

YORKU

DECEMBER 2010



York Stars

The top undergrads



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YORKU

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DECEMBER 2010

Schulich's James Gillies looks back. BY BERTON WOODWARD

Business Man

Until quite recently, the institutional memory of York University was housed mainly in the minds of the people who created it. For long, the most reader-friendly book about the University's early history was *The Way Must Be Tried: Memoirs of a University Man*, published in 1992 by founding president Murray Ross, who also wrote *The New University* in 1961. Then came York's 50th anniversary in 2009, and the community was blessed with two new and important works. Professor Emeritus and University Historian Michiel Horn produced an official history, *York University: The Way Must Be Tried*, which we excerpted in *YorkU* in our February 2009 special issue. And University Professor Emeritus and former dean of arts John Saywell, also a historian, published *Someone to Teach Them: York and the Great University Explosion 1960-1973*, giving his personal take on those days.

Now we have another volume to add to the list, by another major player from York's pioneer era. Professor Emeritus James Gillies, first dean of what is now the Schulich School of Business, has written *From Vision to Reality: The Founding of the Faculty of Administrative Studies at York University, 1965-1972*. It's further subtitled "A Memoir of One of the Most Interesting Times in My Career." What's great about this book – like Ross's and Saywell's memoirs, and even Horn's history, since he occasionally injects his own experiences – is that it is so personal. Gillies gives vivid descriptions of the austere Toronto of the 1960s, and weaves in his family and Toronto movers and



shakers as he recalls the creation of the new Faculty and wider events at York.

Gillies' book certainly gives those interested in York's past plenty to compare. All four works discuss the momentous events involved in the choice of Ross's successor in 1970, for which both Gillies and Saywell were initially shortlisted. Gillies adds a friendly footnote pointing to Saywell's and Horn's books "for additional interpretations of the process."

Ontario-born Gillies also fleshes out probably the best-known part of his saga: that he agreed to come to York for just one year from a seemingly ideal position at the University of California, Los Angeles. The year became two, then headed for three, and UCLA asked him to decide. "What persuaded me to move permanently to York was the challenge to create a unique type of business school with a faculty that could be the best in the nation and perhaps, in time, one of the better ones in the world." Of course, the business school has met that challenge, and Gillies pays tribute to the deans who succeeded him, especially the "inspired leadership" of Dezsö Horváth, dean since 1988. Gillies, who also took time out for a political career, still teaches at Schulich. He is California's loss. ■

YORKU

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

At York, we take the idea of engagement very seriously. BY MAMDOUH SHOUKRI

Hallmark of Quality

Engagement turns teaching into learning, research into discovery and service into citizenship.

As cited in the President's Task Force on Community Engagement, Final Report

Universities are increasingly seen as key drivers of economic and social innovation. Governments, businesses and the public all require universities to provide the critical thinkers and the cutting-edge research essential in today's knowledge-based society. For York, such a commitment comes naturally, since it has been part of our mission and heritage from the creation of this University. A key component of our academic commitment is engagement, a concept that is becoming increasingly relevant in academia. But what is engagement and why is it so important for our students?

Let me answer by speaking directly to our students. Engagement can mean many things to you. It can range from the way faculty interact with you on an assignment to your ability to

Studies show that engaged

access information from a website. It can also include your participation in learning activities, such as coping with first year, joining a campus club or getting involved in community outreach. Studies

have shown that engaged students are better able to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for success. Ultimately, engagement is seen as the hallmark of a quality university experience.

At York, engagement is something we take very seriously. We understand that to fully realize the potential of engagement, there needs to be a commitment from the entire University community: administration, faculty and students. Engagement is the subject of our academic plans, the theme of our Provostial White Paper and the focus of the President's Task Force on Community Engagement, chaired by Rhonda Lenton, vice-provost academic. York is equally fortunate that students share the same passion and commitment to engagement. Our students are keen to participate in the University experience and to become agents of positive change on and off campus, like many

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



of the students featured in this issue of *YorkU*.

This past September, our student orientation leaders exposed many of you to the various activities available on our campuses. But that is only a snapshot of what York has to offer. We are involved in several community outreach initiatives, such as the York University-TD Community Engagement Centre, which offers experiential education opportunities to students;

the Knowledge Mobilization Unit, a partnership between social science researchers and government and community groups; Osgoode Hall Law School and the Community & Legal Aid Services Program, where law students provide

free legal services to low-income community members; the Winters Community Art Club, a student-led recreational program offering art instruction to local youth; and CHRY, a community-based radio station where students and community members work together.

At York, we are all about choices, and it is really up to you to decide how to get involved in the York experience. Whether you join some of the more than 250 student clubs and organizations, volunteer in community service or participate in one of the leadership programs, by getting involved you will discover and sharpen your communication, interpersonal and leadership skills in preparation for the world that awaits you. Along the way, you will have fun and make lifelong friendships. So I encourage you, like the alumni before you, to follow your passion and define your university experience by getting involved at York.

Go Lions! ■

UNIVERSE

SUSTAINABILITY

Branching Out

Assessing the value of York's forests

THE MICHAEL G. BOYER WOODLOT

This woodlot is named
in honour of Professor
Michael Boyer in recognition
of his years of enthusiastic
and tireless efforts to enhance
the campus environment by
conserving and expanding
our woodlots.



W

hat's the value of York's 97,575 trees? Maybe nothing to a developer, who might see them as a hindrance. On the other hand, a landscape architect would probably look at them as an asset. One way to measure trees' "worth" – especially urban ones – is by the role they play as efficient carbon traps, filtering greenhouse gas pollutants from the air.

Plant ecologist and physiologist Cecilia Tagliavia, a senior fellow of York's Institute for Research & Innovation in Sustainability (IRIS), along with IRIS director and biology Professor Dawn Bazely and graduate student Ashley Royle (BES Spec. Hons. '07), examined the tree canopies on York's Keele campus – both natural (existing woodlots) and artificial (gardens, parks and plantings) – with a view to establishing some kind of measure of how York's urban forest might be valued in dollar terms.

Using a computer model developed by the US Forest Service to aid managers and scientists in quantifying urban forest structure and functions, Tagliavia's research team found York has a tree density of 248 trees per hectare, and that 86 per cent of those are in park areas with the rest in artificial plantings such as gardens and areas around buildings. This was the first small-scale adaptation of the model to a university campus.

The researchers found York's trees sequestered approximately 327 metric tonnes of carbon per year. The pollution removed by the Keele campus urban forest was worth \$74,846 per year. The value of the 34,940 trees on campus susceptible to the Asian long-horned beetle was estimated to be \$22.3 million.

"York has more than 500 acres of property and contains a large diversity of recreational areas, parks and woodlots," says Tagliavia. "An integral part of our natural resources is our urban forest here. Studies like ours help clarify and highlight the hidden values of that forest."

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDSAY LOZON

BOOKS

What They're Reading

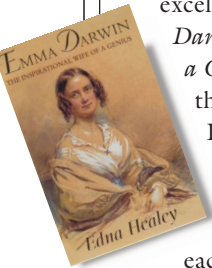
York people reveal what's on the bedside table

Caroline Davis

Kinesiology & health science professor

"I've just finished reading an excellent biography called *Emma Darwin: The Inspirational Wife of a Genius* by Edna Healey. I read this slowly, as time permitted.

But in doing so, I began to feel I knew the Darwins quite well – their lives together, their love for each other and their many children, and especially the sweet and empathic nature of a man who was plagued with demons, both physical and mental, throughout his life. That aspect of Darwin – how loved he was by his family and by the 19th-century scientific community, despite so much adversity – has renewed my captivation by this amazing gentleman."

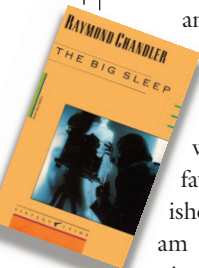


Gordon Flett

Psychology professor

"I love to read classic mystery books with strong characters. Lately, I have been focusing on Raymond Chandler and his character Philip Marlowe.

