BU (extreme) South

Geomorphologist David Merchant and his team of students discover Antarctica's secret past
As all of us at BU come together to withstand this period of economic uncertainty, Arts & Sciences remains strong. I am very pleased to say that our ambitious program of faculty recruitment is not affected by the freeze, and we are moving ahead with plans to strengthen CAS, not only replacing faculty who retire or leave, but also expanding the faculty by as many as 100 new positions within the decade. The newest members of our faculty are impressive indeed. To get a sense of what they mean for the future of the College, I invite you to take a look at the brief biographies in the roster of new appointments found at [www.bu.edu/cas/forms/new-faculty-booklet08.pdf](http://www.bu.edu/cas/forms/new-faculty-booklet08.pdf).

This new cohort of teachers and scholars only adds to the luster of our superb professors we already have here. Consider the awards some of them received last fall. Associate Professor of Chemistry Mark Grinstaff was a co-winner of the Edward M. Kennedy Award for Healthcare Innovation presented by the Center for Integration of Medicine & Innovative Technology, and his colleague in Chemistry Professor John Porco, received the 2009 Cope Scholar Award from the American Chemical Society. International Relations Professor Vivian Schmidt received an honorary degree from the Free University of Brussels. CAS swept the field of winners of the African Studies Association Herskovitz Award honoring the most important scholarly work in African studies published in English during the preceding year. The top entries were so good that the prize was awarded to two books, representing three CAS professors: Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles: Continuities and Change in Central Africa, 1500-1900.

Open a newspaper or turn on a TV and it’s hard to avoid being bombarded by stories about failed financial institutions, corporate layoffs, and stock market rumbles. Indeed, these are troubling economic times. As President Brown stated in his October letter to the University community, “Foremost, we must protect the financial integrity of the University through this turbulent time and provide the most stable environment possible for our students, faculty, and staff.” His foresight and prudent planning will help ensure that the University weatheres the economic storm and remains on solid financial ground.

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VISIT THE NEW COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES WEBSITE at www.bu.edu/cas.

WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE? Read about and see videos of BU’s successes in 2008—in and out of the classroom and lab, in the City of Boston, and around the globe—in BU’s Annual Report online at [www.bu.edu/ar](http://www.bu.edu/ar).

WRITE TO US—WRITE FOR US!

We welcome all responses and we’ll consider any contributions for publication. Please write to the Editor, arts&sciences, Boston University, 985 Commonwealth Avenue, Room 145, Boston, MA 02215, or e-mail justin@bu.edu. Please include your name, address, and class year.

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English Professor James Winn speaks ardently of the lifelong value of a grounding in the humanities. “Exposure to drama, opera, art, philosophy, religion—great ideas—will continue to feed your soul,” he says. “We should not be about training students for their first jobs, but preparing them for full and meaningful lives. Today’s students probably will live to be 110. When they retire, it would be nice for them to enjoy cultural riches and broad intellectual life.”

His multiple academic pursuits reflect his conviction. A poetry scholar, he has written books on Alexander Pope and John Dryden, and last year published his compelling study The Poetry of War. He is also a prize-winning concert flutist, often performing with colleagues from the College of Fine Arts. Moreover, Winn is interested in the connections among fields of study. His book The Pale of Words: Reflections on the Humanities and Performance explores the relationship between literature and the performing arts.

“The reward system in the academy is skewed pretty much to specialists,” he says, “and they often burrow deeply; I’ve spent all of my adult life pursuing more than one field; as a student, I was advised not to let myself be pigeonholed.”

In September, he was appointed the new director of the Boston University Humanities Foundation. Established in 1981, the foundation supports the work of humanities scholars at the University—junior and senior faculty, undergraduate and graduate students. It grants fellowships to faculty enabling them, for example, to extend sabbaticals to write books and complete research. Winn says, “If you’ve been laboring and teaching full-time, an extra six months could buy you the time you need, and we can provide the funding.” Prizes also are awarded to students who have distinguished themselves in humanities fields.

In particular, the foundation fosters interdisciplinary work with financial support for guest presenters and programs. To enrich research in the humanities, the foundation funds library acquisitions such as the recent addition to Mugar Library of the Early English Books Online database, with images of every book published in England from 1475 to 1700.

Since becoming director, Winn has introduced a new approach to running the foundation. Aiming to make broad-based programming decisions and to fund awards by consensus, he has established an executive committee of senior humanities faculty. Winn is enthusiastic about the theme they have proposed for the upcoming academic year: Judgments of Value. Posing such challenging questions as what determines aesthetic taste historically, how emotions, reasoning, and the senses affect those judgments, and what criteria are used in judging different art forms, the committee has called for faculty proposals on this interdisciplinary topic.

He notes that Arts & Sciences Dean Virginia Sapiro defines the humanities broadly, and vigorously advocates for collaboration among the disciplines. “A college of arts and sciences cannot be first rate without tremendous strength in the humanities,” she says. “As James Winn takes the helm, the Humanities Foundation will continue to chart a course that stimulates scholarly creativity through individual work and collaboration across the breadth of the arts and humanities.” They both hope to attract increased funding to further the foundation’s impact.

In some ways, his new directorship is quite familiar to Winn, who has succeeded Professor Katherine O’Connor, associate chair of modern languages and comparative literature and professor of Russian. As founding director of the University of Michigan’s Institute for the Humanities from 1988 to 1996, Winn built a $13 million endowment and helped nurture a number of vital programs. That success and his experience as chair of BU’s English department from 1998 to 2007 prepared him well for his current post.

Leading a foundation with such wide scope enables Winn to significantly boost the resources available to BU students and faculty in the humanities. He relishes his new role: “How sweet it is,” he says, “to have money to give away to bright people.”

—Jean Hennelly Keith and Jeremy Schwab

Heralding the Humanities

With images of every book published in England from 1475 to 1700, the Early English Books Online database was recently added to Mugar Library with funds from the BU Humanities Foundation.

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You are always voting on what you think is good—what voices are good for our cultural moment—and it feels good when it gets echoed in the greater culture.

—Sven Birkerts

For Editor Sven Birkerts, the best part of the job is the chance to be at the forefront of discovery. “I think the thing that creates the highest level of excitement for me is to publish really good literature. You want it, and you want to get it out.”

Birkerts’ six-plus years at the helm of the renowned literary journal, which is supported by BU’s graduate Creative Writing Program, have brought tremendous growth. Since Birkerts took over as editor in 2002, he and Pierce have tripled the number of submissions to the magazine, launched a web magazine with exclusive content, and added DVD and CD inserts to the print edition.

