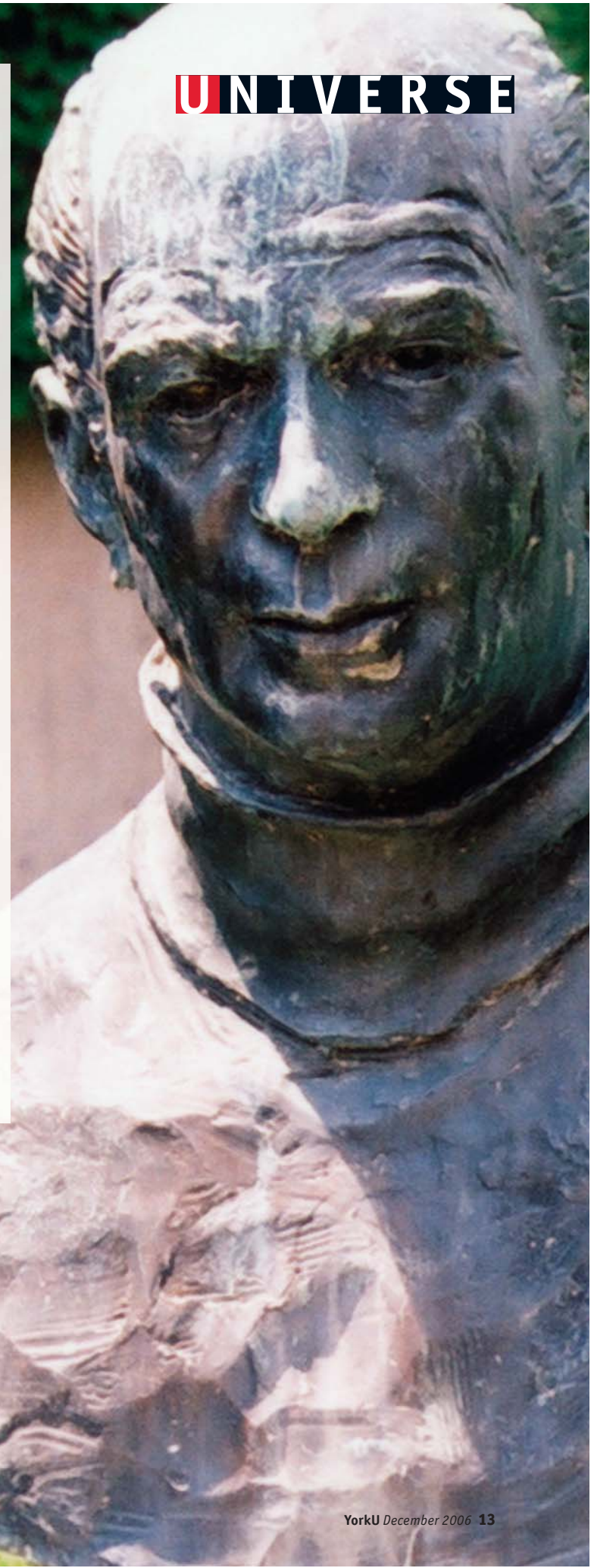
**A**mong the hundreds who pass by each day, relatively few people pause to look at the handsome bronze bust of Norman O. Bethune located on the southeast corner of its eponymous college. Fewer still likely know how the bust came to be there, or even much about the Canadian physician who helped China's Communist forces during the Sino-Japanese War. For some behind-the-scenes details, YorkU turned to resident Bethune "archivist", long-time faculty member and former Bethune master (1983-1989) David Lumsden.

According to Lumsden, the Bethune bust was made in the "very early 1970s" by college Fellow and sculptor Mac Reynolds. The bust was unveiled in 1974 at the official opening of Bethune College itself (an event attended by federal external affairs minister Mitchell Sharpe, the ambassador of the People's Republic of China and Bethune Master Ioan Davies). "This was a time shortly after Canada's formal recognition of the PRC," says Lumsden. "It was also a time of wheat sales to China."

Bethune's memory is still revered by the Chinese people. In 1990 China issued a stamp of his likeness to commemorate the centenary of his birth. Bethune was widely known as an innovative thoracic surgeon, a vigorous advocate of democratic medical services, and an international humanitarian. Chairman Mao Zedong personally received Bethune shortly after his arrival in China (in early 1938) and wrote a famous essay about Bethune praising his spirit of absolute selflessness. Bethune died tragically on the battlefield in northwestern China from blood poisoning on Nov. 12, 1939.

According to Lumsden, Bethune's bust has attracted the attention (and cameras) of many visiting Chinese delegations over the years. It's often the focus for orientation pranks too, says assistant to the master, Suzanne Park. "We've seen him wearing hats and lipstick. Even a dress." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RSQUARED





COVER

There are more women than ever among York's top undergrad achievers.

BY MARTHA TANCOCK  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDSAY LOZON

# class acts

**F**OR THREE OUT OF THE FOUR YEARS that *YorkU* has profiled the top undergraduates in mid-academic career, women have outnumbered men. But this year, there are more than ever. Six out of seven of these stellar students are women – including, for the first time, one from the Faculty of Science & Engineering. Does the disproportion reflect the fact that more females attend university than males? (See page 22.) Or is it really true what they said in high school: gurlz rule, boys drool?

We may never know, at least until a York prof does a definitive study. But we do know this: these individuals attained the highest accumulated grade point average in their Faculties at the end of second year. Most live at home and thrive in the bosom of nurturing, immigrant families. Whatever their futures – as writer, astronomer, opera singer, psychologist, chartered accountant, public servant – they relish every inch of their academic journeys. Singing brings some deep joy, volunteerism brings others profound gratification. They have steeltrap minds, usually coupled with artistic flair. Mix their intelligence and talent with insatiable curiosity and an appetite for learning, and you see down their road to success.





## Desperate for Knowledge

### ASHLEY DANGUECAN

Atkinson Faculty of Liberal & Professional Studies  
GPA: 8.89

**ASHLEY DANGUECAN WANTS TO HAVE IT ALL:** a husband, two children, a PhD in psychology and her pick of dream jobs – researcher, therapist, advocate for the mentally afflicted. Four years ago, she became fascinated by the complexities of human nature revealed in a high-school social sciences class. Now the 20-year-old from North York, who once imagined a future as a geologist, can't learn enough about personality, motivation and the human life cycle. The daughter of Filipino immigrants has always been an A student, top of her class, valedictorian. "What motivates me is the quest for knowledge," she says of her burning curiosity.