Summer reading included his classic *The Big Sleep*. Chandler is perhaps the best dialogue writer in the genre. Another favourite is P.D. James. I just finished reading *The Lighthouse* and I am hoping that she continues to write such fine books (she just turned 90!). I also like non-fiction, especially autobiographies. I am reading Ozzy Osbourne's *I Am Ozzy* after finishing Eric Clapton's even more compelling life story *Clapton: The Autobiography*. In addition to their anecdotes, I appreciate these celebrities being so open about their troubles and personal issues."



ETHICS

Bad Behaviour

Cognitive calisthenics can lead to self-delusion

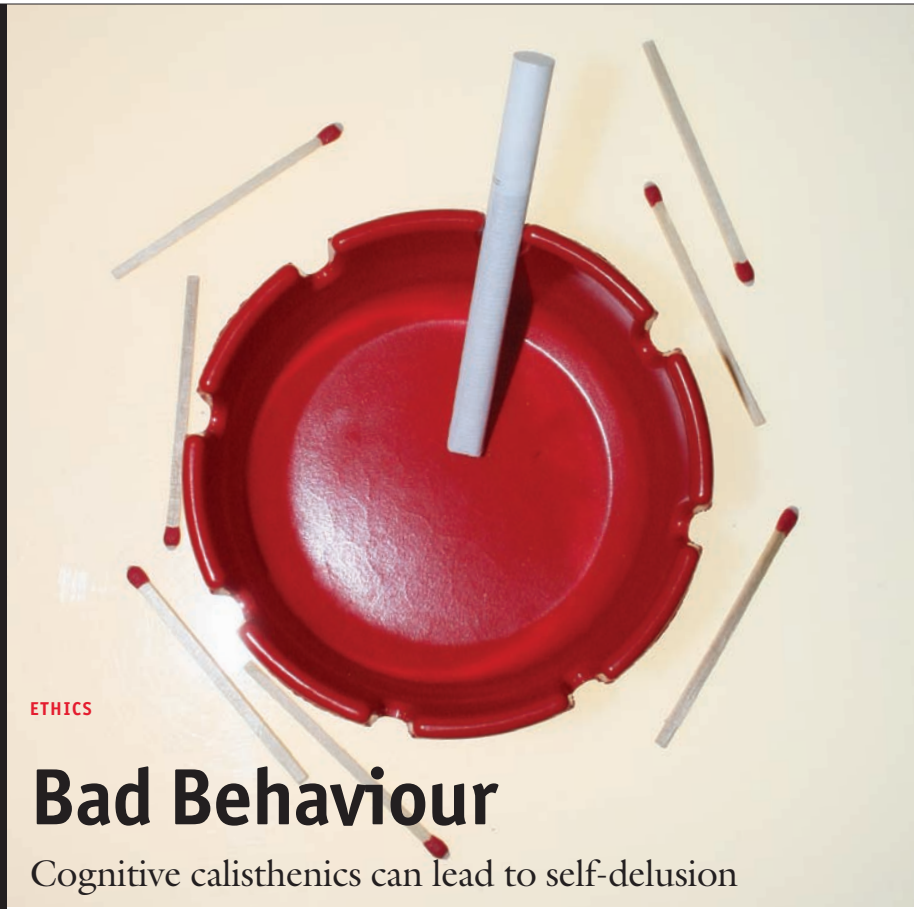
A York researcher has found that the simple act of recalling an instance of unethical behaviour from one's past can affect the way people think now, in predictable ways. Organizational behaviour & industrial relations Professor Chris Bell of the Schulich School of Business says his research suggests that thinking about bad behaviour threatens people's view of themselves as essentially "good". Because people feel threatened, they try to neutralize and assimilate their not-so-good past behaviour into their generally positive view of themselves.

The "assimilative mindset" follows from an effort to resolve cognitive dissonance about self-image, he says. For example, smokers who feel bad about their smoking might "neutralize" the health threat of their habit by recalling someone who smoked well into their advanced years, or by considering smoking an outdoor activity, says Bell.

"Smokers may essentially assimilate their habit into a category of 'not really life-threatening' behaviours by associating smoking with information that negates the threat. These cognitive calisthenics allow the smokers to feel they have control over their habit rather than accepting that the habit controls them," he says.

Bell wondered whether the assimilative mindset could affect judgment in general. Researchers asked subjects to recall a moment of personal unethical behaviour. They were then asked to identify in a rainbow spectrum of colours where, for instance, the colour blue began and ended. They found the people whose minds had recalled a moment of unethical behaviour marked off larger areas, including shades of purple, in the blue part of the spectrum – more so than those who had not recalled an unethical incident. "We found that minds working in an assimilative mode are less able to make fine distinctions," Bell says. "The ability seems to be impaired."

In a business context, Bell suggests decision-makers grappling with thoughts of recent, personal unethical behaviour should be aware of the likelihood that their thinking on other tasks may be impaired, in particular if those tasks depend on making discriminating judgments between options. ■



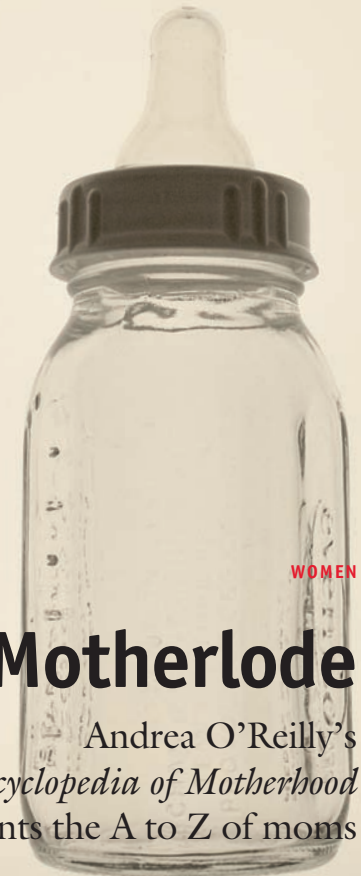
PHOTOGRAPHY BY RSQUARED

You could say Andrea O'Reilly wrote the book on motherhood or, in this case, the encyclopedia. Exhaustive, but never exhausting, *The Encyclopedia of Motherhood* – the first scholarly encyclopedia on the subject – is a fascinating read about mothering in all its aspects. A quick scan of the three-volume, 1,520-page opus yields articles on everything from Absentee Mothering and Authentic Mothering to “Bad” Mothers, Celebrity Motherhood and Mothers in the Bible. There is an article on Cybermothering and Clytemnestra. The very last entry is about Zines and Motherhood, preceded by TV Moms, Unions and Mothers, and Unpaid Work. In total, there are some 700 entries on almost every aspect of mothers and mothering.

O'Reilly, general editor of the three volumes, is a professor in York's School of Women's Studies in the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies and founder of the Motherhood Initiative for Research & Community Involvement. She has spent her academic career establishing the legitimacy of motherhood studies. “Reading the entries you could forget that maternal scholarship is still in its infancy as an academic discipline,” says O'Reilly. “It really only came into being in the late 1970s, and was only truly established in universities in the last 10 to 15 years.”

O'Reilly says the encyclopedia illustrates that motherhood studies, while still a recent discipline, is giving new meaning to our usual and familiar understandings of sexuality, work, power, community and the like. She is particularly proud of the fact that the encyclopedia pays particular attention to geographical, cultural and ethnic diversity (its first entry is titled Aboriginal Mothering). “The three volumes include an entry for almost every country in the world,” she notes.

O'Reilly also happens to be a mother herself and a York grad three times over (BA Hons. '85, MA '87, PhD '96). ■



The Motherlode

Andrea O'Reilly's
Encyclopedia of Motherhood
documents the A to Z of moms



School of Rock

Why rock 'n' roll camp strikes a chord with adolescent girls

Proponents of rock music have long liked to regard it as life- and world-changing. But any fame and fortune that came usually benefited the men, rather than the women, involved. Now ethnomusicology doctoral student Jennifer Taylor is trying to determine whether rock 'n' roll can play a part in building the self-esteem of girls aged eight through 18.