It’s not so much taking a new direction as it is evolution,” says Birkerts, an acclaimed college arts & sciences professor who interned at AGNI in 1998, two years before her short story “Interpreter of Maladies” appeared in the journal in 1999. “You never know what voices are good for our cultural moment—when it speaks well of the University. It’s a great way to get out the brightness, the engagement of our teaching to a new audience,” says Associate Professor of Religion and Director of the Core Curriculum M. David Eckel, recruited by The Teaching Company to record a series on Buddhism.

“You are always voting on what you think is good—what voices are good for our cultural moment—and it feels good when it gets echoed in the greater culture.”

—Sven Birkerts

For Bill Pierce, the best part of being senior editor for AGNI magazine is the chance to meet other writers. “Years back, I was writing in isolation. I had no real community of people doing what I was doing,” recalls the fiction writer and essayist. “Through AGNI, I became connected to a lot of other writers around the city and beyond.”

Neither indicators of AGNI’s success are the coveted grants it’s garnered from the Massachusetts Cultural Council and the National Endowment for the Arts. A Boston Globe article (“JOURNALism,” August 24, 2008) lists AGNI among the top 10 literary magazines in New England. The Globe quotes Elizabeth Searle, visiting writer at the University of Massachusetts in Boston and a PEN/New England board member, as saying that AGNI “sets the gold standard for magazines on the move, and for the literary world in general.”

Probably the greatest mark of the journal’s success is the long list of careers it has helped launch. AGNI is known for publishing the work of talented writers early in their careers. (This may help explain the flood of submissions—nearly 5,000 per year—that Pierce and Birkerts sift through.)

Authors whose careers AGNI boosted include Seamus Heaney, Joyce Carol Oates, and Shampa Lahiri (G&S’93; UN’95, ’97), who interned at AGNI and whose short story “Interpreter of Maladies” appeared in the journal in 1999, two years before her short story collection by the same name won the Pulitzer Prize.

AGNI’s editors see the journal as a conduit in an ongoing cultural dialogue. “You are always voting on what you think is good—what voices are good for our cultural moment—and it feels good when it gets echoed in the greater culture.”

—Sven Birkerts

The relationship between AGNI and the College of Arts & Sciences began when the journal relocated from Antioch College to Boston University in 1987. Since moving to BU, AGNI has enriched campus life by providing Arts & Sciences graduate students with a chance to work as editors and by hosting popular literary readings. Creative Writing faculty also sit on AGNI’s Advisory Board.

AGNI’s editors see the journal as a conduit in an ongoing cultural dialogue. “You are always voting on what you think is good—what voices are good for our cultural moment—and it feels good when it gets echoed in the greater culture,” said Birkerts. Pierce agrees. “We are trying to influence the discussion of what’s worthwhile, while paying attention to it.”

The cars grind to a halt and the commute stalls. As the drivers begin to lay on their horns, you sit back, relax, and spend the next half hour of bumper-to-bumper traffic learning about Mahayana Buddhism from an arts & sciences professor.

More and more, inquiring minds are accessing the vast knowledge of Boston University professors—on their own terms. From lectures on CD to videos at local libraries, even on iTunes, BU lectures are increasingly in demand by an information-seeking public.

BU is a prime source for audiovisual distance-learning companies keen to acquire top minds and to profit from the new trend in lifelong learning. “It’s not so different from a regular class.”

Eckel says he once heard from the father of a student who received a certificate in business, “I want to inspire spirit, curiosity, a sense of fascination. I want to provide courses for people who wouldn’t normally have access to a university, it’s a great way to learn.”

Many of the listeners are drawn to subjects they’ve never seriously encountered before, says Professor of Philosophy and Director of Graduate Studies David Roschek, whose repertoire at The Teaching Company includes 24 lectures on Greek philosophy. “The audience is generally well-educated, but there’s a lot of people who are concerned, who are interested, giving them a taste of a subject, he says. “But in the end,” says Roochnik, “we’re trying to communicate our subjects and it is teaching, and in that sense it’s not so different from a regular class.”

Eckel is used to students asking him questions; he just never expected his local butcher to be one of them.

He tells the story of going into a Whole Foods in Brighton, Massachusetts. “I was buying chicken, and the butcher stopped me and said, ‘Are you David Eckel? I just finished watching your lectures.’ You never know who’s been listening to you, who’s watching.”

James Schmidt, a history professor with CAS and the University Professors Program, and Stephen Prothero, professor of religion, have recorded lectures for The Modern Scholar. Schmidt bases his Enlightenment series—including lectures on Voltaire, Diderot, and the Scottish Enlightenment—on the longer version he teaches at CAS. “Speaking to a microphone was a very different approach from teaching a class. We recorded in a Boston studio, it was clearly the least hip person ever to walk through there. When we were finishing up, rock bands were coming in to record and there I was, a professor.”

Roschek and Eckel agree that recording differs greatly from lecturing live before students. “But in the end,” says Roochnik, “we’re trying to communicate our subjects and it is teaching, and in that sense it’s not so different from a regular class.”

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East Asian Explorations

Luce Foundation Grant Helps Expand East Asian Archaeology Program

Discovering the world’s oldest pottery in Yuchanyan Cave in South China. Learning about nomads of the early states of the Mongolian steppe. Arts & Sciences archaeologists are uncovering East Asia’s past and enriching the curriculum for students in BU’s classrooms.

Thanks to a four-year grant from the Henry Luce Foundation, teaching and research in East Asian archaeology in the College and Graduate School will receive a big boost. The $450,000 award from the foundation’s Initiative on East and Southeast Asian Archaeology and Early History will bring a new slate of courses in East Asian archaeology and cultural heritage studies, as well as research opportunities and graduate student support to academic programs in the Department of Archaeology.

“The grant also will help expand the scholarly resources of the department’s International Center for East Asian Archaeology & Cultural History (ICEAACH), recognized worldwide as a major focal point of East Asian archaeological research and home of one of the finest library research collections in the field. In the first phase of the new program, Robert Murowchick, director of ICEAACH, has been appointed to a full-time teaching position as assistant professor of archaeology and anthropology.

“The first new East Asian courses—made possible by the grant—began this semester: one focused on the archaeology of Southeast Asia, another examining how politics and nationalism affect archaeology, and a third exploring East and Southeast Asian archaeology and cultural history, the most comprehensive kind of course we’ve ever offered.”

—Robert Murowchick

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Darwinian Selections

Bom two centuries ago, on February 12, naturalist Charles Darwin was to jolt Victorian England and the world beyond with his theory of evolution of the species through natural selection—propelling him into the public arena. This year, his life and work will be celebrated around the world, and Boston University will join in the tribute with a University-wide, yearlong Darwin Festival.