This summer she worked only part-time as a Bank of Montreal teller so she could squeeze in three more courses. For relief, she shops at the mall, watches movies, and binges on "Desperate Housewives" and fudge sundaes. Her future career will meld head and heart. Raised in a warm, extended Filipino family, Danguedan has taken her cue from a devout, compassionate grandmother and community-minded relatives, and become a Christian youth-group adviser in her church. "As long as I'm helping people cope in some way, that's what I want to do."



## Shining Bright

### RACHEL WARD

Faculty of Science & Engineering  
GPA: 8.89

**AFTER HIGH SCHOOL,** Rachel Ward couldn't make up her mind whether to be a star or watch the stars. Both were heavenly options for this soprano who thrills at the memory of performing Cosette in a high-school production of *Les Misérables* but whose heart quickens equally when she scans the night sky. The 21-year-old from Pickering chose physics and astronomy despite a successful audition for York's music program because she prefers theoretical physics to music theory. But she still sings in both universes. Since kindergarten, Ward has sung in choirs, most recently the York University Concert Choir, and for the past 10 years, the shortbread-baking granddaughter of Scottish immigrants has been dancing the Highland fling as part of a family act for Robbie Burns Day.

Away from her large, close-knit extended family, Ward orbits York's observatory, where she volunteers as a tour guide and researches variable stars under the guidance of mentor and renowned York astronomer Paul Delaney. This summer the co-president of York's Physics Society analyzed data on the Circinus Galaxy. She's drawn to cosmology, to contemplating the origins of the universe. "There's so much out there we don't know. We don't ever think about how incredible it is that we're even here."



## Switching Destinies

### SHERENA HUSSAIN

Schulich School of Business  
GPA: 8.36

**SCIENCE WAS SHERENA HUSSAIN'S FORTE** in high school and her destiny as a doctor seemed ordained. But she balked at following in her nurse sister's footsteps. "Science would have been a safe route to go, but I wanted to find a different direction," says the 20-year-old from Brampton. Self-employed as a tutor every summer, she sensed a nascent entrepreneurial spirit and applied to Schulich. Her mission, she has decided, is "to help businesses succeed" after seeing a family business falter. "Business does not operate in a vacuum," says Hussain, who is also taking politics and social science to get the bigger picture.

For now, she plans to be a chartered accountant but doesn't dismiss possible careers in law or banking. Always striving to do her best, the daughter of Guyanese Muslims also tries to do good. She's won awards for promoting road safety and anti-bullying, and continues to tutor and volunteer for community charities. For fun, the published poet reads adventure mysteries, plays soccer, shops, goes to movies and watches extreme home makeovers on TV with sisters and friends. But her deepest pleasure comes from helping others. "I remind myself each day that I can make a difference, regardless of how small."



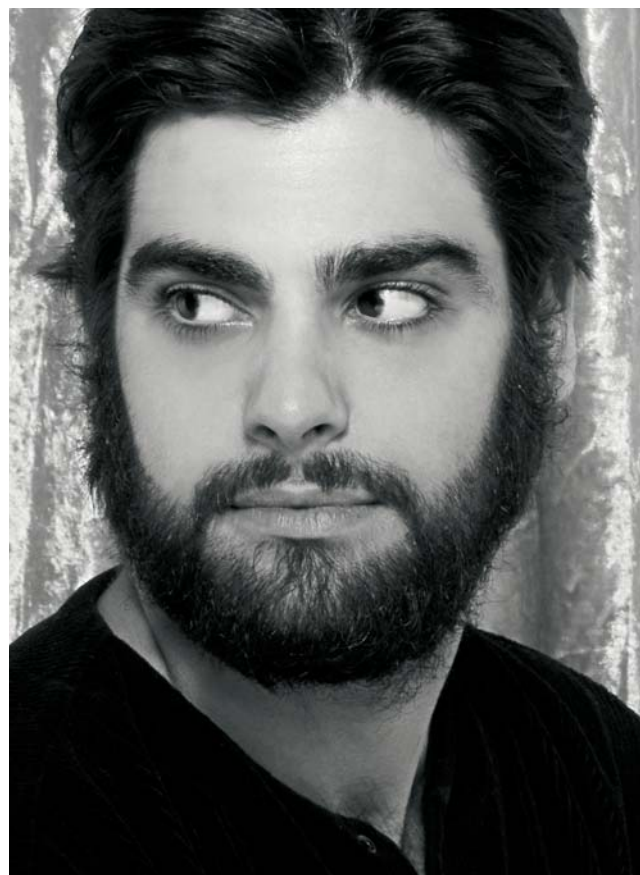
## Georgia on her Mind

### EMILY ADAM

Faculty of Environmental Studies  
GPA: 7.90

**IT'S IMPOSSIBLE TO SLOT EMILY ADAM.** Like her unconventional, artistic parents, she has veered off the beaten track in several directions. You could say she's as varied as the harmonies of the Georgian three-part polyphonic music she travels across oceans to learn. She speaks in almost a whisper yet belts out fiery Caucasus folk songs she joined a New England choir just to sing. When the choir sent her to a Georgian mountain village after high school to learn more about the music, she witnessed a bloodless revolution and a people passionate about their culture and their land. "It nudged me into where I am now," she says.

Now 22, Adam is bending her intellect around the meaning of nature and learning the fine art of printmaking. The accomplished cellist who performed with a theatre-in-the-park troupe last year took a job planting and weeding this summer. Suddenly gardening books are as compelling as science fiction by Ursula K. Le Guin. "I have no idea what I want to do with all this," says the French-speaking eldest of three from London, Ont. Unapologetic about her "here and there, this and that" approach, she doesn't give a thought to her "mythical future". "I'm pursuing what's fascinating."



## In Plato's Footsteps

### CHRIS ARAUJO

Faculty of Arts  
GPA: 8.86

**A HIGH-SCHOOL FAILURE** and a college drop-out, Chris Araujo spent four years sweating as a landscaper and patio layer before gaining admission to York as a mature student. He'd rebelled against the constraints of a strict Catholic school and chafed at attendance-keeping college. Who could have guessed this proud son of working-class Portuguese immigrants was burning to go to university? Once admitted to York, Araujo revelled in his anonymity at the back of the class and tore into courses on war, revolution and international security. "It's my ethical duty to become a more informed person, politically speaking," says the 24-year-old future writer and expert on the Middle East.

He wasn't idle during his hiatus. He sent Alan Dershowitz a 250-page rebuttal of the Harvard law professor's justification of the Iraq war and adopted as his mentor Britain's *New Left Review* editor Tariq Ali. While he learns Arabic and saves up for a year at Oxford, the martial artist offers free self-defence classes to women on campus and joins lots of protests and debates. "The greatest thing about York is the activism. It's just like Plato's academy! What I like about learning is the moral pursuit. It's not just about the pursuit of knowledge."