Although Taylor was never a rock 'n' roller herself (she grew up playing classical piano), she's been studying the results of a rock education for young women who attended the Rock 'n' Roll Camp for Girls, a non-profit organization that started in Portland, Oregon. “Usually we think of rock music as male dominated, with some exceptions, of course, like Janis Joplin, Marianne Faithfull, Alanis Morissette or Joan Jett. But more often women are relegated to the role of backup singers or so-called girl groups,” Taylor says.

Taylor spent summers doing fieldwork in two separate camps to examine their definition of “rock” while seeking to understand what genres were included and how the camp's definition was informed by gender, race, class and sexuality. “The camps' missions aren't solely limited to girls' musical abilities. They also incorporate workshops that deal with issues like self-esteem, body image and even self-defence,” she says.

“I think girls, particularly adolescent ones, are faced with the expectation of the quiet good girl, alongside the contradictory messages of being independent and assertive – yet deferential to men. Rock is an opportunity for girls to be loud and to express themselves in a way that is typically unavailable to them in their everyday lives.” ■

EXERCISE

Office Tai Chi

The ancient Chinese movements can aid workplace health

Want to improve your body and your mind? Look no further than the centuries-old Chinese tradition of tai chi, with its slow, elegant movements. York researchers have proven it's a bona fide mood lifter as well as body toner. The best part is – no expensive gym membership or workout room required!

“In these days of intense office and leisure work based around computer use, musculoskeletal disorders [MSDs] are a leading cause of work disability and cause huge losses in productivity in industrialized nations,” says Hala Tamim, professor in York’s School of Kinesiology & Health Science, who, along with colleagues, conducted research into the efficacy of a daily tai chi regimen to help keep at bay the aches and pains stemming from desk jobs. They also found tai chi had benefits for the mind as well as the body, with significant

improvement in psychological measures.

The study focused on 52 female computer users and measured levels of physical fitness as well as psychological well-being during the 12-week program. Subjects participated in a twice-weekly lunch hour tai chi session with a professional instructor. “Tai chi is a simple, convenient workplace intervention that may promote MSD health without the need for special equipment or showering after,” says Tamim. “Yet no study, before we did ours, had investigated tai chi as workplace-based physical exercise for health promotion.”

Will tai chi become the new chi-chi office exercise regimen? Only time will tell, but if your workaday workout consists of cramming sweaty squash games and aerobics classes into an all-too-short lunch hour, you might consider a calmer, gentler path to mental and physical well-being. ■

It seems contradictory, but clean water does not necessarily a healthy lake make, according to recent research by York biology Professor Roberto Quinlan. The five lakes in south-central Ontario that Quinlan inspected for his study have all experienced longtime stressors (19th-century logging, for instance) and even pre-contact events (before humans). But many water quality studies are fairly recent in terms of lake history – only 30 to 40 years old, he notes.

To get a more accurate picture of long-term ecological effects of anthropogenic (human-caused) stressors on aquatic ecosystems, Quinlan resorted to what is known as a paleoecological approach using paleolimnological analysis. “Stressors – like watershed disturbances from logging and road building – began acting on aquatic ecosystems long before monitoring programs for things such as acidification began in the 1970s,” says Quinlan. “Since we don’t have any pre-disturbance monitoring data, paleolimnological approaches offer one of the few avenues of gathering information about pre-disturbance conditions, and later lake ecosystem response to stressors.”

Paleolimnological methods enabled Quinlan to study past lake environments by examining the minute fossils preserved in their sediments. “It’s like an underwater archive of the lakes’ history,” says Quinlan. “It provides a long-term snapshot that lets us see how the lakes have changed as a result of natural or human activity.”

While Quinlan found water quality (pH and nutrient levels) had returned to natural levels, the ecological structure in the lakes was still degraded. “The results of our research show that even though water quality programs can be successful in returning nutrient levels in lakes to ‘natural’, pre-disturbance levels, the underlying ecological structure in these systems may still be compromised,” says Quinlan. ■

BIOLOGY

Underwater Archive

How to find the hidden history of a lake





EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

What a Disaster

Predicting flood risk due to urbanization

It's water under the bridge now, but people who remember Hurricane Hazel's devastation in the Toronto area might welcome the research of Niru Nirupama, professor of disaster & emergency management in the Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies. Nirupama and Professor Slobodan Simonovic at the University of Western Ontario are looking at how predicting flood risk due to urbanization could help avert a natural disaster.

"Our research shows how progressive urbanization considerably increases the risk of flooding," says Nirupama. She used the city of London, Ont., as a case in point. The Thames River, which traverses London and drains the Upper Thames River Watershed (UTRW), has flooded many times in the city's past – even when the city wasn't developed.

"The UTRW has experienced a net population migration trend that's very similar to other large metropolitan areas – such as the Greater Toronto Area," Nirupama says. Using satellite imagery, remote sensing data analysis and hydrologic data, the researchers found that the UTRW has experienced steady urban growth since 1974. By 2000, 22.5 per cent of the watershed was urbanized, compared to 10 per cent in 1975. Now that London has become more urbanized, researchers wanted to assess if flood risk has increased over time due to urbanization, and hence prepare the city before crises occur.

"Our case study of the UTRW should be useful in helping authorities form conservation policies on land-use planning," she says. Once the influence of urbanization on river flows is quantified, it will be possible to predict future flooding trends. Then, she says, measures can be taken to plan for the increased demand for residential and commercial areas without risking increases in the intensity and extent of storm water in rainy periods. ■

Top of the Class

How these eight undergrads became academic stars.

BY MARTHA TANCOCK

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LINDSAY LOZON

Y

OU MIGHT NOT PICK THEM OUT IN A CROWD, but the eight students profiled in these pages stand out as the top achievers in York's seven undergraduate Faculties at the end of second year. Eight out of seven? The tie this year, in *YorkU's* eighth annual survey, occurred in the Faculty of Fine Arts, not in business or science & engineering where ties have happened in the past.

It is no fluke that these young adults scored the highest cumulative grade point average at the midpoint in their undergrad years. Smart, ambitious and driven to do their best from an early age, two are immigrants and five are children of immigrants. They seize opportunities, dream big and work hard. Many also squeeze jobs, community activism and sports into their intense schedules – as well as reality TV.

Down the road, they hope to chase their dreams on Bay Street, on Wall Street, in the ethereal world of design or on the ground, empowering the poor or treating the sick. Who knows where they'll really end up in five years? The future didn't unfold exactly as expected for the class of 2005 (see page 18). But whatever comes, this year's crew is determined to succeed.





Healthy Ambitions

Nadia Warsi
Faculty of Health
GPA: 8.85

THESE DAYS, Nadia Warsi is so fixated on her future goal – to get into medicine, optometry or some other health-care profession – that she sometimes glosses over her past accomplishments. Like winning a national youth award for urban leadership in 2009. “Getting into professional school is what’s really important to me now,” says the 20-year-old psychology major, who was valedictorian at the Islamic Foundation School of Toronto and winner of many scholarships.

World-travelled, multilingual and inquisitive, the Canadian-born eldest daughter of immigrant Indian and Pakistani professionals also devotes much time to volunteering. Among other things, she tutors, writes for the *Toronto Star* about young people making a better world and organizes events at her mosque. At 15, she started lending a hand at the hospital near her Markham home – and discovered her life’s calling. In health care, she could combine her interest in science with her desire to work with people. Whether she ends up in research (her summer job for the past two years) or in clinical practice, she’s leaving her options open. “I’ve been truly blessed. I’ve led a comfortable life and had everything I’ve ever wanted. One day, I really hope to make a positive difference in the lives of others.”



Creating the Future

Oleg Nicolaev
Glendon
GPA: 8.62

OLEG NICOLAIEV CAN FIX CARS, alter his own clothes, install home electrical systems, repair TVs. He’s always been good with his hands. When he was 14, he and his mother departed Belarus for Israel. There, the independence-seeking teenager left home to go to boarding school, learned English and Hebrew, trained as an electronics engineer, then put in three years of mandatory military service in the air force’s data communications unit. “I hated it,” remembers the 31-year-old business economics student. For a young man in his 20s, Israel seemed small and opportunities limited. Nicolaev started to plot a different future, dreaming of returning to school. For five years, he worked for Internet service providers and wireless communications developers – and saved his shekels – to emigrate to Canada.