For many months, the Greater Boston Darwin Bicentennial Committee, sponsored by University Provost David Campbell and co-chaired by Arts & Sciences History Professor Thomas Glick and Engineering Professor Charles DeLisi, has been planning events around campus that explore Darwinian themes from an array of disciplinary perspectives. As a member, as well, of the Boston Area Committee, Glick is organizing programs for the wider community, including outreach to public schools, with colleagues from other local universities, including Harvard, Northeastern, Tufts, Brandeis, and MIT. BU is hosting numerous events for the Darwin commemoration; he says, “It will be the hub of the Hub.”

Festival highlights include a student fair at the George Sherman Union celebrating Darwin’s birthday. On a more academic note, a series of multidisciplinary programs sponsored by the Boston Colloquium for the Philosophy & History of Science will gather faculty from around the world to examine the life, work, and influence of Darwin. Campbell and faculty in the various human sciences will discuss the impact of human evolution theory on a wide range of endeavors, including politics, economic markets, religion, attitudes toward mental disorders, and the reception of Darwin’s work from Estonia to Brazil. And biologists from around the country will convene at The Castle in late March to ponder “Systems Biology Framed by Ecology.”

Beyond Arts & Sciences, a special exhibit is planned for Mugar Library, and in April, College of Fine Arts Theatre School Director Jim Petosa will direct CFA students in Peter Panelli’s Trumper, a play about Darwin’s family life and his publication of The Origin of Species. Visual Arts Professor Hugh O’Donnell will guide teams of University students in creating Darwinian-themed art to be installed at campus sites in the fall—NH

To learn more about the year-long Darwin Festival, see www.bu.edu/darwin2009. —Amy Biderman

Professors to the World continued

one of his colleagues (who also teaches Buddhism), who thanked him for the lecture series because it was the first time he understood why his son liked Buddhism so much. Roosnack received e-mails from a doctor and a lawyer in Brookline, Massachusetts, who wanted to take him out for coffee to discuss the fundamentals of Greek philosophy in greater depth. And, although the professors cover different topics, as Schmidt says in his opening lecture on the Enlightenment, the lectures serve a similar purpose: “To satisfy curiosity about different ways that human beings can live, and, if we’re lucky, to acquaint ourselves with certain possibilities, certain opportunities of living that we might have lost sight of.”—Rochelle Johnson
Thousands of students take courses in the College and Graduate School of Arts & Sciences each year. Some major at other schools at the University but take a large portion of their credits at CAS, ensuring that their BU education is grounded in the liberal arts. Many CAS majors, in turn, pursue minors outside the liberal arts, broadening their educational experience and opening up new career possibilities.

Q: Can you describe a typical day in your life?
A: Thursday is my busiest day. I crab a Red Bull on my way out the door in the morning and get to my first class at 9:30. Then I have to leave 20 minutes early to get to my Spanish class. After that, I meet with Boston University Bands Director Chris Parks to talk about what’s going on with the band. I have to be at all of the band meetings because I’m president of the band fraternity, Kappa Kappa Psi.

Q: What kind of music do you like to listen to? What’s on your iPod?
A: It ranges from classical to country to whatever. I have all the pop hard cores on my iPod. It’s “90s and ‘90s music that’s really bad but really good.”

Q: How do you juggle all of your commitments?
A: It forces me to get work done. The buzzier I am, the better I do because you make the time with the time you have. I think I would regret it if I hadn’t gotten as involved as I have at BU. There are just so many things to do. As a student, you might as well get as immersed as possible.

Q: What do you like most about BU?
A: The University cares about its students. This summer, I played in the Scarlet Band (an ensemble that performs at all new student orientations), and I found out in the middle of a performance that my friend from back home died. That same night, my RA knocked on my dorm door and just said, “If you need anything, come talk to me.” Guidance counselors came to talk with me. It wasn’t just one time, either; they followed up. Chris Parks said, “If you want to go home— if money is an issue—we’ll help you.” I didn’t take him up on it, but I really appreciated all the support.

Q: What do you want to do after you graduate?
A: I’m considering doing Teach for America (a two-year commitment to teach in rural or urban schools) before going to grad school for psychology. Ultimately, I think I want to be a school psychologist, which involves the educational, emotional, and other aspects of learning that I love about psychology. I think it would be really cool to have a real hands-on experience in the classroom.

Q: What do you think is the educational equivalent of a golden ring?
A: I don’t think it’s a “golden ring.” I think that it’s the chance to challenge myself and learn as much as possible.

Q: Is it unusual for a woman to become president of the fraternity?
A: It’s a co-ed national musical fraternity. Our chapter has eight girls and eight guys. We serve and promote all campus musical organizations. This summer, I went to the leadership symposium for the fraternity in Pittsburgh.

Q: How many hours a week do you decide to band?
A: I don’t want to know. I don’t think my parents would want to know. A lot!

Q: How many hours a week do you practice band?
A: We practice on the roof of the facilities building off Babcock Street. The roof has the outline of a football field with the yard markers. We can’t see Nickerson Field because everyone on West Campus would be able to hear us. Practicing at 10 on Saturday morning? We wouldn’t have many friends.

Q: What do you like most about being at BU?
A: The University cares about its students.

Q: What do you think is the educational equivalent of a golden ring?
A: I don’t think it’s a “golden ring.” I think that it’s the chance to challenge myself and learn as much as possible.

Q: What is the most important part of your education at CAS?
A: A large portion of my credits at CAS, ensuring that their BU education is grounded in the liberal arts. Many CAS majors, in turn, pursue minors outside the liberal arts, broadening their educational experience and opening up new career possibilities.

VISIT ALICE GOMEZ’S PHOTO GALLERY
at www.bu.edu/cas/magazines/spring09/gomez.
Do magnets repel sharks? When MythBusters—the popular Discovery Channel program that tests all manner of myths, rumors, and legends—took up this question last summer, the show’s hosts at first seemed inclined to confirm the theory. But in the end, they declared the myth busted.

Craig O’Connell (CAS’06) thinks they were mistaken. He and his research colleagues have submitted a rebuttal of the show’s findings, and they’re hopeful MythBusters will revisit the topic.

O’Connell is a researcher with SharkDefense Technologies, a small company working to develop shark repellents. Since he graduated from CAS’s marine biology program two and a half years ago, he’s been testing his theory that magnets can repel sharks, and he’s convinced he’s onto something.