## Diva in Waiting

### NICOLE STELLINO

Faculty of Fine Arts  
GPA 8.32

**NICOLE STELLINO HAS NEVER REALLY VENTURED** away from home. But one day the 20-year-old soprano from a hamlet near Bradford, Ont., aims to perform arias on the stages of Europe. The little girl with the big voice hasn't stopped singing since she saw *The Little Mermaid* and obsessed over children's performers Sharon, Lois and Bram. Her proud parents documented their first-born's progress on video. "Sing us a song, Nicole," they'd say, and she'd also give them a dance. Stellino started ballet lessons years before her elementary school choirmaster recommended voice and piano lessons. She sang in school choirs, competed at festivals, performed in musicals. By Grade 11, the A-student dropped plans to go into medicine. "I just decided I wouldn't be happy doing anything else but singing."

She enrolled at York to study under mezzo-soprano Catherine Robbin and this year is taking acting and voice, a master class in performance, and Canadian fiction, just in case she ends up teaching high school. The summer waitress who tucks Agatha Christie mysteries into her purse and sings Ave Maria at weddings has discovered a new pleasure – performing contemporary classical music. "It's less musically predictable," she says, and the challenge, like the road to La Scala, is irresistible.



## Grand Slam

### NICOLE JONES

Glendon  
GPA: 9

**SOME DAY NICOLE JONES MAY BE** a high-ranking government economist, influencing policy and policy makers, at ease in Canada's two official languages. Then again, she might be designing computer graphics and Web pages. Excelling equally at economics and computer science, the 20-year-old is leaving her options open. Of British-Chinese heritage, this only child of an economist and librarian excelled at independent learning at an alternative high school in Scarborough. Her teachers remarked on her thoroughness every time she completed a special project. "I liked doing research on my own."

Though she happily burrows deep into her studies during the school year, she surfaces to volunteer at awareness-raising events organized by the Glendon Women's Centre. "I like to be involved," says Jones, who answers calls on the Ontario Works helpline during the summer. A perfectionist, Jones relieves exam stress by sketching and doing pilates. If she's not watching grand-slam tennis like Wimbledon on TV, she might be reading *Pride and Prejudice* or *Freakonomics* or hanging out with friends. She used to do ballet and play the clarinet but these days is mastering her serve during weekly tennis matches with her dad. "I've always wanted to do well just for the pleasure of doing my best." ■

## RESOURCES

York's libraries are going digital, even as they preserve the "browsable" print experience. BY DAVID FULLER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDSAY LOZON

**W**HEN THE DIGITAL revolution hit libraries in the mid-1990s, predictions about the demise of their silent halls were a staple of future shockers everywhere. It seemed clear that, in "being digital", we would sit at home or in an Internet café, accessing all the knowledge we needed from a powerful computer somewhere in a distant closet. Goodbye books, bricks and mortar; hello cyberschool.

Except it didn't happen. Well, not in the way the bibliophilistines envisioned, anyway.

Three million times last year, people in search of knowledge visited one of York's six libraries, performing a kind of pilgrimage to a learning space where they could, of all things, talk, study or read one of York's two million printed books. "Every time we add 20 chairs, 40 people come in the library to use them," says University Librarian Cynthia Archer, who oversees York's central library system. "So, even though we have more electronic information, students are using the library buildings as much as ever."

But the futurists did get it right in many respects. As Nicholas Negroponte predicted in his 1996 classic, *Being Digital*, students of the post-information age have been "released from the limitation of geographic proximity as the sole basis of friendship, collaboration, play, and neighbourhood." The reality for libraries of the future is their enduring role as social spaces, now both virtual and physical – yet altered by a changing concept of what libraries should be preserving and how they share it.

"Our challenge in the next five to 10, even three, years is to make our library Web presence as vibrant as our physical buildings," says Archer. She is echoing

the cry of librarians everywhere who are still responding to the paradigm shift brought on by the Internet. We're not talking here about upgrading a search engine to locate a book or a journal article. We're talking Web 2.0, as it's known, the new generation of software applications that allow a virtual community of researchers to be both consumers and producers of content.

The popular Web site Flickr, dedicated to members' photo collections and comments on them, is one of many examples. In an academic setting, Archer sees Web 2.0 as a potential enabler of collaborative learning where an academic librarian might be invited to join in a discussion on a course Web site and suggest additional resources such as digital "information objects", a collection of data and multimedia files built around a theme. One futurist's example using pollution as a topic combines the usual text and pictures with data fed to it in real time by monitoring stations around the world. Archer herself is helping to produce a digital library journal that will contain a section on conferences with submissions of presentations, including video and sound clips.

Digitization comes with challenges, however. A study by the Association of College and Research Libraries says understanding the conceptual changes and how to use libraries' new digital holdings will demand higher levels of information literacy: the ability to find, evaluate and use information with "critical discernment and reasoning". In other words, the Web is not a knowledge ATM.

But what about the books, you ask? They're still here and, as Archer is quick to point out, York is making more room for them by installing compact mobile shelving to maintain the collection and

slow the encroachment on study space. "We are committed to providing our students with a browsable collection, particularly in the humanities and social sciences," says Archer. York focus-group sessions with graduate students have shown they still place a high value on printed books.

While committed to the browsing experience, Archer is also participating in a project by the Ontario Council of University Libraries to replace thousands of duplicate printed journals stored at each of the province's 22 campus libraries; instead there would be a searchable digital collection and a few shared print copies. She says Canadian university libraries are leaders in building digital collections after receiving a five-year grant from the Canada Foundation for Innovation.

But digitizers have realized there are two different streams of scholarly communication, "those that can go on micro bites and others that need the narrative and context," says Archer. Scientists think nothing of consulting the latest data online but few of us would look forward to curling up with a laptop to read Shakespeare. As one university library in California discovered when it tried to discard or store thousands of volumes, academic communities will rise to defend the printed book.

When asked to imagine the York library of tomorrow, Archer sees greater use of technology and more people space, plus a much-needed new wing on Scott Library. The vision includes students in a group-study room, using a wall-sized computer screen to share information and ideas with students visible on a distant campus. In a word, Archer sees the future as "connected". "Young people will be connected all the time, sharing learning moments," she says with a smile that seems anything but bookish. ■



MY BACK PAGES: University Librarian Cynthia Archer

# Where the boys Aren't

York's undergrads are now 62 per cent female, reflecting a continent-wide gender gap. Is it a problem?