Finally, at 28, he landed in Toronto and plunged into full-time studies at Glendon, keen to add French to his linguistic repertoire. Now living within biking distance of the midtown campus, this amateur photographer and avid in-line skater still survives on savings – plus a hefty York scholarship. “I am happy here,” says Nicolaev, clearly as clever as he is handy and thrilled at future options – graduate school, or a banking or government career in, say, market analysis. “I want too many things!”



Mind without Borders

Alina Belivsky

Faculty of Science & Engineering

GPA: 9.0

THE DAY ALINA BELIVSKY DISSECTED a fetal pig in high school and examined the digestive system, she dropped business studies for biology. “I thought it was so interesting to see how things work together,” says the 20-year-old biology major. Belivsky was two when her parents applied for visas from Ukraine to Israel and 10 when they moved again with their two daughters to peaceful Canada. The family settled in midtown Toronto where Belivsky was soon speaking flawless English and coming nearly top of her class. In high school, the girl who likes arguing joined the debating club. “It gets your blood running,” says the York debater. She thrives under pressure and lets off steam doing karate, playing ultimate Frisbee and watching “How I Met Your Mother”.

What does the future hold? To the summer lab assistant who has tracked and analyzed eye movements, neuroscience looks appealing. So does academia. But right now medicine trumps both. The Mount Sinai Hospital Emergency Department volunteer, who normally commutes from home in Maple, rented a downtown sublet this past summer to buy more time to prep for the Medical College Admission Test. One day she may be a pediatrician helping refugees with Doctors Without Borders.

Never Satisfied

Maxwell Serebryanny

Schulich School of Business

GPA: 8.85

DON'T BE FOOLED by Maxwell Serebryanny. The 19-year-old from Thornhill may look and sound like a featherweight, but one day he intends to make millions as a corporate or tax lawyer, a heavyweight on Wall Street. The adored first-born of Russian immigrants got the idea from a John Grisham novel when he was 12. “Wow,” he thought, “lawyers can make a lot of money.” In high school, the gifted student ran math and Scrabble clubs, edited the student newspaper and came first in every class. He entered York at 16 with irresistible scholarships and these days makes top dollar as a prized tutor, offers free group lessons, and created and oversees a helpful career-oriented website for classmates.

This summer, Serebryanny doggedly completed 60 LSAT practice tests to boost his 95 percentile to 99.7 and qualify for Harvard Law School, the ticket to a lucrative job in New York. “I’ll get there,” says the Donald Trump fan who commutes in a Pontiac Vibe, never misses a TV reality show (“my guilty pleasure”) and listens to rap and hip hop. “I’m a perfectionist, I’m ambitious and I always like to be the best. I am never satisfied with where I’m at.” Bright light, big dream.



Intelligent Design ...

Katy Ha
Faculty of Fine Arts
GPA: 8.4

FROM AN EARLY AGE, Katy Ha couldn't resist fancy packaging. "I remember standing in the candy aisle. I always picked the box that looked prettiest," says the 20-year-old pack rat who stuffs her cupboards with Japanese Pocky snack boxes, and perfume and chocolate boxes. Though a talented illustrator – these days of anime-type fashionistas – Ha aims to focus on packaging and book design in the York University-Sheridan College Joint Program in Design. Commuting from her Newmarket home and an intense curriculum leave little time to read the latest graphic novel or learn a few more phrases in Japanese. "I love everything Japanese," says this Cantonese-fluent only child of Hong Kong immigrants. Ha took art lessons throughout her childhood. "My parents weren't like most Chinese who want their children to learn abacus and math."

At school, the "CSI" and "Bones" fan adored biology and chemistry, and imagined a life in forensics. Graphic design won the day, however, and soon gripped her intellect with its complex theories of form and function. "It made me love design much more." Ha is ambitious but worries that good grades don't guarantee a good job. A recent car accident has persuaded her to stick close to home, count her blessings and work even harder.

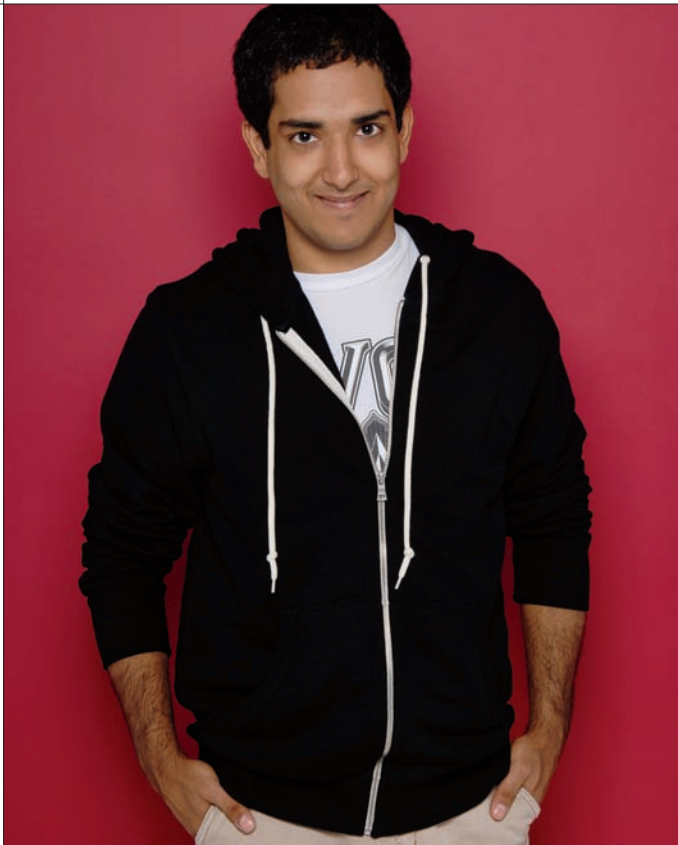


... And Smart Theatre

Meara Tubman-Broeren
Faculty of Fine Arts
GPA: 8.4

EVER SINCE SHE SAW *Cinderella* in Grade 2, Meara Tubman-Broeren has lived for theatre. At eight, she took acting lessons; at 11, she recited poetry, and practised elocution and poise in speech arts classes. During high school, when she wasn't acing every subject at her private academy for girls in Victoria, BC, and devouring Jane Austen novels, she and her friends were mounting plays for teens, like anorexia-themed *Little Sister* by Joan MacLeod, and touring them locally. For two years as a speech arts tutor, this once-bullied girl helped little kids find their voices and gain confidence.

When she decided to pursue theatre further, all signs pointed to York – experimental, interdisciplinary (she could take English and history, too) and set in theatre-rich Toronto. It was also the only university on the continent to offer "devised" theatre, where creative ensembles develop plays from scratch. "I can come out of ensemble work and go into directing, production, acting or writing plays." Perfect training if you want to start your own theatre company, create political theatre in developing countries or teach. "Theatre gives people an opportunity to express themselves and to shine," says this 21-year-old who knows. "Theatre is a great place to figure out who you are."



Fighting for Excellence

Rajat (Nick) Sabharwal

Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies

GPA: 8.75

GYM AND MATH were “Nick” Sabharwal’s favourite subjects in high school. In Grade 12, the wrestler played lacrosse, was president of the athletics council, then goofed off after York accepted him, flunked a course and tasted humility at summer school. When a new martial arts gym opened near his Brampton home, the Tito Ortiz fan couldn’t sign up fast enough. “It has changed my life,” says the bantamweight Thai boxer and former couch potato. Daily two-hour workouts and an inspiring coach taught the emotional wild card physical and mental discipline, and how to stay calm under pressure. He brimmed with confidence.

At York, Sabharwal flirted with business studies but returned to economics, preferring the right-or-wrong exactitude that gives him control of his own academic destiny. “I like tests and I need a lot of structure,” says the 21-year-old martial arts instructor who now never misses a class and studies intensely for every exam. “My mom is the reason I try so hard,” says the third son of long-divorced Indian immigrants. Impressed with her real estate savvy, he bones up on investing and even sees tax or corporate law ahead. Here and now, he’s kickboxing competitively, dreaming of glory one day in World Extreme Cagefighting.