Magnetic repulsion

The idea that magnets could play a part in shark conservation came to O’Connell after he learned that sharks have special sensing organs called ampullae of Lorenzini that allow them to detect electrical fields. Some scientists believe, is where magnets are not. This, they believe, is where MythBusters went wrong. The hosts of MythBusters started their experiments with ceramic magnets and then switched to magnetic shark repellents. Before they started researching magnets, O’Connell’s colleagues at SharkDefense were studying chemicals released by decaying shark tissue.

MythBusters—known as “bycatch” in the fishing industry—or if the fishermen were intentionally catching sharks in order to sell their fins on the black market. To better understand the situation, O’Connell began a daily tally of the dead sharks discarded on the beach near the markets. The number of shark carcasses—most of them finless—he counted at that single beach was shocking, he says, and the experience ignited his desire to save sharks.

Sensing organs called ampullae of Lorenzini

Craig O’Connell’s research with magnets may help boost shark populations—and TV ratings.

While you might expect O’Connell is developing shark repellents to protect people from shark attacks, his actual goal is to protect sharks from people. Scientists estimate that humans kill 100 million sharks every year, leaving many shark species in danger of extinction. O’Connell hopes his research with magnets will provide shark conservationists with an inexpensive tool for reducing shark deaths by keeping sharks away from beaches and fishing lines. Shark conservation has been O’Connell’s passion since his junior year at CAS, when he spent a semester in Ecuador with the College’s tropical ecology program. “We made a stop in Ecuador’s coastal region, and we saw all these fish markets,” he says, “and I noticed the fishermen were catching a lot of sharks.”

Craig O’Connell with magnets

Craig O’Connell’s research with magnets may help boost shark populations—and TV ratings.

O’Connell joined the SharkDefense team, helping to design and conduct experiments. After his stint at Sharklab ended and he moved to South Carolina for graduate school, he continued to visit the lab every couple of months to assist with the research. “What we’ve found so far is incredible,” he says. The researchers have added magnets to the netting used to create shark fences, and in some experiments they’ve seen a 95 percent reduction in the number of sharks entering through holes in the netting. They’ve also placed magnets above the hooks on long-line fishing lines, he says, “and we’ve reduced shark catch by 50 percent.”

SharkTaggers

SharkTaggers is an NBC reality show that follows marine biologists as they track and tag sharks in various locations around the world. The show’s film crew was working at Sharklab during one of O’Connell’s visits there last fall. They filmed him as he caught a hammerhead and a tiger shark in the waters around Sharklab—but they didn’t stop there. “They wanted absolutely everything,” he says.

“SharkTaggers is an NBC reality show that follows marine biologists as they track and tag sharks in various locations around the world.”

O’Connell is enthusiastic about the progress of his research, but he’s optimistic it will yield reliable magnetic shark repellents within four or five years. “The sooner the better,” he says, “so we can save these sharks.”

Other researchers have added magnets to the netting used to create shark fences, and in some experiments they’ve seen a 95 percent reduction in the number of sharks entering through holes in the netting. They’ve also placed magnets above the hooks on long-line fishing lines, he says, “and we’ve reduced shark catch by 50 percent.”

The SharkDefense researchers are still refining their understanding of how various magnets affect different species of sharks. Their research, for example, indicates that ceramic magnets are fairly reliable shark repellents, while super-strong rare earth magnets are not. This, they believe, is where MythBusters went wrong. The hosts of MythBusters started their experiments with ceramic magnets and then switched to rare earth magnets, which O’Connell believes are so strong that they simply overwhelm sharks’ senses.

O’Connell is enthusiastic about the progress of his research, and he’s optimistic it will yield reliable magnetic shark repellents within four or five years. “The sooner the better,” he says, “so we can save these sharks.”
At a Maine alumni dinner in 1945, Boston University President Daniel Marsh met the alumna seated next to him, Westbrook College Dean Elsbeth Melville.

“What kind of a dean are you?” he asked. “A good one,” she responded. Before they had finished the entrée, he had hired her as dean of women.
Melville was as attentive to born leaders like Olive Lesueur (CAS’66, MET’85), named among Boston’s Women of Tomorrow as a high school senior. “You didn’t say no to Dean Melville,” she agrees, even after graduation; Lesueur remains active in the College Club and the Arts & Sciences alumni board because, long ago, Melville phoned.

The Dean exemplified the University and community service she advocated. Over the years, she was president of the National Council of Camp Fire Girls and eight local organizations, sometimes twice, and a trustee, director, chair of the board, or founder of others. And she was the very model of a mid-century professional woman. She didn’t do her own typing, nor did she iron her gowns (hardly appropriate to Melville’s persona) and chaperoning her, even when she appeared with her father in public. It became one of Melville’s favorite stories. “When the pageant was over, I tucked her into her boyfriend’s car for the trip back from Atlantic City,” she’d say blandly. “I was certain that was fine; they probably even stayed in separate hotels.”

Then came the turbulent late sixties. “Elsbeth wasn’t intimidated by changing times,” says Chuck Wexler (CAS’72), who as president of Miles Standish dorm served on the University committee considering student demands to end paritals—dorm curfews and regulations on visitors of the opposite sex. “She had very strong feelings,” he says, “but she was a great listener and saw changes were necessary. The students were all impressed by her ingenuity and strength. She was a leader among deans for change.” Later, as president of CAS student government, he named someone to the Dean Search Committee: not another student, as expected, but Melville. “She had an impact on me forever,” summarizes Wexler, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum.

After reaching the compulsory retirement age, she was the unpaid, nearly full-time advisor on alumni affairs to a succession of CAS deans for over a decade, and, until a year before her death, she remained Dean Melville. “A lot of us thought we were first.” —Caroline Chang

Melville said she knew every young woman living on campus and every young man who kept one out past curfew. Founder and permanent chair of the Student-Faculty Assembly, she also knew all the student leaders, in a day when activities were firmly guided by staff or faculty advisors. “I gave her a lot of grief as a student, but we came to love each other,” recalled the late Paul Liacos (CAS’50, LAW’52, Hon.’96), chief justice of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court, one of many who put BU leadership experience to demonstrably good use. “Dean Melville loved us students and she showed it in all her dealings,” says Lou Latala (SMG’61, Hon.’90), president of Ford Europe before becoming dean of the School of Management. “As needed, she was firm, never brash, always fair.”

Through most of Melville’s career, universities acted in loco parentis, particularly sheltering women students. Melville dutifully enforced dress codes and curfews as dictated by Presidents Marsh and Case, while privately lobbying for some loosening of the rules. She spoke proudly of alumnae with professional lives but also of those with careers as wives and mothers. She was, above all, a realist: about how much she could advance the roles of her young women, her duties as the employee of conservative male presidents, and human nature.