BY MICHAEL TODD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDSAY LOZON

**M**OST PARENTS WOULD LIKE TO BELIEVE that the only reason their child is attending university is to get a degree (and maybe land a decent job down the road). But if you're an 18- or 19-year-old male, the social benefits of being a minority on campus – due to the gender gap – are probably not lost on you. At York today, as at many universities across North America, the ratio among students is approaching the old Surf City lyric – two girls for every boy.

Rachael Dankiw, a fourth-year student majoring in humanities and psychology, has noticed the gender gap, and says she thinks it colours the tenor of some class discussions. "There are more girls than guys in all my classes. I feel we sometimes lack a male presence, a voice, a different perspective. And there have been occasions – when a lone guy is outspoken – that he has to be ready to defend himself against all that female opposing opinion! Sometimes that's funny, but I think there are cases too where the one or two men in my class don't speak up much because they feel a bit intimidated."

So far Lendl Barcelos, a second-year philosophy and music major, doesn't find the gap much of an issue. "I really don't notice any imbalance in my classes. Not in philosophy anyway – there are still more guys than girls," he says. "You do notice an imbalance in residence, though, where there are more females than males. And I see more girls than guys riding the bus to York, because I commute. As far as my social life? Not much of an impact."

While the G-gap may not be anything new – as a trend, it dates back more than 25 years – it still has many educators wondering (and worrying) about its impact. In Canada as a whole, only about four in 10 undergrads are now male. Are young men flunking out of high school and not bothering to apply to university, figuring they wouldn't get in anyway? Has the education system failed them? How will this play out later in life in terms of careers, earning power or life satisfaction?

Although the gap began to appear around 1982, a 2005 Statistics Canada report notes that between 1993 and 2001 it widened greatly. The two genders had already reached parity in the late 1980s, and by 2003-2004, the last period available, 59 per cent of Canadian undergrads were women. It's a similar situation in the US, where the figure is 56 per cent.

To reach two girls for every boy, you need 66.6 per cent females. We're not there yet, but in 2005-2006, York's 45,895

full- and part-time undergrads broke down to 28,508 women and 17,387 men – or 62 per cent female. That's up slightly from 1999, when 61 per cent were women. Glendon numbers are even more striking: last academic year, 71 per cent of students there were female. Grad students: 55 per cent.

So what's going on? Various theories have been put forward to explain the gap across North American universities. Schulich School of Business professor and organizational culture expert Ron Burke says it's clear that if you talk to women in high school they are performing better than men at every level. So does that mean men just aren't making the grade academically to get into university? "Women are certainly competing with men for those spots," says Burke. "I think it's fair to say that we're seeing women realize they can compete, that they are as capable in all the fields men [traditionally] were. But it's also about women's realization that to build a reasonable life and attract a reasonable partner – at the same economic or social level – they're going to need a degree."

Are universities failing to attract men in the right way? "I don't believe Canadian universities are consciously marketing more to women than men," says marketing expert and Schulich Professor Alan Middleton. In the past, he suggests, women didn't pursue higher degrees because of family and societal pressures. "The assumption was the jobs available to women didn't justify the expense. While the job market is not yet equal, it has opened up much more to women in the last decade. As such, more women do see a value in going to university."

"Clearly something is going on," says Sheila Embleton, York's vice-president academic. "It may have to do with young women just being more serious students and some young men not taking education all that seriously. You see that in women's higher grades, and you see it in the high-school award ceremonies where the majority of academic prize recipients are female."

What about the lure of the booming economy as a cause for the gap with, as some experts have posited, young men eschewing higher ed for the glories of higher pay? "I don't think the promise of short-term high-paying jobs is the cause for male absence," says Embleton. "I do think that what we've done is a good job encouraging young women to come to university. It's not that the number of men coming to university has gone down, it's that the number of women has gone up." ■

**THE MAJORITY:** York students Lisa Simpson (left), Vanessa Williams, Caitlin Scragg

**H**E'S ONLY WORKED AT YORK FOR TWO YEARS, but there likely isn't a nook or cranny on campus that Andrew Wilson doesn't know about (or hasn't thought about improving). In fact, walk into his office and you're immediately impressed by the wealth of visual information covering York from every angle. There are aerial shots, photos, topographical maps and computer-drawn landscape plans in various colours (although he seems to have an affinity for green).

The maps and plans aren't there to brighten up dead wall space (although they do). Instead, they give Wilson, who is York's campus planner, an overview of the University landscape so he can identify what needs attention now – and in the future. Working out of the Facilities Services department, Wilson oversees, instigates and lobbies for changes to both the Keele and Glendon campuses to address years of deferred maintenance, integrate new development and generally work to make York a beautiful – and sustainable – place.

Wilson arrived with impressive credentials. He's a registered landscape architect with a master's degree in landscape architecture from the University of Guelph, and an undergrad degree in urban and regional planning from Waterloo. Before York, Wilson was an urban designer in Vaughan and worked for 10 years in the Vancouver area, where he was a consulting landscape architect before becoming the University of British Columbia's in-house urban designer/landscape architect.

But he did have prior experience of York too – he lived with a friend on campus for two years in the mid-1980s. "It wasn't a bad place to live then," he says. "Now, though, with the build-out of the campus, this is a much more enjoyable place to be. There's a good urban quality to the core of the campus." That quality is partly due to York's 1988 Master Plan. "Master plans generally have five to 10 years' applicability," he says. "York's has served the University well though it's now outdated. The general planning principles are sound but they need to be reapplied to the current planning context."

The York University Development Corp. manages the University's master planning, which covers land-use and long-term development plans, and works with the City of Toronto to align the University's plans with the city's secondary plan, which sets out potential or proposed land uses for the campus. Wilson says he is working on the University's landscape plan in this context.

"The landscape plan deals with the physical detail of the campus as an expression of the environmental and aesthetic

objectives of the University," he says. "The job of a campus planner is stewardship. That means I take care to define and apply an overarching idea of what York 'is', to understand its sense of place and how, as it evolves, that is respected, revealed and expressed. The Master Plan's original concept of a pedestrian-oriented academic core, distinguished by good architecture and a unified open space system of walkways, plazas, courtyards and greens, is as valid today as it was in the late 1960s. That's what I have to respect and reinforce."

