The works we read in Core are rich with examples of nutty professors and silly scholars. Think of Thaumaste, the English scholar in Pantagruel, or Faust in Goethe’s eponymous tragedy. In the final semester of Core Humanities, we read Voltaire’s Candide, a book that humorously warns against life’s evils. One of Voltaire’s prime targets is Candide’s tutor, the German-speaking Pangloss, an expert in “metaphysico-theologo-cosmolo-nigology.” In most Core texts, things do not usually turn out well for scholars. More often than not, their learning gets in the way. The readers laugh at them because the academics can’t laugh at themselves.

Having come to this realization after my first year of teaching in the Core, I decided that it was high time for a vacation. My traveling companion and I chose Portugal and settled in Sintra, a beautiful town with lush greenery and spectacular mountain-top views. The Romantics were enraptured by Sintra; Lord Byron called it a “glorious Eden.” As soon as we arrived, we understood why. What we didn’t understand, however, was what the friendly Portuguese we encountered were saying to us. Like French and Italian, Portuguese is a Romance language, derived from Latin. Although we could easily understand written Portuguese, the spoken language was beyond us. We were perplexed by the vaguely Eastern European sound of it, and could only master Bom dia (hello) and Adeus (goodbye, actually pronounced “Aday-ush,” since the “s” at the end of a word is pronounced “sh”).

There were, however, some advantages to this. By the end of our second day, we had tasted a wide variety of excellent Portuguese dishes, primarily because we would listen attentively to the waiter’s incomprehensible descriptions of the daily specials, then smile, nod mutely, and wait for the dishes to arrive.

On the third day, we entered a marisqueira (seafood restaurant). “Boa tarde,” the smiling waitress said to us. We responded with the same evening greeting and her smile grew. So far, so good, we thought. “Deutsch?” she asked, looking at us both. After thinking for a split second, I came to the conclusion that she was asking us if we spoke German. Aha! I understood! I was ecstatic: after all this time, we would be able to communicate with the Portuguese! I launched into German, excitedly explaining that we were not German but that we were delighted to find someone who spoke a language we knew, that the Portuguese we had met so far had been very friendly, that Sintra was beautiful, etc. The waitress’ smile vanished. She threw her hands up and silently walked us to a table in a dimly-lit corner of the restaurant. We
I have always loved science. My childhood dreams included conversing with primates the way Jane Goodall did, examining birds in the Galapagos like Charles Darwin, and discovering previously unknown substances inside an Erlenmeyer flask as Marie Curie had. These days, I find myself modulating currents in the laryngeal nerves of juvenile *Xenopus laevis* frogs. Are ion currents my childhood dreams come true? I certainly did not as a child imagine myself playing with amplifiers, manipulators, and other gadgetry. But, though my first forays into research to tackle my own questions in biology seem somewhat myopic, I must argue that any quest aimed at understanding a process of nature is an exciting realm, worthy of inquiry.

The highest goal of science is to understand nature, or everything around us. The late Carl Sagan said, “Nearly every scientist has experienced, in a moment of discovery or understanding, a reverential astonishment.” Each time I prepare the saline correctly, apply a current, and see the muscle jump, I am astonished. Whenever I make observations, I am making an investment in the body of scientific data constructed by minds across the globe, since the advent of human curiosity…what could be more exciting?

Science is exhilarating. I caution those who disagree to consider whether their opinion is based simply on the lack of an opportunity to experience the thrill of discovery. Does it lessen our experience of the world to pick apart the mechanisms that drive its ticking, vibrant unfolding? Is science, in its humble attempt to elucidate the complexity of nature an overly ambitious institution? Regardless of your take on these issues, any field that raises such questions is an exciting one.