Maintaining that balance took humor. Sometime in the fifties, when the Miss America Organization sought academic respectability, BU agreed to sponsor the student named Miss Massachusetts. Melville was her official companion, ironing her gowns (hardly appropriate to Melville’s persona) and chaperoning her, even when she appeared with her father in public. It became one of Melville’s favorite stories. “When the pageant was over, I tucked her into her boyfriend’s car for the trip back from Atlantic City,” she’d say blandly. “I was certain that was fine; they probably even stayed in separate hotels.”
Kate Swango (GRS’09) examines a soil pit in Antarctica’s Dry Valleys. Each year, Associate Professor David Marchant leads a team of Arts & Sciences students to brave the frigid Antarctic summer in search of clues about past climate change. Photo courtesy of Kate Swango.
Frigid, bone-dry outcrops of rock surrounded by a sea of ice, the McMurdo Dry Valleys of Antarctica present one of the most inhospitable environments on Earth. Here, each Antarctic summer, Associate Professor of Earth Sciences David Marchant leads a team of Arts & Sciences students and other researchers from around the world to probe the secrets of Antarctica’s distant past.

The Dry Valleys are an ideal place to search for clues to Earth’s geologic history. Unlike the other 98 percent of Antarctica, the valleys are ice-free due to an almost total lack of precipitation. This means that their geological features remain exposed.

“When we are walking around Beacon Valley, we might as well be walking around Earth 14 million years ago,” says Marchant. “Some boulders are still in the same positions that they were then.”

Over the years, Marchant’s National Science Foundation-funded research discoveries have added volumes to our knowledge of past climate conditions in Antarctica, earning him a global reputation in geomorphology. Until recently, however, he and his team were missing a crucial piece from the puzzle of Antarctica’s climate history: at what point did Antarctica become the barren, frozen region that it is today?

Working in the Dry Valleys during Antarctica’s summer—from about mid-November to mid-February—in a test of endurance, David Marchant and his team spend long, grinding days sampling, digging, and hauling rocks and sediment back to camp for analysis. Their camp is little more than a few tents, a stove for cooking, and plenty of rope to tether the tents when the wind grows violent. Drained of nutrients, the weary researchers end each day with a huge, high-protein meal. No matter how much they eat, however, they still lose weight.

Despite the enduring cold (the average temperature during the most recent 82 expedition was -5°F), isolation, ever-present daylight, and a absence of heat and showers, while other elements decay, and is used to calculate when the ash fall. The volcanic activity during this period was greater than it is today, accounting for the deposition of multiple layers of ash. Above the fossil layers, the researchers found coarse rock deposits of the type left by cold-based, non-melting glaciers as exist in Antarctica today. The presence of these coarse deposits indicates that the region underwent a dramatic, permanent cooling following the deposition of the fossils. By comparing the temperatures at which the fossilized species are known to survive with the temperature required for cold-based glacier formation, the researchers estimated that atmospheric temperatures plummeted by at least 14°F. This cooling period, called the Middle Miocene Climate Transition, killed off plant and animal species and caused glaciers to advance to cover the continent. It was the second of three permanent global cooling shifts over the past 65 million years that created the conditions for Earth’s present-day climate.

Of the three climate shifts, the Middle Miocene Climate Transition is the one that scientists knew least about regarding its timing and its effect on Antarctica. Nobody can say for sure what caused this dramatic drop in temperature, but before the shift, the climate in the Dry Valleys was similar to present-day southern South America. Mosses and shrubs covered the landscape, which was poached by alpine lakes fed by meltwater from temperate-style glaciers. Butterflies and midges thrived in bogs, while dwarf southern beech trees may have grown at low elevations.

The upshot of Marchant’s latest find is that we now know when interior Antarctica transitioned from a tundra ecosystem to a polar desert. We also can be reasonably sure that the East Antarctic Ice Sheet, the largest ice mass on the planet, has remained permanently frozen for 13.9 million years. Some scientists have suggested that the ice may have receded during a warm interval roughly four million years ago. However, the geological evidence unearthed by Marchant’s team and the exceedingly well-preserved nature of the fossils they found indicate that interior Antarctica remained, in the words of the research team, a “paralyzed landscape.” This last finding suggests that the East Antarctic Ice Sheet, which is separate from the more vulnerable and smaller West Antarctic Ice Sheet, could remain frozen despite future global warming.

“Some boulders are still in the same positions that they were then.” —David Marchant

“We lived in tents, so far away from the nearest road that we had to bring all the food, equipment, and supplies ourselves, and to see how people to spend among the best-preserved fossils from the middle Miocene period found anywhere on Earth. Published last year in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, the discovery opened a window onto one of the most dramatic climate shifts in Earth’s history.

By measuring the level of argon in layers of volcanic ash deposited within, above, and below the fossil layer, the researchers determined that the fossils were between 14.1 and 13.9 million years old. (The argon in volcanic ash builds up at a known rate and to see how people to spend among the best-preserved fossils from the middle Miocene period found anywhere on Earth. Published last year in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, the discovery opened a window onto one of the most dramatic climate shifts in Earth’s history.

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Out of This World
Marchant’s sense of being on another planet while in Antarctica is not so far-fetched. With a dry, subfreezing climate for the past 13.9 million years, Antarctica has a lot in common with Mars. In recent years, Marchant, his students, and colleagues from Brown University have examined photos of the surface of Mars for telltale features of cold-based glaciation—features they’ve grown accustomed to while working in Antarctica.

Funded by NASA and the National Science Foundation, their work is aimed at finding likely locations of past glaciers as well as present-day buried ice on the Red Planet.

The researchers have made some promising discoveries.

Certain Antarctic landforms, such as the polygons formed by periodic contractions of the frozen ground, indicate the presence of shallow subsurface ice. The team has looked for similar landforms on Mars.

Their work was rewarded last year when NASA’s Phoenix Lander found ice just below the surface—right where Marchant and his colleagues said it should be.

“For the past 20 years, I thought I’d been focused solely on Antarctica and global climate change,” says Marchant. “But now I realize that I’ve actually been working on Earth’s best analog for Mars, and the similarities in surface processes and recent landscape development are striking. In fact, I am now learning more about Antarctica by studying images of the surface of Mars.”

Polar Legacy
Marchant’s worldwide reputation as a glacial geomorphologist attracts a dedicated group of graduate and undergraduate students to the Arts & Sciences Department of Earth Sciences each year. Many want to travel with him to Antarctica, where they can follow in the footsteps of polar explorers. Sean Mackay (GRS’13) is one of these. “The location itself holds a lot of significance as a place on Earth that is one of the most ancient and pristine,” he says. “There is a little bit of the adventure left, which is pretty rare in this world.”