Wilson notes the Keele campus itself is nearly 50 years old and in need of some TLC. "Our challenge is to decide what, how and when to restore and renovate. And we have to consider the sustainability of our actions. Cutting grass is a perfect example. It's not simply a cut/no-cut issue. There are logistical, financial, aesthetic, ecological and cultural considerations to it. Imagine the considerations when it comes to redesigning Stong Pond so it can be more effective at its storm water management function." (That process is underway and the reconstruction of the pond – in conjunction with the rebuilding of The Pond Road from Sentinel Road to Shoreham Drive and Shoreham out to Murray Ross Parkway – is scheduled for 2007.)

Aside from his planning duties at both York campuses, Wilson also teaches a fourth-year course called Advanced Environmental Landscape Design Studio in the Faculty of Environmental Studies. "One benefit to the students is that the campus landscape will be both their classroom and their design project. The benefit to me and the University will be the students' insights and ideas about the campus," he says.

Such academic activity is paramount at a university, but the state of the physical environment is also important, in Wilson's opinion, because the quality of campus landscape is a big factor in where a prospective student chooses to enrol.

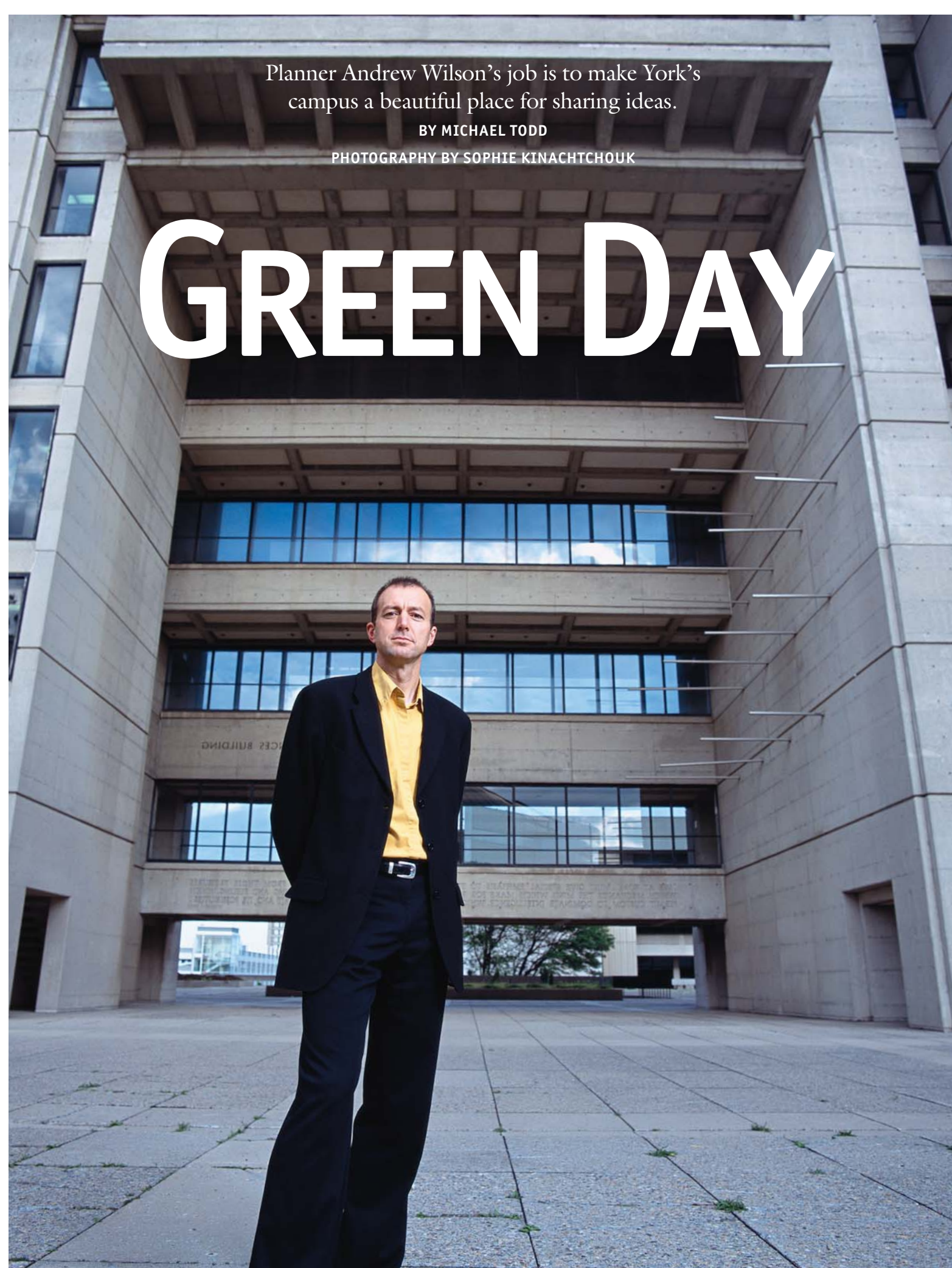
"The campus landscape is part of the York cachet – as significant as logos, team colours, signage, or anything else," he says. "It represents our accomplishment and our potential. The York experience should be unique. The task here is to humanize the landscape; to design the context for learning and innovation. That means making the campus conducive to social interaction, creating opportunities to linger, to meet, to share ideas and learn from one another's experiences. One comfortable bench, well-placed, represents opportunity. York's campuses as a whole have to express that, and make being here enriching and enjoyable. That's the reason I'm here – to facilitate such an experience." ■

Planner Andrew Wilson's job is to make York's campus a beautiful place for sharing ideas.

BY MICHAEL TODD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOPHIE KINACHTCHOUK

# GREEN DAY



## RESEARCH

**R**ICHARD LEBLANC'S LIFE CHANGED forever on March 4, 2003. That was the day he defended his doctoral thesis on corporate governance at the Schulich School of Business, and the memory of it still makes the 41-year-old York professor flush with pride. After he'd finished the oral defence, members of the panel stood up, extended their hands and said: "Welcome, Dr. Leblanc." They had accepted his dissertation without asking for a single revision.

Suddenly he had six free months ahead, six months he'd reserved for thesis revisions. What would he do? He and his girlfriend Nancy Cote, whom he'd met at law school in Windsor, decided to get married. But when the Catholic priest insisted they attend pre-nuptial classes for 14 weeks, Leblanc balked. "I didn't want to go to school any more." He was 37 and had spent his entire life at school earning one university degree after another. He and Nancy flew to Las Vegas, lined up at the Little White Wedding Chapel and took their vows. It was March 15, the same day *The Globe and Mail* happened to publish a story about his ground-breaking research on how corporate boards really work. The phone began to ring and ring. While her groom did media interviews in their honeymoon suite, the bride played the slots downstairs.