It would be rash to say that a feat such as understanding the universe is impossible, although it may be extremely difficult and a constant work in progress. The accomplishments of science to date, however incomplete and contingent, cannot be overlooked; indeed, we depend on medicine and technology for our survival as well as for our comfort. Furthermore, to be ignorant of science is a form of intellectual isolationism. So pervasive are the fruits of scientific research, that it is impossible to be a responsible citizen without an awareness of the state of the art. Evolution, stem cell research, global warming, and other issues are hot topics, subjects of media scrutiny, intellectual debate, and public policy consideration. We must be wary of pseudoscience, and learn to distinguish the pearls of science from glass imitations. For these reasons, it is crucial that the individual be scientifically literate. I formed the Core Science Forum to provide an opportunity to discuss science. As college students, we should seize the opportunity to learn about science, lest we commit a huge disservice to ourselves and our neighbors. Science is a part of all our lives, not just the scientist’s. The Core Science Forum is a good place to start your journey as a scientifically literate, well-rounded individual.

MAYER’S SISTINE CEILING
A Spiritual Experience

by David Mayer

In September while I was studying the Sistine Chapel for Core, my roommate (see photo) suggested that we recreate the famous frescoes on our own ceiling in Warren Towers. I digitally enlarged an image of the Ceiling from the Core online art gallery and built a grid to map how I would print out the different panels. Phil and I split the cost of printer ink (it came to something like $60) and I printed the ceiling entirely from my own printer. To simulate the actual Sistine experience as accurately as possible, I started by taping up pieces of paper with the images from the far end of the Chapel, where Michelangelo began painting. I then slowly worked my way toward the image of God separating Day and Night, where Michelangelo completed his frescoes. I only worked at night and as the ceiling progressed, I gradually turned off more of the lights in my dorm room to recreate the deterioration of Michelangelo’s vision due to paint falling in his eyes while working on his back from the scaffolding. The completed work measures 45”X 62” and is composed of 54 sheets of paper and nearly 60 yards of Scotch tape.

David Mayer (CAS ’07), a sophomore in the Earth Sciences program, is from Milford, CT. His roommate Phil Weiss (CAS ’08), in his first year of Core, comes to Boston from Cincinnati and is studying philosophy. Photo: Katherine Venegas
The Great Galileo Fruit Drop
by Professor Daniel Hudon

Do the two halves of a cut watermelon plummet to the Earth at the same rate as a whole watermelon? Will a single banana fall side-by-side with an entire bunch of bananas? Does Earth’s gravity really tug down light and heavy objects at the same rate? In Core Natural Science, CC105, there’s nothing like a good demonstration to get your concepts straight, and the course kicked off this fall with the Second Annual Great Galilean Fruit Drop.

“It’s the classic experiment,” CC105 course coordinator Professor James Jackson said, referring to the Galileo legend of dropping balls of different masses from the Leaning Tower of Pisa. “Almost everyone has a misconception about it, so seeing really is believing.”

The event began with Core and CC105 Faculty, dressed in their best 17th century robes, recreating the science and philosophy of the times through a short script. Dean Johnson (Mayor of BU Pisa) welcomed all as Professor Declan De Paor (the Ghost of Aristotle) and Dr. Daniel Hudon (a member of the Roman Inquisition) tried to hold up their arguments against the formidable logic of Professor Galileo Jackson Galilei, who not only was admirably robed but also had the best Italian accent outside of the North End.

And then the fruit dropping began. Professor Galileo Jackson Galilei climbed to the 4th floor of the fire escape School of Social Work and dropped light and heavy pairs of fruit at the same time. Each pair, whether melons, cantaloupe, bananas or grapes, fell together at the same rate. He finished by repeating a version of Galileo’s thought experiment: suppose you tied two halves of a watermelon together with a thread to act as a whole watermelon; would they then start falling faster because they were now a heavier object? No. As the video clip on the CC105 webpage shows, hearing a simultaneous splat is also believing.