Like many of Marchant’s students, Mackay came to Boston University specifically to work under his tutelage. “I found BU because of this research,” says Mackay. “They are bringing students into the field to do the cutting-edge work that matters.”

Marchant first became interested in geology during a cross-country bike trip after high school. He snapped photos of dramatic landforms in Yellowstone National Park and later shared them with a geology class at Tufts University, where he was on a pre-med track. Marchant became so fascinated by exploring geologic processes that he switched to a geology major. He initially planned to study beach morphology, which might have brought him to far warmer climes than Antarctica’s for his life’s work. However, as a graduate student in geology at the University of Maine, Marchant was persuaded by his professor, noted Antarctic glaciologist George Denton, to travel with him on a research trip to Antarctica.

“The science was so fantastic,” recalls Marchant. “We were doing groundbreaking research. It changed my life, in part because it was such a hard experience that it gave me a lot of confidence in my ability.”

Marchant went on to earn his PhD at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland and, in 1999, became the fifth geologist since 1926 to receive the W. S. Bruce Medal from the Royal Society of Edinburgh, the Royal Physical Society, and the Royal Scottish Geographical Society. First won by James Wordie, the chief scientist for Antarctic explorer Sir Ernest Shackleton, the medal was given to Marchant for his work demonstrating the stability of the East Antarctic Ice Sheet.

“Everyone who goes to Antarctica has a longing to go back. Maybe it is the intense quiet, the sense of being on a different planet.”

—David Marchant

What comes next for Marchant? His team plans to continue drilling into Antarctic glaciers to study the composition of the Earth’s atmosphere between two and three million years ago. By doing so, they hope to find clues about what might have led to the most recent major global cooling shift. Marchant also wants to look for evidence of the formation of alpine glaciers in Antarctica in response to another major global cooling around 3.4 million years ago.

Marchant’s enthusiasm for his research bubbles over into his family life. Asked whether after 20 years “on the ice” he plans to end his yearly pilgrimage, he says he can’t stop “until I get the chance to show my kids this wonderful place.”

Marchant’s son, Taylor, is seven and his daughter, Olivia, is four. Their proud father jokes that despite their young ages they “already know about the Mid-Miocene Climate Transition. What have I done?” For BU students, Marchant’s dedication to his work means many more seasons searching for climate treasures in the coldest, driest, and windiest place on Earth.
Prior to researching Life Stories, she was unsure how the women got from place to place. Goldsmith’s work reveals that the sisters’ seemingly arbitrary paths were the result of an early and often imperfect form of public transportation—the postal system. “In the late 17th century, there were regularly scheduled carriages that carried mail all over Europe,” Goldsmith says, “and that’s what made it possible for the women to travel the way they did. When I first traced their travels, their routes didn’t make any sense to me. Then I realized they were connecting with postal coaches, and they weren’t necessarily sure where the coaches would lead them.”

Goldsmith finds the stories of these women invigorating. “People tend to assume that women from this period weren’t able to operate freely at all,” she says. “And despite the fact that these women had a very difficult time on the road, there’s a kind of exuberance to their stories that I find fascinating and uplifting. They really made something of their lives and their educations in deciding to write about themselves and defend themselves and go public with their stories.”

She hopes that historical figures like the Mancinis can help readers see the eddies and whirls in history’s flow. “People are surprised to learn that progress in the area of women’s independence does not move steadily from this dark period of the past toward this bright and open period of modernity. There are different moments in history when you see examples of women being able to defy convention in interesting ways.”

*Reprinted with permission from Research at Boston University 2008.*

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It sounds like a plot dreamed up by a novelist with a vivid imagination. Two sisters in 17th-century Europe leave their aristocratic husbands—one a Roman prince and the other a French religious zealot—and abandon their families. They spend their lives traveling, trying to develop a network that will help sustain them. Along the way, there are kidnapping plots, stalking, and other forms of danger.

But it’s all true. Hortense and Marie Mancini are the central figures in a book currently being written by Elizabeth Goldsmith, professor of French and academic affairs director at International Programs. Goldsmith first wrote about the sisters in 2001 in *Publishing Women’s Life Stories in France, 1647–1720,* which examines the memoirs of six 17th-century women—three religious, three secular—and how they came to be published.

“I was particularly intrigued by the secular women, who became notorious because they left their families and traveled,” she says. “They wrote to defend their reputations. I started looking more into Hortense and Marie Mancini, trying to figure out how they traveled, how they got around.”

The Mancini sisters had been brought up in the court of Louis XIV—Marie was the Sun King’s first mistress—and for different reasons and at different times, both walked out on unhappy marriages, even though it meant leaving behind their children.

“I’m interested in how women’s travel relates to the idea of taking risks and the usefulness of taking risks,” says Goldsmith. “I also wanted to know why women on the road were so fascinating to everybody. The Mancinis sisters were early media figures. Their travels were documented in news gazettes and in correspondence, in addition to their own memoirs.”

Eager to learn more about their experiences, Goldsmith searched the family archives of Prince Colonna, Marie’s husband, in Subiaco, Italy. There, she says, “I found an incredible number of letters and documents that tracked her movements and the movements of her sister.”

*See Professor Elizabeth Goldsmith’s bio at www.bu.edu/cas/magazine/spring09/goldsmith.*
DAVID MUNDY waited to speak. The La Porte–Bayshore (Texas) Chamber of Commerce was naming his firm the 2006 Company of the Year. Introducing Mundy, the emcee concluded: “David graduated from Boston University in 1996 and moved back to Texas to begin his education.”

“That line got a big laugh,” recalls Mundy (CAS’96), an industrial-services contractor and semipro race car driver/owner. “But in a lot of ways, your education continues every day. And when you quit learning, you’re dead.”

Now, Mundy, president of the Houston-based Mundy Companies, hopes to bring to BU the lessons he’s picked up over the last dozen years, whether in the boardroom, on the job site, or even behind the wheel. Dean Virginia Sapiro has named him to the College of Arts & Sciences Leadership Advisory Board.

Mundy enjoyed his time in Boston, he says, despite the climate. “Locals told me, ‘Don’t worry, we haven’t had a real winter in yeeaaaahh,’” he recounts. Cue the Blizzard of ’93, freshman year. “I thought I’d died and gone to hell.”

At CAS, he double-majored in philosophy and history, and is still a big reader of history. “One thing I really admired about BU at the time, and still do, is that in that kind of department, you don’t have to toe a particular line of thought.”