Ready for Action

Fatima Khan

Faculty of Environmental Studies

GPA: 8.67

WHEN FATIMA KHAN WAS GROWING UP in suburban Brantford, she played every sport – and coloured her world green. In high school, she founded Green It Up! and led city tree-planting missions, initiatives for which she won high-school and provincial volunteer awards. “I’ve always been the type to take action, to try,” says the baby daughter of Pakistani parents who instilled in their three children an ethic of giving back to the community. “If it doesn’t work, so what? I tried.”

Unsure what to study at university, Khan couldn’t believe her luck at finding a York program that blended environmental, social justice and cultural issues – then winning the \$38,000 Visionary Leadership Scholarship, for which she has to create and carry out a four-year project. After two years planning, the 20-year-old hopes to unite the Keele campus’s eight disparate undergrad residences around a charity fundraising drive. She’s coordinating this community-building effort from her Calumet suite, where she shleps around in pyjamas and hits the books at midnight – 1980s hits playing in her ears. One day Khan dreams of helping the needy, but for now she wants more school, more possibilities. “I don’t know where it is taking me, but I don’t see stopping anytime soon.” ■

Five Years Later

Where are the top students of 2005 now? BY MARTHA TANCOCK

IN 2005, *YorkU* produced its third annual list of York's top undergrads, charting their hopes and dreams about the future. How did they turn out? Here we pick up the story half a decade on.

Mitch Vainberg

Science & Engineering BSc Hons. '07



ANOTHER YEAR at medical school and Vainberg will realize his dream of becoming a doctor. He's hoping to go into family practice and thrilled at the prospect of helping others. Still an aspiring writer, he makes time in an intense schedule to read *Freedom* by Jonathan Franzen, and write and edit for student publications. The doctor in training hears "amazing stories" and feels writing, like medicine, "is a way to connect to other humans."

Robbie Goldberg

Science & Engineering BSc '07



GOLDBERG, WHO TIED with Vainberg in 2005, sprinted into medical school right after third year. One credit short of a degree, he took an economics course the next summer to complete his bachelor of science.

"It was very important to me," says the newly minted doctor, now doing rounds in Toronto hospitals after a California holiday this summer. Between shifts, the future internist balances work with jogging and movies, friends and family as he begins his residency in medicine.

Stella Mbaka

Glendon BA Hons. '07

MTAKA IS CLOSER than ever to blending her two passions – art and mathematics. After graduating in computer science, the



Congolese immigrant upgraded her graphic design skills at college. She develops e-commerce stores for Telus and just started graduate studies in applied mathematics at Ryerson University so she can construct graphic design software from scratch to rival the best in image and colour processing. "I have an idea that will change the world!"

Jennifer Bukovec

Environmental Studies BES Spec. Hons. '07

BUKOVEC IS FINISHING a three-year master's degree in landscape architecture at the University of Toronto. For the Bramalea-raised anti-suburbanite, what could be better than remediating contaminated sites, capturing storm water and creating vibrant civic spaces? She's done field design work in New Orleans and will intern for two years to launch a career that stokes her creativity and desire to protect natural processes, as she hoped. "It's exactly what I want to do."



Irene McEwan

Atkinson (now part of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies) BA Spec. Hons. '10

TWO YEARS AGO, McEwan, then a special-needs assistant, scheduled a year off to complete her psychology degree when an osteoarthritic hip forced her into surgery. This spring, 13 years after the single mother of three started part-time studies, she graduated summa cum laude. No longer keen on speech pathology, she's quit her job and won big scholarships to do a master's in occupational therapy at McMaster University. Her future teems with possibilities. "I am really pumped."



Kar-Woon Choy

Schulich IBBA Spec. Hons. '07

CHOY DID DO a third-year exchange in Hong Kong and, true to script, has been exploring the world. First Asia, next Europe. Since her second-year summer, she's worked for Procter & Gamble in brand management. Last year, she was promoted to business manager of the Pampers brand and this fall relocated to Cincinnati headquarters. "It's a very exciting move," says the rising corporate executive now jetting around the globe on international assignment.



Jessica Chan

Arts (now part of LA&PS) BA Spec. Hons. '07, MA '10

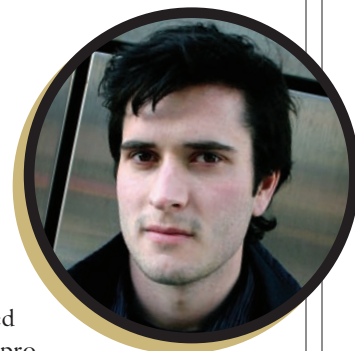
TWO MORE YEARS and Chan earns her PhD in psychology from York, where she also completed her master's degree. Music now plays second fiddle to her studies, but she dusts off her viola to perform with her violinist boyfriend at weddings. Of Chinese and Portuguese heritage, she is researching parenting in different cultures and will soon realize her dream of being a child psychologist. "I'm really glad I followed this path. I love working with kids."



Jamie Cussen

Fine Arts BFA Spec. Hons. '07

SINCE CUSSEN'S fourth-year project *Rock Paper Scissors* won awards at international film festivals, the writer-director has worked non-stop in TV and film. He and producer Will Beauchamp (BFA Spec. Hons. '08) formed Aircastle Films and over the past two years have written, directed, edited and produced short dramas for Bravo and documentaries for OMNI TV. Now they're pitching a TV series. "It's been a bit of a whirlwind," says Cussen.



Go online to see the original December 2005 YorkU feature at digital.yorku.ca/issue/18032.

SPACES

Common Knowledge



The library's sparkling new Learning Commons offers an innovative place to study and collaborate.

BY MICHAEL TODD ■ PHOTOGRAPHY BY JEFF KIRK

ANYONE WHO LIVES, works or plays at York is familiar with the Harry W. Arthurs Common, York's proverbial green welcome mat. People may not be so familiar with another new commons right in the centre of York's main library. There's no grass, but it does have just about everything students need to make learning and sharing knowledge a little easier.

Known as the York Learning Commons, this 17,000-sq.-ft academic hot spot takes up nearly half of Scott Library's second floor, just off the soaring Atrium. It emphasizes flexible

work space – salon areas for quiet study, places for collaboration, group study rooms and an atrium for exhibits.

Phase 1 of the Learning Commons opened in October and Phase 2 is due to be finished by 2013. The second phase will include two classrooms, additional group study rooms and more quiet-study, computer and soft-seating areas.

With donor support, the Learning Commons will further enrich the learning experience. Gifts or pledges of \$5,000 or more will be recognized on the Learning Commons Donor Wall. For more information, contact the York University Foundation at yorku.ca/foundation.



ACADEMIC HOT SPOT: The Collaboratory (opposite) and the Salon

SPACES



COMFY COZY: The Collaboratory (top) boasts floor-to-ceiling windows and a mix of soft seating, move-it-yourself furniture, whiteboards and flexible wired banquettes. That means you can always be plugged in while customizing the learning space to fit the needs of your group. Study alone on the comfy lounge seating or head for the Hill – a stepped, raised area where you can plug in and stretch out.



VERY HUSH-HUSH: The new Salon (centre) is outfitted with soft lounge seating intended for quiet study in a book-lined, contemplative environment. Scott Library's collection of reference books is housed here. See the works of important Canadian artists like David Partridge and Claude Tousignant along the Art Walk.



HOT HUB: The Learning Commons Hub (below, left & right) brings together your academic support all in one central spot – real help with research, writing and learning skills offered by instructors, librarians and other professionals.



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Like Oil and Water

York's Gail Fraser has been a leading campaigner in the fight to protect the environment from offshore drilling.