Leblanc is thought to be the first scholar to gain such wide-ranging, unfettered access to the meetings of corporate boards. Originally interested in studying how board structure affects board performance, Leblanc eschewed the usual analysis of board documents for a fly-on-the-wall approach. Nobody had ever tried this before. Once one board let him in, others were quick to acquiesce. Over five years he attended meetings of 21 boards – of financial institutions, oil and natural resources producers, hi-tech companies, non-profit agencies and Crown corporations – and interviewed 194 high-powered directors, including former prime ministers and premiers. His notes, which now fill 12 four-drawer filing cabinets, led Leblanc to unconventional conclusions. What makes an effective board has everything to do with group chemistry, leadership style, and individual competencies and skills – not size, composition and independence as was widely believed. In the wake of the Enron collapse and other corporate scandals, when shareholders were demanding more independent directors as a hedge against corruption, Leblanc's deductions were controversial.

Word spread fast and Leblanc was deluged with invitations. Overnight he went from obscure doctoral student to jet-setting

academic. *Inside the Boardroom: How Boards Really Work and the Coming Revolution in Corporate Governance*, the book he and his PhD adviser, Schulich Professor Emeritus James Gillies, wrote and released last year, has been flying off shelves in Canada, Britain, Australia and New Zealand, and translated into Russian and soon, possibly, Chinese. It is "truly pioneering work," says Donald Jacobs, dean emeritus of the Kellogg School of Management, Northwestern University, in his foreword, highlighting chapters that list 10 types of board members – change agents, cheerleaders, conformists, controllers, critics etc. – and how to identify them. Leblanc's next book, tentatively titled "Fixing the Boardroom", features diagnostic tools for assessing board effectiveness.

Life for Leblanc hasn't always been so fast. Growing up in Timmins, a small town in northern Ontario, he played peewee hockey like the other kids. But unlike the others, he spent Saturdays holed up in the school library waiting for his father, the principal, to catch up on paperwork. "I would just work, work, work, work." Education, he decided, would be a ticket to success – and out of the mining town – and, except for the year he got sidetracked by fraternity parties, he sustained a relentless work habit. After high school, he spent the next 19 and a half years earning six degrees: a BSc in psychology and an MBA from the University of Toronto; joint law degrees from the University of Windsor and University of Detroit Mercy; a master's degree from York's Osgoode Hall Law School and his PhD in administration from Schulich.

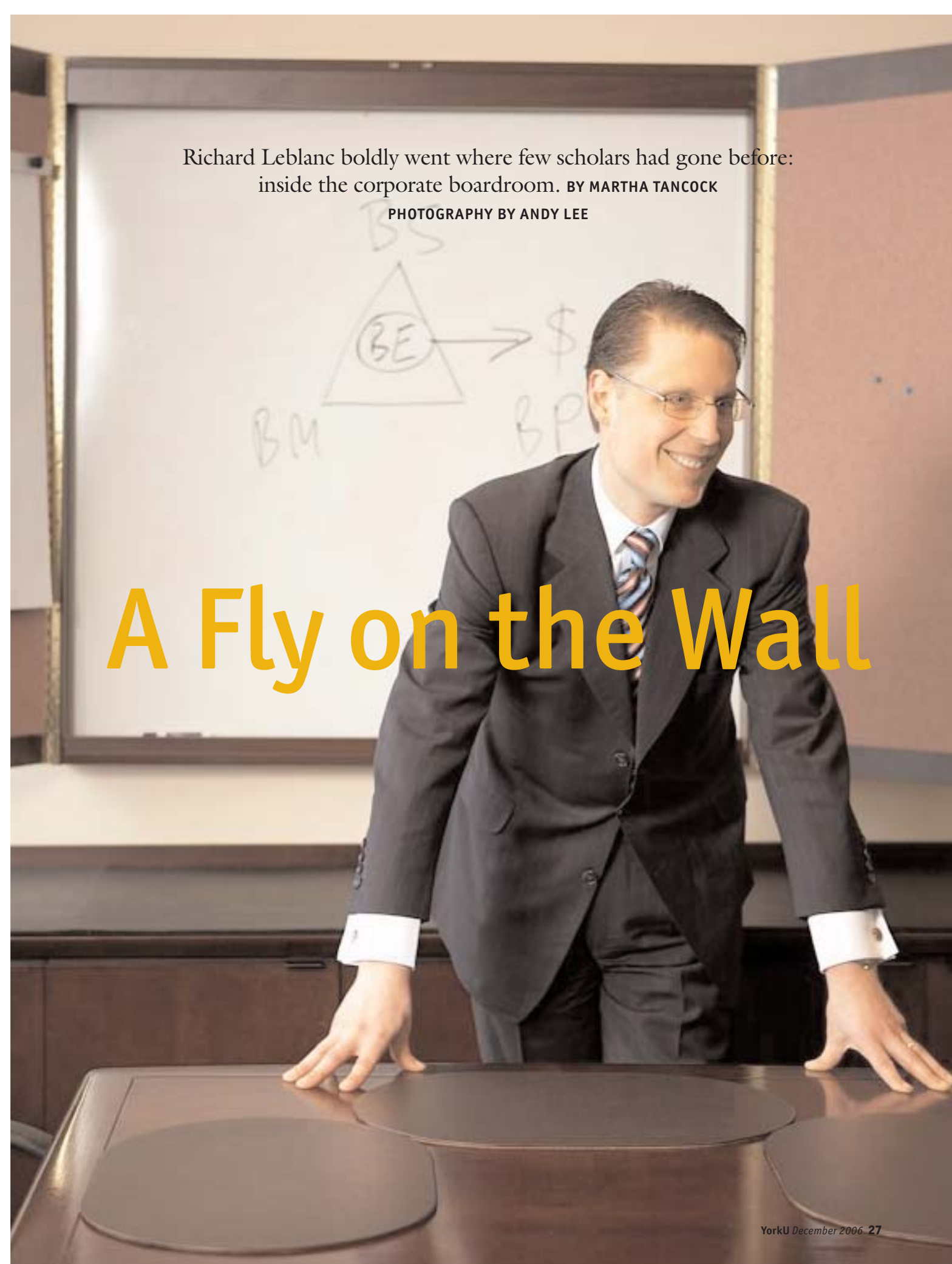
Leblanc is the kind of guy who will jump out of his chair, grab a marker and start drawing charts to explain his research. In a word, driven. Even Nancy has a tough time enticing him away from his work. On a recent trip to Barbados, he spent 11 out of 12 days closeted in the hotel room clearing up files on his computer while she read on the beach. On the last day of their idyll, he emerged to go snorkeling with her before catching the plane home. "She's very understanding," he says.