During the summers, Mundy cut his teeth on industrial work, including in chemical plants and oil refineries in Texas. “My first job was as a helper in a vessel fabrication shop,” he remembers. “I found that I liked the business and I liked the people.”

After graduation, Mundy went to work in human resources for the Mundy Companies. Founded by his grandfather, A.J. Mundy, the business provides and manages temporary and permanent workers for industrial operations. Across the country, thousands of Mundy employees fill mechanical maintenance, small capital project, and operations support needs, such as packaging, railroad loading, warehouse, security, and janitorial work.

During the summers, Mundy cut his teeth on industrial work, including in chemical plants and oil refineries in Texas. “My first job was as a helper in a vessel fabrication shop,” he remembers. “I found that I liked the business and I liked the people.”

In the family’s long-term plan, Mundy and his now-business partner were to eventually take over the company from their father and uncle (A.J.’s sons), who had begun easing into retirement. “Then my father was diagnosed with terminal cancer,” Mundy says. “So a seven-year plan was condensed into about twelve months.”

After his father’s death in 2002, the young managers had to take charge. The business has not only thrived but expanded in the years since. Mundy deflects credit. “We really benefited in that we inherited an absolutely stellar team here, and that makes a huge difference.”

Mundy also inherited a passion for auto racing. An open-wheel (similar to Indy) car driver, he is co-owner of Mundill, one of the top teams in the Star Mazda Championship circuit, which he likens to “double-A baseball, but for racing.”

“I’ve been around it all my life,” he explains. “My dad raced dirt bikes when I was a kid, my uncle raced dragsters, and I hung around a motorcycle shop.”

Nowadays, he races only “on occasion,” Mundy says. He and his wife “have three children under the age of four, with a fourth on the way,” meaning the lure of high speeds “fades a bit,” he admits.

Threaded through Mundy’s work and hobbies are not only a fascination with the mechanical but a love of problem-solving, which he intends to turn toward his new role at CAS. As development officer Karen Fung explains it, the 15-member Leadership Advisory Board is “a high-level, thoughtful, committed group of people outside the Long an active alum, David Mundy is a member of the new Leadersh ip Advisory Board at CAS. academy with whom Dean Sapiro can consult to bounce ideas around, discuss situations, and seek real-world opinions and counsel.”

“I’m excited to think about the challenges the College is going to face,” says Mundy. “BU is a wonderful, special place.”
If BU does not of Old Greenwich, Conn., writes, “I am
AWARD WINNERS
SPRING 2009 SPRING 2009
magazine
of Fairfax, Calif., writes, “Morris says her new book grew
with her award by
agency. She was presented
director of a San Francisco-
is founder of Full Glass,
and philanthropic organiza-
consulting firm for nonprofit
or their Alma Mater. In the spring, we will begin to take nominations for the 2009 awardees who will be honored on October 23.

More than 70 guests attended the CAS/GRS Distinguished Alumni Awards Dinner on Friday to honor four distinguished alumni for their outstanding contributions to profession, community, and alma Mater. The awards were presented by former Distinguished Alumni Award winners.

Margaret M. Moitín (CAS’72) is principal of Rafael Hernandez School, a bilingual school in Boston that places equal emphasis on Spanish and English literacy. Her presentation of Olive Lenzner (CAS’64, MEF’85). In 2001, the Hernandez School was one of 10 Massachusetts schools recog-
nized for improved MCAS scores and was named as one of Boston’s 23 Effective Practices Schools. Moitín’s many awards include selection as one of the “100 Outstanding Women in Massachusetts” by the Women’s Educational and Industrial Union.

In 2008, two Arts & Sciences alumni were appointed to the Boston University Board of Trustees and Overseers, respectively. Stephen R. Karp (CAS’63), founder and chairman of New England Development, Inc., Newton, Massachusetts, became a trustee in September, while Shamin A. Daboh (GS’76, CAS’78, MED’87), a physician with Chelseafront Primary Care in Chelsea, Massachusetts, became an overseer in April.

Other Arts & Sciences alumni serving on the University’s boards are:

Robert A. Knox, (CAS’74, GSM’75) Chairman Chairman and CEO Cornerstone Equity Investors, LLC, New York, New York

Elaine B. Kirshenbaum (CAS’71, SED’72, SM’79) Vice President of Policy, Planning, and Membership Massachusetts Medical Society Waltham, Massachusetts

Stuart W. Pratt (CAS’69) Chairman Fort Point Real Estate N/A/Nummern Company Boston, Massachusetts

Allicia Cannon Mullion (CAS’84) is the founder and CEO of Watching Waves Ventures, a Chicago-based early-stage venture fund that works with TI-enabled busi-
nesses. LANTIMES magazine named her as one of the “Top 100 Women in Computing.” As the senior vice president of management information systems for the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, Mullion implemented the use of leading-
edge handheld wireless devices, which transformed the way business is conducted on the trading floor. At BU, she was the first woman to graduate from the Department of Computer Science.

In 2008, Arts & Sciences Alumni was published a book on beading. A former associate editor at Threads magazine, Morris says her new memoir Bugging Out: An Army Memoir (1954) was selected by the
Committee on the...
Greetings from the Arts & Sciences Alumni Association! As those of you who were able to attend Reunion and Alumni Weekend 2008 in October know, it provided a wonderful opportunity for all BU alumni to reunite with classmates and faculty. Changing Reunion to a fall weekend enables all alumni to enjoy Reunion the way we remember it, bustling with students and faculty and buzzing with energy. Next year’s Reunion and Alumni Weekend is planned for Friday, October 23 through Sunday, October 25. Save the date!

Meeting this year’s award recipients at the CAS/GRS Distinguished Alumni Awards Dinner was a privilege. The unique and fascinating stories that these alumni shared highlighted how their experience as Arts & Sciences students at Boston University enabled them to pursue a high level of success in their professions, as well as in their communities.

Read about Laura Deaton (CAS’86), Alcix Cannon Mullins (CAS’88), Magdaria M. Muñoz (CAS’72), and Matthew B. Smith (CAS’70, GSM’72) on page 26. They represent the strength of the Arts & Sciences alumni community, and the Alumni Association is proud to recognize their tremendous accomplishments.

The Association is also very enthusiastic about the Discoveries learning and lecture series, now in its second year. The events have wonderfully demonstrated the depth and breadth of teaching and research at BU. I invite you to attend the panel discussion on April 16, “The Ballot, Six Months Later: Where Are We, and What Lies Ahead?” Please see www.bu.edu/alumni/events for more details, when available.