New Faculty Profile: Dr. Ellen Birnbaum
by Jennifer Swerida

A new instructor in the Humanities faculty, Prof. Ellen Birnbaum is excited to be teaching a curriculum of such venerable works. Prof. Birnbaum said that, as an undergraduate at Barnard College, she had always wanted to study in a program like BU’s Core. At the time, though, she and her classmates were denied access to similar courses at nearby Columbia University, because enrollment was open only to Columbia students. Now, when asked what she enjoys most about teaching Core, she responds, “Being part of a community of conversation.” That conversation, she clarifies, is not just between and among professors and students in the present; it has been an ongoing exchange for centuries between ancient authors and their readers.

As a college student, Professor Birnbaum was influenced by a number of literary works, including Henry James’s “The Beast in the Jungle,” a short story that communicates the importance of enjoying every phase of life and of actively pursuing happiness instead of sitting back and waiting for it. Professor Birnbaum advises students today to remain open to learning from all our experiences, even from those that don’t initially interest us. “What we at first resist,” she observes, “may turn out to be meaningful in unexpected ways.” She also recommends that students “devote time and effort toward developing a sense of self, a ‘core’ that is yours. That way, as you go through life, you have yourself as your own best friend.” She feels that our current studies of ancient texts can contribute to this process as we find our voices and become active participants in the ongoing conversation.

With a degree in Religion from Columbia, Professor Birnbaum has taught and done postdoctoral work at Brandeis and Harvard. Author of The Place of Judaism in Philo’s Thought, she has focused her research on the Jews of ancient Alexandria, who brought together the biblical and classical traditions that we study in the Core. “In fact,” she reflects, “this community may have been the first to have a kind of CC101 of its own!”

Editor’s Note
by Jehae Kim, Editor-in-Chief

It’s another school year and a new freshman class is taking Core. What I remember most about Core was the stress. In Humanities we were expected to read a book per week, while in the Natural Sciences professors expected us to understand quantum mechanics . . . all at the same time. On top of that I was trying to finish homework in my other classes, decide my major, and go to meetings for Wandering Minds, Amnesty International, and the Environmental Students Organization. Now that I’m a senior and retaking the Natural Sciences (after dropping out of it freshman year, then realizing I would have to take an extra three courses to fulfill divisional studies requirements), a little bit of the stress has returned . . . CC105 isn’t any easier than it was freshman year. Core seemed easier after my first semester at BU, that is, until Weber’s “The Individual and Modernity”, Prof. Loury, and concepts of nationalism. The course reading has changed so much since I took that class – I recognize only two titles on the reading list! But that’s one of the great things about the Core: it’s always adapting.

Continued EDITORS page 6
ANDY KINGSTON, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF JAZZ  

This Chicago-born scholar is new to the Core this semester. Eager to learn, Kingston earned a degree in English Literature at Kenyon College before obtaining a PhD in philosophy and music from BU’s University Professors program. His thesis deals with the relationship between philosophy and rhythm in Western music, ranging from Plato’s Republic to contemporary jazz. When asked about his career plans after obtaining such a degree—a question his wife often asks—he has a ready answer: “I don’t really have any. I’m here to learn. That is my motivation for everything.”

Professor Kingston, who currently teaches in CC101 and will be leading a CC204 seminar in the spring, says that he aspires to transmit his enthusiasm for the texts and shape his students’ ways of thinking and learning so that they enjoy themselves in the process. He says the Core is unique in providing a sense of community within the diverse atmosphere of Boston University and that “there is no place else students will read all of these great books...this knowledge that arises from reading and learning the same material unites the students intellectually and socially.”

Outside of the academic milieu on campus, Kingston is an ardent pianist with a strong passion for jazz. Chasing his 11-month-old daughter around the house and crashing BU intramural soccer games also rank among his favorite pastimes. Quoting from the movie Round Midnight, he claims that “style isn’t something you just pick off a tree.” Throughout his life he has been inspired by his teachers, both academically and musically, because they are the people who can do things that he aspires to do. By learning from people who are more knowledgeable, he is able to both attain this hard-earned “style,” while securing the happiness he so adamantly associates with progress.