Last year was a watershed for Leblanc. York's Atkinson Faculty of Liberal & Professional Studies appointed him professor of corporate governance, law and ethics. He began collaborating internationally on diagnostic surveys that will further his own research. And just shy of his 40th birthday, *The Globe and Mail* included him in its prestigious Top 40 under 40. Life couldn't be sweeter. "I had absolutely no idea! You just put your head down, be humble, work hard, be diligent, and let your work speak for itself." ■

Richard Leblanc boldly went where few scholars had gone before:  
inside the corporate boardroom. BY MARTHA TANCOCK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDY LEE

# A Fly on the Wall



JOURNEYS

# Riding for Life

Two recent York grads talk about why each made a cross-Canada bicycle trip this summer to help fight cancer.

BY ALISON ELLWOOD AND DAVID VISSCHEDYK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOPHIE KINACHTCHOUK



COLLECTING STORIES: Ellwood

BIG CHALLENGE: Visschedyk



**T**his summer, two Toronto-area grads each completed a cross-Canada bicycle trip to raise awareness about cancer. Articling lawyer David Visschedyk (LLB '04), who lost a leg to the disease, had long been inspired by the heroic run of Terry Fox in 1980. Visschedyk set off from Vancouver on July 1 and finished in Halifax on Aug. 27, raising more than \$100,000. Alison Ellwood (BA '05), an aspiring teacher who dubbed her campaign HerStory, wanted to collect stories about breast cancer from people along the way for use in a book. She left Vancouver on May 8 and arrived in St. John's, Nfld., on Aug. 12. YorkU asked them about their journeys.

**What's your personal involvement with cancer?**

**VISSCHEDYK:** When I was 8, I was diagnosed with osteogenic sarcoma, a bone cancer, in my right leg. My leg was amputated just below the knee a few months later and I had eight months of chemotherapy.

**ELLWOOD:** My mother was diagnosed with breast cancer two years ago. She has since had two lumpectomies, a mastectomy and her lymph

## JOURNEYS

nodes removed in addition to drug and chemotherapy treatments.

### What was the purpose of your trip?

**VISSCHEDYK:** I was hoping to show people, and especially kids fighting cancer, that you can not only win the fight against the disease, but once it's won, you can do anything you want. I was also lucky enough to find a great charity focused on childhood cancer – the James Fund for Neuroblastoma Research at Sick-Kids – to raise money for.

**ELLWOOD:** The idea behind the tour and the collection of stories was to support those women and communities currently facing breast cancer and to celebrate and remember those who have lost the battle. Telling our stories is part of the healing process and it is what connects us as human beings.

### Why did you choose cross-country cycling?

**VISSCHEDYK:** Purely on a cycling level, it's a big challenge. To show people that someone can ride across the country with one leg might inspire them to do something they think will be difficult.

**ELLWOOD:** Truth be told, I had never cycled prior to this trip.

Last summer, I met a group of cyclists who were on a tour of the Great Lakes region spreading awareness on environmental and social justice issues. I witnessed how they were able to connect with people along the way. Clad in spandex and flashy helmet, pedalling a bike weighed down by gear, you get noticed! And you always have time for a chat over a cup of coffee.

### Who was with you?

**VISSCHEDYK:** Timothy Knowles, a new friend, volunteered his summer to drive the RV that supported my trip, and he did pretty much everything other than ride.

**ELLWOOD:** I began the journey with Megan MacDonald. She was with me on and off until Peterborough, Ont., at which point I was joined by Maria Leonardo. Both of these women I met at Trent University last year during teacher's college. Megan's father is currently battling prostate cancer and Maria's mother is battling thyroid cancer.

### What was the biggest highlight of your trip?

**VISSCHEDYK:** The ride through the mountains was beautiful. I was concerned about them, because it's difficult to train for them when you live in Toronto. But I was able to ride up them, which gave me a great feeling of accomplishment.

**ELLWOOD:** The generosity we received from complete strangers has been very powerful. If I spend the rest of my life trying to "pay it forward" for all the goodness that has been bestowed upon me throughout this trip, I will need at least three more lifetimes.

### What was the most emotional moment?

**VISSCHEDYK:** I was able to meet a lot of kids across the country who were fighting cancer. They were the people I would think of when things were getting hard. They certainly put the pain into perspective.

**ELLWOOD:** At a campsite in New Brunswick, we asked for our site fee to be waived and met the owner. Her eyes welled as she explained how her sister had just passed from breast cancer not two weeks ago and her mother a few years past. She told us of the pain that cancer has brought to her family and how appreciative she was of projects such as HerStory, at which point my eyes began to well. And there were so many moments like that.

### What else happened?

**VISSCHEDYK:** When I was riding through Saskatchewan, I crested a little hill and was almost hit by a house! They were moving the house along

the highway on the back of a transport truck, and it was so wide that it even went over the shoulder I was riding on.

**ELLWOOD:** The first tire that blew was a riot. Megan and I had a grand old time figuring out the ins and outs of changing a tube. Then, after taking the last, celebratory photo of ourselves, a huge bang sounded and our tire proceeded to rapidly deflate again. The bike maintenance aspect of our journey continued to be a bit of a gong show.

### What was the net result of your trip in terms of the goals you set?

**VISSCHEDYK:** The original goal I had was to raise \$15,000. As we got going and people were moved by the kids I was trying to help, that goal became \$35,000, then \$50,000 and by the end I helped to raise \$110,000. I think there was a lot of awareness raised for childhood cancer, and especially neuroblastoma.

**ELLWOOD:** We are continuing to encourage people to submit their stories about breast cancer. People can forward lessons learned, inspiring or challenging moments, or lives celebrated in the form of words, poetry, pictures or artwork to our Web site. I would like to publish the book/journal in the next few months to raise funds for research.

See David Visschedyk's Web site at [www.cyclingforcancer.ca](http://www.cyclingforcancer.ca) and Alison Ellwood's at [www.herstory2006.com](http://www.herstory2006.com). ■

**I was hoping to show people fighting cancer, that you can not only win the fight against the disease, but once it's won, you can do anything you want.**

# YORK PEOPLE

**Muluken Muchie**  
Newspaper publisher

## Gentle Critic

MULUKEN MUCHIE IS A SLIGHT, somewhat shy man whose courtesy might only be surpassed by his helpfulness. But Muchie (BA '91) is also a champion of his native land – Ethiopia – both its traditions and history. And he has at times been publicly critical of how little other Canadians seem to know about the black communities in his new homeland.