BY MARTHA TANCOCK ■ PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOPHIE KINACHTCHOUK

IN THE SUMMER OF 1987, Gail Fraser had a job tagging sea otters in Prince William Sound off the coast of Alaska. Two years later, the University of Minnesota biology student stood teary-eyed and transfixed at TV images of the Exxon Valdez oil spill. “I watched otters we tagged pulled out of the oil, dead.” The catastrophe politicized her.

This spring, 23 years later, the marine-bird researcher’s heart broke again over images of oil-soaked pelicans and endangered turtles surely doomed by the even worse BP spill in the Gulf of Mexico. This time, the York environmental studies professor joined a public chorus of scientists and politicians questioning the safety of Canada’s offshore drilling. In a letter to *The Globe and Mail*, she accused regulators of a conflict of interest. “They promote the offshore industry and oversee environmental protection. This needs to change.” When Chevron started drilling a well off Newfoundland even deeper than BP’s Deepwater Horizon, she said it must drill a relief well or risk a spill that could gush for months in the North Atlantic.

“I think Canadians really need to consider what is the worst-case scenario and ask themselves, ‘Is this tolerable? Are we willing to put up with that?’” she told *The Canadian Press*. “We really need to ask our government: Are we doing our best at protecting ocean ecosystems? I would say we’re not even close.” Spills happen all the time on the Grand Banks, she told CBC’s “The Current”, yet little information is available on their impact on the environment. In interview after interview, and on June 17 before the federal Standing Committee on Natural Resources, she repeated: “My biggest concern is a total lack of transparency.”

She should know. Since 2002, she has been stonewalled and thwarted by regulators and governments when posing this simple question: What is the impact of offshore oil and gas exploration and production on marine birds? “I’m still asking the question.”

Fraser grew up in Minneapolis and never dreamed of becoming a biologist until, at 16, she canoed down the wild Seal River in northern Manitoba and ended up paddling among beluga whales in Hudson Bay. Like biologists she met there, she wanted to go to cool places and study cool animals. She earned a BSc in biology, kayaked around Minnesota marshes to observe colonial nesting water birds to complete her master’s in zoology, then headed for Alaska where she worked as a fisheries observer on the Bering Sea. She leapt at a chance to do doctoral studies on the behavioural ecology of seabirds in the Aleutian Islands of the north Pacific and moved to St. John’s, Newfoundland, on the opposite coast, where her Memorial University supervisor was based.

Fraser remembers the November day in 1997 when the Hibernia, Newfoundland’s first offshore-drilling rig, extracted its first drop of oil. “That put it on the radar for me.” After completing her PhD, she decided she wanted to do more than just study birds. “I wanted to improve conservation. It was a big shift and it was a very intentional one.”

For two years, she researched habitat fragmentation for York songbird expert Bridget Stutchbury, now Canada Research Chair in Ecology and Conservation Biology in the Faculty of Science & Engineering, then found another post-doctoral position with an environmental lawyer at Texas A&M University. Let’s assess the impact of offshore oil and gas extraction on marine birds in the Gulf of Mexico and Newfoundland, proposed Fraser. She easily collected data in the United States but had no such luck with the Canada-Newfoundland Offshore Petroleum Board, the rig regulator. It turned out the petroleum board cannot release information submitted to it by oil companies without their consent. Stymied, Fraser made five Access to Information requests. Every one was denied. “As a biologist and member of the public, you’re shut out,” she says. “I went from writing scientific articles to asking policy questions.”

Meanwhile, she and colleagues in Newfoundland’s ecology-focused Alder Institute tried educating the public. They published an atlas that mapped the intersections of oil production and endangered blue whales, harlequin ducks, ivory gulls and wolffish. “One of the biggest problems with offshore oil and gas in Newfoundland,” she says, “is that it is out of sight, hundreds of kilometres away.” In 2008, they released a study showing the number of small spills exceeded original predictions. Petroleum boards were clearly failing to enforce their policy of zero tolerance for spills. “Why does it take me to point this out?” she asked the *Globe*. Then the BP spill happened and Fraser stepped further into the public spotlight.

During the school year, Fraser normally studies cormorants on Toronto’s waterfront and retreats to a “foggy little island off Newfoundland” every summer to study Manx shearwaters and Leach’s storm-petrels. This year, however, she’s on sabbatical, continuing a three-year research project on environmental assessment policies in Canada. So far, few researchers are casting such a critical eye on environmental regulation of oil and gas drilling in Canada, and Fraser figures it will keep her busy for 10 years. “I wouldn’t describe myself as anti-oil. I recognize the need for it,” she says. “But we need to move to alternative sources of energy and look after our environment.” ■

York has a club full of winning international players, but gaining varsity status for the sport is still a sticky wicket.

BY DAVID FULLER ■ PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

THE NEXT BIG THING in sports at York started with a few students in a parking lot and a tennis ball wrapped with electrical tape. It was the late '90s and the students were new to the country, mostly from South Asia. They were enjoying a free moment in the best way they knew – by playing cricket. But they also heralded a demographic trend that has changed the face of Canada, and the University. Those early cricketers were members of what is now the second-most populous cultural group immigrating to Canada every year, and they were coming from countries where cricket is every bit as popular as hockey is in Leaf Nation.

A decade later, cricket is well established at York. Mahjuz Sourav (BA Spec. Hons. '06), a native of Bangladesh and captain of the York University Cricket Club (YUCC), is one of a growing number of York students and grads now eager to share their passion for the game with other university sides. They hope the day will come when school teams from across Canada can compete for a national varsity championship. Last March, they got a glimpse of the future. Sourav and his teammates won the privately sponsored American College Cricket Spring Break Championship in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. They were the only Canadian team entered, and the members – all current students plus the allowable two alumni players – travelled at their own expense.

That success prompted Sourav and club co-founders Chirag Shah (BA '04) and Daniyal Fahim, a fourth-year student and the club's current president, to organize the CanUCric Canadian University & College Cricket Championship, an event aimed squarely at showcasing cricket to the sanctioning bodies – Ontario University Athletics (OUA) and Canadian Interuniversity Sport (CIS). "It is about time that all this talent we have in the education system is recognized," says Sourav. The CanUCric tournament – won by the University of Waterloo, which defeated York in the semifinal – attracted 12 university club teams with all but two, Manitoba and McGill, coming from within the province. Four more teams – Ottawa, Carleton, Calgary and the University of British Columbia – wanted to enter but couldn't afford to travel.

This evidence of interest from across the country comes as no surprise to Fahim, who emigrated from Pakistan and played

for six years in Calgary, where he says there is a vibrant cricket community. British Columbia, with its large South Asian population, also has teams. Yet even in Ontario, where the number has reached critical mass, other sports have long-standing claims for addition to the OUA championships, says Jennifer Myers, York's director of sport & recreation. "You have to put it in context," she says. "We have 14 [Ontario university] women's softball teams playing in a league now and even that's not a varsity sport." York Sport & Recreation does provide access to facilities for the cricketers, as it does for all registered student clubs, and some financial support. There is also an eight-team intramural cricket program, notes YUCC team member Waleed Anwar Butt (BSc '10), who helps arrange the games held indoors at the Tait McKenzie Centre on the Keele campus.

Organized cricket at York started in 2003, when the student alumni program York is U held its first challenge tournament. It was an immediate, albeit modest, success. The following year's event featured more teams from student clubs representing their home countries, and inspired a group of the best players to form a club to compete in the Brampton-Etobicoke & District Cricket League. The YUCC won the premier division championship in 2005, its first season of competition.

In the equally popular Toronto & District Cricket League, York student Khushroo Wadia, who came from India and plays in the T & D's Elite division with several members of the Canadian national team, is that league's highest run scorer. He is one of several top-level players at York. Jai Patel, who came from the United Arab Emirates, played for his country's under-19 and senior national teams as did Raza Rehman, who played for Pakistan.