It isn’t hard to expect that Professor Kingston will provide the same inspiration for his own students. In this way, he will be able to not only avoid complacency, but also continue doing what he loves most: learning and enjoying the fruits of life.
DE IDEIS

Photos from the 3rd Annual CAS Talent Review
November 8, 2004 – Boston University Tsai Performance Center
Sponsored by the Core Curriculum. Hosted by Daniel Bruggemeyer.

Jane Kim sings “Save Your Love for Me” with her jazz band playing backup.

Justin Michaels playing The Starboard Side

Prof. Daniel Hudon reads his surreal poem “The Art of Conversation.”

Angélica Allen sings her original song Forgetting Regrets.

Not shown:
- Slow Children at Play, BU’s sketch comedy troupe
- Colin Pang plays Brahms
- The Fish Worship Trio (Prof. Jim Jackson, Prof. Brian Jorgensen and Dean Jay Samons
- Dean James Johnson plays Bumble Bee Boogie
- Prof. Andy Kingston on piano plays the music of Thelonius Monk.

Cosmos II singing his unique science rock (aka Dean Alan Marscher).

The JALWA Indian dance troupe led by ENG student Raj Roy.

Linda Tan slams Beethoven, a poem by Shane Koyczan.

All photos on this page by Katharine Venegas

Prof. Sassan Tabatabai recites his original poem, Adam to Eve in Old Age.

Prof. Christopher Ricks reciting “Some LimeRicks.”

Paul Umbrow plays his original blues song It’s the Same.

Dave Ransom plays his original song Uluru.
CORE HOUSE RULES
by Andrew David, Core House Resident Assistant

These basic rules will make your year in the Core House a fun, exciting, happy and productive one.

1. No matter how excited you get about them, don’t try to prove any of Galileo’s theories.
2. Don’t try to reenact the cave scene from The Republic. It might be cool to live out what you’re reading, but you won’t have a place to live after the fire burns the house down.
3. Don’t try to apply anything Rousseau says to dorm life. Seriously.
4. I expect all of you to follow Max Weber to the letter. That means everyone gets up at 6:00 a.m. to start schoolwork... I’m not just doing this for your GPA – I’m thinking of the future of your soul as well.
5. When trying to decide whether rappelling from the second floor is a foolproof plan, remember what the Athenians can teach us about “a sure bet.”

7. Despite Hobbes’ claim about life being “nasty, brutish, and short,” this doesn’t mean it’s okay to mean to your roommate.
8. Even if you really like Petrarch (some of his poetry is pretty well written), a stalker is not a role model.
9. Although the house is generally a safe place for studying and socialization, be wary. Dante got some of his best ideas from our basement.
10. “And God said, ‘Let there be light’; and there was light.” However, not even divine intervention can stop me from confiscating that light if it’s a halogen lamp.

We are currently accepting articles and artwork for Vol. III Issue 2: Winter 2005, the next edition of De Ideis. E-mail deideis@bu.edu for information on contributing or to inquire about joining the editorial staff.

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Behold!
The crumbling seawall!

Students of CC105 spent their Saturday on October 23rd or 30th scrambling about the shoreline of Hull, MA, learning about three of the four elements of Empedocles: earth, water, and air (though fortunately not fire). Students met with local watershed and conservation officials, geologists, and representatives of the Pemberton Windmill, to discuss the origins of the region’s terrain, alternative energy, community issues, and diverse aspects of physical and geological activity visible in the landscape. Graduate students Britt Argow and Eric Moore of the Earth Sciences department supervised the Core crews as Prof. Declan De Paor directed the expedition. In this photo, CC105 students examine the seawall in Hull which, owing to inadequate consideration of wave activity, is deteriorating rapidly. Nearly one hundred students participated in this integrative science field trip. Photo: Eric Moore