Except for perhaps a BU rainsman’s hockey win, nothing can compare with the excitement of a room filled with BU alumni gathered to hear from some of the University’s best faculty minds.

Han Han (CAS’96)
Han Han is an information technology project manager at Harvard Business School.

Whatever your news, we want to hear it.
Send us an e-mail at casalum@bu.edu.

We’ll publish your news or photo in Class Notes.
And we’ll make sure you’re up-to-date on what’s new at BU.

Michael Maguire (CAS’93) and J.B. (Colette) Maguire (COM’93) of West Roxbury, Mass., are the birth of their second child, Meghan Elizabeth, on July 16, 2008. They note that two-year-old Alexander couldn’t be happier. Contact them at Mr&MrsTailor@cox.net or abgmj@comcast.net, respectively.

Jesse Levine (CAS’13, GRD’14) of Beverly, Massachusetts, welcomed her first child, Jack Leviton, on November 7, 2008. She was born at Brigham and Women’s Hospital. Jesse is a deputy prosecutor for King County and Sarah is a brand manager for Williams of the Coast, a Haas subsidiary.

Sally Bessee (CAS’03)
Sally Bessee (CAS’03) named one of the 30 under-30 top executives in the music industry by Billboard Magazine.

Wen-Tor Björn Dahlquist (CGS’96, MET’99), of Boston, Mass., was married to Joelle Anderman on May 31, 2008, at Old Orchard Beach in Maine. The couple relocated from San Francisco, Calif., recently followed a reception at Castle in the Clouds in North Conway, N.H.

The 134-foot steel brigantine sailed last fall as the research vessel for a BU Marine Program funded by the National Science Foundation. Attendees and wedding participants included Tim Cook (CAS’05), Sarah Fogley Cook (CAS’05), Matt Brookover (CAS’04), Mary Aquino (COM’05), Bobbie Benison (COM’03), Rebecca Brooks (COM’03, SED’07), and Dorothy Pengra (COM’05).

Shanna Spinello (CAS’03)
Shanna Spinello (CAS’03) of New York, N.Y., is the production stage manager for the Broadway show 

class notes continued

Dear Reunion and Alumni Weekend attendees and alumni, it was a privilege to welcome you to Boston last weekend. As you know, the University is committed to providing a wonderful experience for all attendees. Please provide us with any feedback you have so that we can continue to improve the event for future years.

David is the principal cellist for the Billings Symphony in Billings, Montana. He and his wife, Elissa, own and operate two adventure travel companies—

The Arts & Sciences Alumni Association and BU Marine Program (BUMP) faculty and staff and our partners at Sea Education Association (SEA) sponsored a panel discussion at the 2008 New England Aquarium Conference on August 28-30.

Once the deadline for the Spring 2009 issue was reached, we had received 667 news items. The Association is particularly enthusiastic about the Discoveries learning and lecture series, now in its second year. These events have wonderfully demonstrated the depth and breadth of teaching and research at BU. We invite you to attend the panel discussion on April 16, “The Ballot, Six Months Later: Where Are We, and What Lies Ahead?” Please see www.bu.edu/alumni/events for more details, when available.

Except for perhaps a BU rainsman’s hockey win, nothing can compare with the excitement of a room filled with BU alumni gathered to hear from some of the University’s best faculty minds.

Han Han (CAS’96)
Han Han is an information technology project manager at Harvard Business School.

Private equity firm, left, is CAS Senior Associate Dean Susan Ferraro, Biology Chair Geoffrey Cooper, SEA Academic Dean Paul feet, Art & Sciences Dean Virginia Sapers, BUMP Program Manager Jennifer Ryan, SEA President John Ballard, Rachel Sandner (GRS’75), BUMP Director Rick Murray, SEA faculty member Gary Jenkins, and SEA Development Dean Gino Thomas.

Shanna Spinello (CAS’03)
Shanna Spinello (CAS’03) of New York, N.Y., is the production stage manager for the Broadway show 

Wen-Tor Björn Dahlquist (CGS’96, MET’99), of Boston, Mass., was married to Joelle Anderman on May 31, 2008, at Old Orchard Beach in Maine. The couple relocated from San Francisco, Calif., recently followed a reception at Castle in the Clouds in North Conway, N.H.
At the heart of Jamie Kaler’s comedy is a fascination with life’s blunders and bizarre moments. A stand-up comic and actor who plays Mike Callahan in the TBS sitcom My Boys, Kaler (CAS’87) says he likes to make people laugh, often at his own expense. “I focus a lot on the dumb things that happen to me every day,” he said during a recent trip to Boston. “To tell a joke and then someone laughs—it’s the ultimate drug. I’m sometimes surprised I can make a living at it.”

On a Friday evening in September, Kaler brought his routine before a packed crowd of undergraduates in the basement of the George Sherman Union, part of BU’s Laugh Out Loud Comedy Series. He regaled the crowd with bawdy tales of romantic mishaps, BU misadventures, and insights into everything from the lottery to chimpanzees. He even made light of the age gap separating him from his audience members: “I’m at the age where I need to tell a woman I’ve been divorced, just so she thinks I’m capable of committing.” Following the show, Kaler joked with fans and friends, clearly in his element.

While success may be coming more easily for Kaler now, it took him years to reach this high point. When he first decided he wanted to become an actor, he was living in California, working as a bartender, after five years in the Navy. One day, he auditioned for a Sea World commercial and got the part. That first experience—easy money and a chance to perform for an audience—was enough to get him hooked.

He soon discovered, however, that landing a part is not always so easy. For a while, he made commercials whenever he could. “I went to so many auditions and got rejected so many times,” he reflects. “I think one of my best skills is that anytime I do fail, I learn from it. Each year, it’s gotten better.” Soon, Kaler started to get appearances on TV shows like Will & Grace and The King of Queens. He also got parts in movies, including The Family Stone and Spanglish, and performed in a few plays.

“The last couple of years, it’s been amazing for me,” he says. “You finally reach the point where you get to do what you want to do. But I still kind of feel as if I am pulling the wool over someone’s eyes whenever I get a spot.”

The success of My Boys, a sitcom about a tomboy sportscaster and her group of guy pals, may have surprised some people, but not Kaler. “I knew right away that the show was going to,” he recalls. “The chemistry’s amazing on the show. We were hanging out from day one. We have a ball shooting it.”

Now, My Boys is in its third season, and Kaler is making the most of his breakthrough success. He writes a popular My Boys blog and is touring the country to broaden the fan base for his stand-up show. He even landed a spot in the traveling comedy show “Blue Collar Comedy: The Next Generation.”

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