With about 300 club teams playing in two major GTA leagues and a fast-growing number of teams in area high schools, demand for recognition of the sport will only increase in the future. Sourav says he and his fellow enthusiasts are now working on a business plan for an Ontario university league. "We know it's coming and we know it's something we have to address," Myers says. "We have a real opportunity in front of us to grow cricket as a club and recreational sport." Those are welcome words to Sourav and company. "We are working, and waiting patiently and eagerly, for that day," says Sourav. "We know the outcome will be sweet in the long run." ■

CRITICAL MASS: YUCC members (from left) Mahjuz Sourav, Jaiveer Chauhan, Daniyal Fahim, Raza Rehman and Chirag Shah

Cricket Nation



A close-up portrait of Sarah Flicker, a woman with short, wavy, light brown hair and blue eyes. She is wearing a teal-colored scarf and has a slight smile. The background is dark and out of focus.

Sexual Healing

York's Sarah Flicker is a leader in public health research on teen sex and HIV.

BY MARTHA TANCOCK ■ PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOPHIE KINACHTCHOUK

SARAH FLICKER IS NO DR. RUTH. But like the grandmother who dispenses sex advice on TV, she aims to improve sexual literacy and health, especially among teens. When Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty nixed a bold new sex-education curriculum for public schools last April, she didn't lose heart. "The topics are certainly controversial, but the information is so important," says the York professor whose public health research focuses on adolescent sexual health and HIV/AIDS. "I see it as a human right for youth to have information about their bodies and reproduction and ways to keep themselves safe."

The cancelled curriculum proposed teaching elementary school children about genitalia, sexual orientation, puberty, masturbation and sexually transmitted infections. It could have been lifted straight out of the recommendations from the Toronto Teen Survey report released six months earlier by Flicker and researchers at two other Ontario universities. The survey – one of the largest and most diverse samples of its kind – found that Toronto teens were engaging in risky sexual behaviours but not getting the information they needed to protect themselves. Concerned, the province wanted to know more.

"At the end of the day, kids suffer" for lack of sex education, argues Flicker. "No matter what race, very few are talking to Mom before they jump into bed. So where are they going to get information if you don't offer it in school?" She is quick to add, "I would never suggest that schools promote sex. All we are advocating for is that, if and when youth are ready, they have the knowledge to make the healthiest choices."

This summer, Flicker co-edited a special December issue of the *Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality* devoted entirely to the Toronto Teen Survey. The survey continues to spawn student papers, keeping Flicker's grad students busy while she juggles other projects. Since she joined York's Faculty of Environmental Studies four years ago, she has attracted over \$1 million in grants to document teen sexual health, inequitable access to clinical services and education, and the inadequacies of sexual education. Now she wants to influence change on the ground and at the policy level. "It's easy to critique. The much more challenging work is trying to put forth solutions."

She's seeking solutions in novel ways. In a national project, Taking Action!, she paired aboriginal teens with local artists to express – through painting, sculpture, music or theatre – the effect of HIV/AIDS on them and their communities. Flicker is also grooming the teens to be leaders in HIV prevention. "We work directly with young people to become agents of change,"

she says. "They help set the research agenda and become researchers themselves. I see the biggest changes with those young people. They gain confidence and serve as credible sources of health information for friends." Soon agencies develop better services, and governments listen. Flicker is doing similar work with youth in South Africa. "We know HIV follows a pattern of inequity. Those with the least power suffer the most."

HIV/AIDS is the thread that weaves through all of Flicker's research. "From early on, I was deeply concerned with sexual health. I matured in the 1980s as HIV hit the world." In high school, she started volunteering at Planned Parenthood. It was a family imperative. "I was the grandchild of Holocaust survivors and one of the things they always said was, 'how come no one paid attention or cared about us?'" says Flicker. "So from a young age, I felt responsible as a global citizen. I didn't want my children to say, how come you didn't care?"

Flicker grew up in Montreal, the multi-talented middle child of professionals. She won a scholarship to Brown University, the Ivy League school in Rhode Island, and forsook art and biology to graduate in anthropology. A job at the Jewish Women's Archive in Boston led to her discovery of trailblazers such as Lillian Wald, a Victorian-era nurse who started community health programs in Brooklyn tenements. "I wondered, how could I impact our future?"

She marched into public health. Lured west by a full scholarship from the University of California Berkeley, Flicker started a master's degree in maternal and child health and epidemiology. One day she was startled to learn that, in 1998, AIDS had surpassed cervical cancer as the biggest killer of women in the developing world. Both diseases are preventable. "I saw an opportunity and felt a responsibility to become an actor in this area."

She was already working in the AIDS program of a San Francisco Bay Area public health department and might have stayed in California had then-president George W. Bush not tied AIDS relief in Africa to abstinence. "I thought, this is insane. It flies in the face of everything we know. It is purely ideological and I don't want to stick around for it." She came home.

She won a scholarship to the University of Toronto and produced a doctoral thesis on improving support for HIV-positive youth in Canada. She has been building on that theme ever since. "There is a lot that can be done," says Flicker. "That's why I find HIV research with young people so exciting and interesting. HIV is not a *fait accompli*. Amongst the doom and gloom, there is a possibility for seeing and imagining a different future and making it happen." ■

YORK PEOPLE

"THE OPPORTUNITY WAS MUSIC," says singer/dancer and York student Amanda Morra as she talks about her decision to take 18 months off school in 2008. Her instinct proved correct: the 22-year-old spent the time recording two albums and travelling to Europe and the US to launch her career as a performer. But school was still a passion for Morra, who also teaches dance, and she returned this year to finish her studies in York's School of Kinesiology & Health Science in the Faculty of Health. "Why aren't you in fine arts?" a professor inquired when she arrived for her first day of classes. "I'd rather learn about something totally different," says Morra, who has been singing and dancing competitively since she was five.

After being discovered online via her MySpace page, she signed a deal with independent recording company Costa Music Inc., and started work on her self-titled first album. Her single, *1 and Only*, has received significant airplay in the US and Australia – enough for her name to register on the Billboard charts – and *Kisses*, the first single from her new album, was released this past summer along with her first music video. With her second album now completed, Morra hopes she can juggle studying and performing long enough to get her degree. That's part of her back-up plan to further a teaching career. ■


PHOTOGRAPHY BY MCKENZIE JAMES



Amanda Morra

Recording artist, kinesiology student

On the Charts

A photograph of tennis player Mikhail Lew standing on a blue tennis court. He is wearing a grey t-shirt and dark jeans, smiling and looking to his right. He is holding a red and white tennis racket. The background shows the stadium seating and some advertisements like Sun Life and Fly Emirates.

TENNIS PLAYER MIKHAIL "MISHA" LEW, who will graduate with a degree in psychology from York's Faculty of Health in the spring, says he's ready to start a new career after a stellar three years as a member of the York Lions varsity team. Although he is not eligible to play in his final term at York, Lew hopes his days as the top-ranked player in Ontario University Athletics (OUA) will stand him in good stead for a career as a personal trainer. "I'd like to stay in sports," says the former Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) player, who came to York as a mature student when he was 21.

Born in Caracas, Venezuela, Lew left that country when he was 14 and spent two years at a tennis academy in Germany where he roomed with Serbia's Novak Djokovic, now a top-ranked star on the ATP men's tour. At 16, Lew moved to Florida to continue his training and, after five years and a series of recurring injuries, decided to pursue a degree at York. In three all-star years on the squad, Lew helped the Lions to a provincial title in 2009 and was ranked number one in the Ontario Tennis Association rankings. He was also selected to play for the Canadian Universiade team and travelled to Belgrade, Serbia. Although he still hopes to play in as many Canadian tournaments as he can, Lew admits he's now focusing on life after tennis. "It's time to start paying the bills." ■

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE FORD

Mikhail Lew
Tennis star, psych major

Netting Out



WHY I GIVE TO YORK

"My family fled Finland after World War II because my father, for fear of a Soviet invasion, became involved in a military movement that was distributing guns to people instead of demobilizing. We moved to Venezuela and eventually wound up in North America.

These experiences explain why I have devoted much of my career to researching the causes of displacement and lost opportunities. They're also why I created the Paavo and Aino Lukkari Human Rights Fund at York and have included a bequest in my will to further support the fund in future. It honours my parents' memory while supporting the work of students who share my passion for human rights and social justice in Latin America and the Caribbean.

For me, a bequest was the best way to support York and celebrate the forty years I've spent at the university."