Muchie is editor and founder of *Hawarya*, a newspaper that reports in Amharic, Ethiopia's official language, and has served the Ethiopian community since 1995. For most readers, he says, it's the only source of reliable news about Ethiopia.

Muchie came to Canada in 1986 alone (he later sponsored his fiancée, Bizuayehu). A year later, he enrolled at York, earning

his degree in economics. But his transition into Canada's multicultural mix wasn't easy. "People talked too fast and seemed insensitive toward one another," he says. "But there was also an abundance of opportunities."

So what does he think of Canada's multiculturalism policy today with regard to Africans? "For Ethiopians it has been hard. We have a history that goes back 3,000 years, and we're deeply inward thinkers and jealous of our identity. It was difficult to mix easily. But we've shared the same ups and downs as with other African immigrants. I think the system may be more advantageous to some non-black communities, but I also believe it works." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOPHIE KINACHTCHOUK



## YORK PEOPLE

### Kelly Williams

TV personality, former racer

# Driving Passion

FOR 10 YEARS, KELLY WILLIAMS (BA Hons. '93) was the most successful female auto racer in Canada. Fans voted her the most popular driver on the Canadian circuit in 1999. Now, two years into her retirement from competition, she has become an engaging presence on television.

Williams is currently a judge on "Canada's Worst Driver", a kind of Idol-in-reverse reality show that has been the most-watched program on the Discovery Channel. She also does commercials on The Weather Network, promoting auto maintenance on behalf of the non-profit group Car Care Canada. And she has hosted Global TV's "Mechanical Chicks", helping the mechanically challenged solve vehicle problems.

Although the 35-year-old Williams doesn't chase the checkered victory flag now, she remains a fixture on the oval track. The Caledon, Ont., native is one of seven women drivers who take turns pacing the major races on the Champ Car World Series. (When a race is interrupted by an accident, the pace car leads competitors past the scene at a slower speed.)

That role fits nicely with Williams' other staple: teaching defensive driving at a BMW school. Having earned a BEd following her York BA in geography and history, she likes "being able to use my teaching skills, but in a non-traditional way." She still does some supply teaching. When students ask her about street racing, she replies: "It's the stupidest thing in the world. Take it to the drag strip. Streets aren't meant for racing." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KIRK



## YORK PEOPLE

### Ruba Nadda

Filmmaker

# Coming of Age

SABAH, THE FEATURE FILM by York English grad Ruba Nadda (BA '96), is a classic coming-of-age story. But in this case it isn't a 19-year-old ingénue up on the screen. Sabah is a 40-year-old Muslim Arab woman who finds her true love later in life with a white Toronto man, Stephen.

The movie has been a resounding critical success (except with conservative elements of the Toronto Muslim community, notes Nadda, 33, who wrote and directed the film). So far, *Sabah* has sold internationally in 25 countries, and made it onto the Top 10 list at the Rotterdam International Film Festival.

The film boasts Arsinée Khanjian as Sabah, and, behind the scenes, Khanjian's real-life husband, Atom Egoyan, who signed on as executive producer. "Atom and I became friends when he looked at some independent shorts I did years ago," says Nadda.

She admits the film is somewhat autobiographical, but says it's really about how people bridge two cultures. Her next big thing? A new feature called *Cairo Time*, shooting this fall. "It takes place in Egypt," she says. "It's about a North American woman who falls in love with an Egyptian man." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KIRK



American universities could learn a lot from York. **BY JACKIE GUENTHER**

# High Expectations

**U**NIVERSITY IN TORONTO? I've heard the question more times than I could begin to tally here in my hometown of Buffalo, New York. (Or to be accurate, it's, "College in Toronto?") So what did I get out of it? While my initial intention of soaking up Toronto's culture and atmosphere alongside my studies at York University remained intact, my answer has evolved. Only since returning to the good old US of A has it become apparent to me that York has a whole lot more to offer than your average "college".

Upon first engulfing myself in classwork, among other

grad school at a large American university. I was severely disappointed. Not once did I have to rewrite an essay for a better mark or pull an all-nighter studying complex material for an exam. Every time I turned in a paper, I'd get it back with a big red "A" and little to no feedback on how I could improve or expand my analysis. At York, my projects would come back with so many marks that I'd ponder whether the professor might have a red marker designated for my work alone.



I was becoming increasingly aware that the education I had received at York had done a lot more than just provide me with residence horror stories and a 10x13-inch sheet of paper marked "Bachelor of Arts". It had forced me to push myself harder and challenged my ways

of thinking. It had prepared me to go out and question others while pursuing goals of my own design.

This revelation was driven home when I applied for a graduate degree program in the States upon completing my certificate. I nearly fell out of the admissions office chair when I was told that my GPA from York would be considered the equivalent of an entire letter grade higher based upon their standards. This was extremely exciting, but also troubling because the school was openly admitting that they don't expect as much out of their students as Canadian universities do. How could this be? The university that many of my colleagues view as one of the best in the area can't even compare to those found on the other side of an imaginary line 30 miles away? Talk about a conflict of international proportions.

So, my road to higher education has given me a unique appreciation of my alma mater. Canadian universities, including York, may sometimes get lost in top school listings behind the Harvards and the Stanfords, but I couldn't feel luckier to be among the unnamed. American universities could learn a lot from their northern neighbours, and many of us York grads could learn a lot in hindsight about something we often took for granted. ■

**I nearly fell out of my chair when they told me my York GPA would be considered an entire letter grade higher.**

frosch-related activities at York, I found myself a bit overwhelmed by university-level study. Prior to those sleepless nights, unfamiliar theoretical concepts and professors who accepted nothing short of the best at York, I had always breezed through my classes with little real work and a laundry list of excellent final grades. Now I was confused: my friends at college back in "the States" were still pulling off A averages with little to no effort. Had I lost my knack for exam-writing? Had I spent too many Thursdays at pub night? I didn't realize that I was finally getting what I had been looking for all along in my academic career – a challenge.

Now, it's no revelation that university is challenging and involves hard work. This was not the surprising factor to me, but rather that York's American counterparts seemingly could not live up to the same expectations. Nor do I mean that there aren't universities in the US that could go head to head with York academically. Of course there are many. I've come to find, however, that a vast number simply do not push their students to go above and beyond in order to receive their degrees.

Once I graduated from York with a BA in communications and English, I returned home to spend a year attending graduate school to earn an advanced certificate. I prepared myself that summer to dive back into a gruelling workload. After all, this was

Jackie Guenther (BA '04) is promotions coordinator for a group of Buffalo radio stations.



A lawyer sees insider trading.  
An historian sees 1929.  
A fine arts student sees papier-mâché.

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