Professor Emerita Liisa North is a founder of the Centre for Research on Latin America and the Caribbean at York University.

There has never been a better time to redefine the possible through gift planning. For more information about bequests in your will, gifts of life insurance or other planned gifts, contact York University at 416-650-8210 or visit yorku.ca/foundation.



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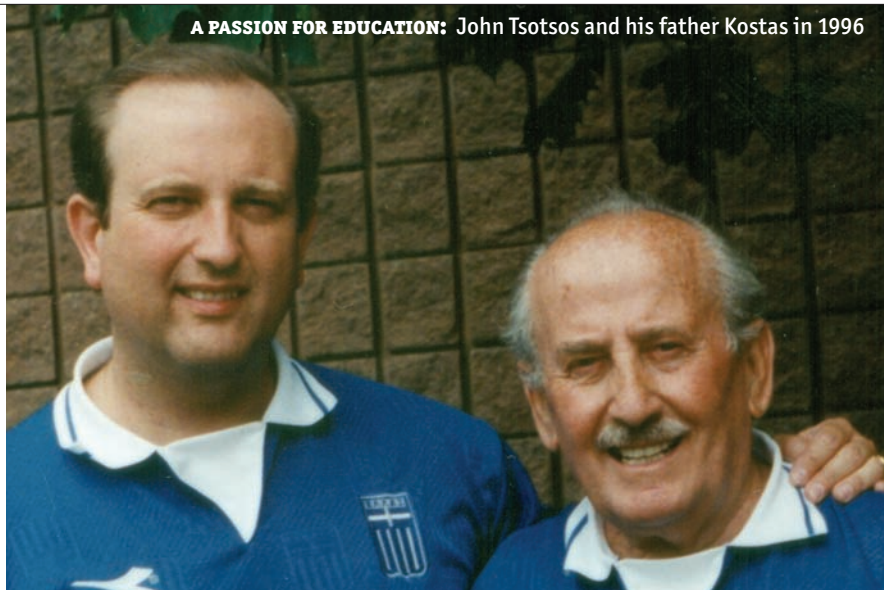
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OU CAN ALWAYS COUNT on the support and dedication of family – including the York University family. Faculty, staff and retirees have a long history of giving to the University. John Tsotsos, distinguished research professor in the Department of Computer Science & Engineering and Canada Research Chair in Computational Vision, has shown himself to be a York “family man” in more than one sense. Six years ago, he spearheaded the creation of York’s first graduate scholarship in modern Greek history in memory of his father, Kostas Tsotsos.

Kostas Tsotsos was a poet, athlete, soldier and teacher who immigrated to Canada from Greece in 1951, and died in 2004. A hard-working idealist with a deep-rooted belief in the power and value of education, Kostas encouraged his children to set their goals high and strive for a better world.

To celebrate his father’s life and acknowledge his passion for higher education, Tsotsos established the Kostas Tsotsos Graduate Award in Modern Greek History in 2005 with the support of family and friends. Additional support from the Ontario Trust for Student Support (OTSS), which matches such donations dollar-for-dollar, allowed him to establish it as a permanently endowed fund of \$25,000. An award is given annually to an outstanding graduate student specializing in modern Greek history.

“My father believed that education was the key to understanding the world,” says Tsotsos. “He would be pleased to know that because of this award, students will have the financial resources to help



A PASSION FOR EDUCATION: John Tsotsos and his father Kostas in 1996

A Family’s Value

How John Tsotsos created a very special scholarship

them complete their studies and reach their own lofty goals.

“I owe so much to my father,” he adds. “He taught me the meaning of idealism by his teachings of the ancient Greek ideals and with the romantic poetry he wrote. He always looked through the way the world really was to the way it should be, what he hoped it could become. And as [Nobel Prize-winning chemist] John Polanyi said, idealism is the highest form of reasoning.

“This award means a great deal to me, so much so that I have continued building the endowment through monthly payroll deductions.”

York family members like Tsotsos see first-hand the impact of their gifts on the

lives of deserving students. Scholarships, awards and bursaries allow scholars to focus on their studies and follow their dreams, rather than worry about paying bills. Such funding also helps attract the brightest minds to York, where they work with faculty to produce cutting-edge research and add to the University’s reputation.

The community’s support was evident throughout the York to the Power of 50 fundraising campaign, in which more than 2,500 faculty, staff and retirees contributed as part of the Family Campaign. With costs for students rising and the economy still fragile, there has never been a better time to give. For more information, contact the York University Foundation at 416-650-8210 or visit yorku.ca/foundation. ■

Where language, poetry and ethnicity meet. **BY ADEBE D.A.**

Finding My Voice

I **N** GROWING UP and into myself, I have learned not to take compliments on my “exotic” (read: racially ambiguous) looks too personally. When asked where I’m from, I like to say, “Toronto. And sometimes New York. I travel a lot.” That always seems to confuse the person asking. Thankfully, I’m a writer, and I’ve been able to find creative ways around those oft-repeated questions. Yet I have to admit that the questions hint at a lot of who I am.

As the product of an interracial family – and, coincidentally, of parents who met in the social work program at York – I have

As the product of an interracial family, I have always had a penchant for never settling for one thing.

As a child, I learned to read by seeing words as faces, each word with a particular expression, a personality and a life. I saw words as living things that could speak, and had a voice. It is that sense of voice that has defined my vocation as both a journalist and poet.

Yes, journalist and poet. I never studied journalism or poetry proper, and instead spent the course of an undergraduate and graduate degree at York pursuing English literature. Still, it is from having delved into (and outside of) the canon of literary greats and studied world literatures that my appreciation of language has grown deep enough to have made journalism and poetry equally enjoyable crafts.

In some ways, the process of having grown to fully accept and embrace my Italian-Ethiopian-Canadian background has mimicked my relationship to language. My household has always been unique; not only a mix of ethno-racial backgrounds, but the coming together of two individuals whose commitment to human rights was always coupled with an appreciation of the arts. Under this influence, being driven to write was a way for me to see the political in the poetic, the power of language to work against the quotidian and make newness possible in the world.

So not surprisingly, my first poetic experiments were with spoken word; I felt every poem should be heard, felt, and effect

change. During my father Teferi Adem’s tenure as York’s first race relations/human rights adviser, I remember being active in campus-wide anti-racism and equity events, attending rallies before going to class to read the tightly laced Victorians. I wrote for *Excalibur* on pressing issues while taking the time to smell the roses in campus courtyards – and write about them.



Growing up mixed-race also played a part in my future decision to return to York for grad school. York’s Graduate Program in English was about more than just reading and critiquing literary greats. It was about getting to the heart of subjects that had an overarching and personal concern for me: creativity, speech, the freedom to express. I delved into literatures as well as legal cases of racial passing, and other tales of the interracial experience. My mixed-race identity, as well as my identity as a poet, stemmed from a single source of inspiration: to know the world in its intricacies, grey areas, the places where cultures crash but also fuse. It is from various crossings – as a poet, writer, educator and activist – that my sense of self is both deeply rooted and always in-the-making.

The way I identify myself is less “the best of both worlds” than a continual struggle for equity and racial justice. Still, I do admit the comedy in all of this: watching my Italian relatives eat *injera* (Italians invented the fork, by the way) or serve espresso, which many don’t realize was literally invented – the format, and the bean – in Ethiopia. It is all part and parcel, perhaps, of the larger human comedy of life that writers are inspired by, and that drives them to writing’s greatest gift: a sense of sympathy, an attempt to communicate.

The very things that have inspired me – my heritage, love of travel, scholarship and keenness for the political – have all stemmed from an uncharted place. A voyage away from the familiar is probably the best way of learning how to anchor yourself most fully to your life’s purpose. Crossroads will ensue, life is a road. Or perhaps the road is life’s primary way of reminding us how much there is to take delight in, how much is possible. A way that must, at all costs, be tried. ■

Adebé DeRango-Adem (BA Spec. Hons. '08, MA '09) last summer published her debut poetry collection *ex nihilo*, which was long-listed for the University of Wales’ prestigious Dylan Thomas Prize.



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