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He doesn't just look tough: English Assistant Professor Todd McGowan's philosophically informed film courses offer students great challenges and rewards. (Photo: Bill DiLillo)

Todd McGowan is a bit embarrassed by the attention generated by his recent Kroepsch-Maurice Award. But the positive buzz this energetic assistant professor of English has created among students and faculty made it almost inevitable he would receive this formal recognition of excellence in teaching.

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A State Affair The classic descriptions of Vermont found in the many travel guides attempting to capture the state's essence sound strikingly similar. Not so the 1,050 electric entries that comprise a new *Vermont Encyclopedia*, a "labor of love" by two ex-UVM professors and a Johnson State colleague.

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Lectures Spitting saliva samples into test tubes has become such familiar business to the women of the Congo's Ituri tribe that they have coined one of Swahili's newer phrases — *kazi ya mate*, which is accurately, if indelicately, translated as "spitwork."

THE WEEK IN VIEW

Oct. 16, 5 p.m. Forum: "Speaking of Freedom" with Stanley Fish, of the University of Illinois at Chicago, and UVM President Daniel Mark Fogel. Ira Allen Chapel. Information: 656-3056.

Oct. 17, 9 a.m. Women's Tennis: New England Championships. Patrick Gym courts. Information: [Athletics](#)

Oct. 17, 3:30 p.m. Lecture: "The Experience of Italian Writers in America" with Luigi Fontanella of SUNY-Stony Brook. Waterman, Room 413. Information: 656-3576.

Oct. 17, 7:30 p.m. Concert: UVM Lane Series presents "The Faire Winds" with musicians Aoife Clancy, Christine Smith, Jean Hewson and Anne Hills. UVM Recital Hall. Tickets \$25. Information: [Lane Series](#)

Oct. 18, 9 a.m. Event: "Deaf Awareness Exposition" including a presentation on Usher's syndrome, a TTY demonstration, and a viewing of "Sound and Fury." North Lounge, Marsh Lounge, Billings Student Center. Information: 656-3368.

Oct. 18, 9 a.m. Event: "The Joan Robinson Centennial Conference" celebrates the 100th

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Professor's Book Thinks Through Complexities of Sexual Consent

In regards to consent to sex, Alan Wertheimer, professor of political science, argues that the key question is not "when no means no," as is so often said — it is when yes really means yes.

Wertheimer's latest book, *Consent to Sexual Relations*, which was recently published by Cambridge University Press, draws on references ranging from John Rawls to Jerry Seinfeld in a detailed and often technical exploration of what entails valid consent in a wide range of circumstances. If it's given that a no is a no, and acquiescence achieved through violence or the threat of it is totally unacceptable, is a "yes" valid when a woman is retarded? Coerced? Deceived, egregiously or subtly? Voluntarily intoxicated?

"I've taken a very charged — and for good reason — subject and tried to bring whatever philosophical and analytical abilities I have to bear on the subject," Wertheimer says. "The book is not programmatic. I'm not advocating for particular reforms. I'm trying to help myself and others think through this issue."

The theory on what constitutes valid consent that emerges from his sustained philosophical examination is highly dependent on the particular circumstances of a case. As a philosopher, Wertheimer is deeply concerned with what makes consent morally valid, which often leads him to diverge (sometimes widely) with past and present legal conceptions of acceptable consent.

"In our laws and moral attitudes, people do not take sexual deception as seriously as they regard commercial deception," Wertheimer says. "It's *caveat amator*, 'let the lover beware.' With the exception of a few specific cases, the law generally doesn't get involved in deception. But morally, deception should be taken more seriously than it is."

Although it masks the subtleties of Wertheimer's particular arguments, his general moral approach is grounded in concern for preserving individual rights and a woman's (the book focuses on female consent) positive and negative autonomy. He applies these wide concerns to more than 115 hypothetical cases, many of which actually happened, and finds that the morality of consent can turn on the smallest details.

Wertheimer, who uses law, philosophy, economics, evolutionary theory, psychological research, and social research to gird his analysis of the hypotheticals, is ever-mindful of the horror of rape but also allows that a certain ambiguity and mystery is fundamental to many peoples'

Leaders of Drive to Create an India-Pakistan 'Peace Park' Meet at UVM

A senseless and bloody small war has festered for two decades between India and Pakistan a once-pristine part of the Karakoram Mountains. Saleem Ali, an assistant professor of natural resources who was born in Pakistan, hopes to stop it by putting new life into an old proposal to create an international peace park along the troubled borderland.

The Karakoram conflict, which is an outgrowth of a bloody dispute in Kashmir, has the dark distinction of being the world's highest-altitude war, with skirmishes taking place at roughly 20,000 feet in a largely uninhabited but ecologically sensitive area. At Ali's behest, a group of former ambassadors, non-governmental organization officers, executives, students and academics gathered on campus Oct. 9 to create a plan of action that he hopes will end with the creation of the "peace park."

Ali, who specializes in environmental conflict resolution, believes that dialogues to resolve comparatively low-stakes environmental problems can help combative states start wider-ranging conversations to begin fixing their more fundamental conflicts. But the road to doing this, he concedes, is long and difficult.

"The meeting went very well, and we've got a plan of action," Ali says. "The next step is to start the campaign — building a Website, establishing a board with public celebrities, applying for grants, and getting Indian and Pakistani experts involved in creating a technical proposal."

Ali hopes that a formal proposal will be ready for public deliberation by the middle of next year. A previous effort by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) to create a transboundary park in the region failed, so Ali emphasizes the process "will be long." But he and his colleagues take heart in the presence of similar parks straddling borders between Nepal and China, India and Bhutan, Chinese and Pakistan and elsewhere.

Participants in the UVM meeting to develop the peace park plan included Harry Barnes, a former American ambassador to India; Larry Hamilton, an emeritus professor at Cornell who has been deeply involved with the IUCN's mountain work; Farooq Kathwari, chief executive officer of Ethan Allen and a Kashmiri; and many others. Another participant, John Shroder, a professor at the University of Nebraska, is applying for a grant from NASA to fund a complementary effort to create a "science park" for high-altitude research in the Karakoram region.

enjoyment of sex. While he finds some circumstances that would never lead to prosecution morally wrong (as in some cases of deception), he's wary of setting the bar of consent so high as to, for example, say that tipsy or retarded women are incapable of consenting to sex.

Wertheimer finds these sorts of cases, where permissive principles could expose vulnerable women to exploitation, and excessively strict dictates could deprive them of the autonomy to make fulfilling choices, particularly difficult, so he uses dozens of carefully tailored hypothetical scenarios to reach tentative conclusions. "All competence is local," he says.

Retarded women, in his view, probably can give morally valid consent to sexual relations under some circumstances; but not in many others. Arguments sometimes espoused on college campuses that claim that apparently consensual sex is impermissible when a woman has willingly drunk too much, go too far — but so does, Wertheimer argues, the surprisingly common notion that voluntary drinking makes a woman responsible for virtually anything that subsequently happens to her.

Wertheimer is proudest of the book's sustained examination of this topic. He feels that his intoxication chapter "breaks new ground" by carefully examining the nuances of a debate that usually provokes only heated arguments. Despite the pressing nature of the subject, Wertheimer says that relatively little had been written about how intoxication affects consent. With his book published, Wertheimer has now turned his attention to issues of coercion and consent in medical research.

Ali, who convened the meeting and will play a key role in coordinating the group's endeavors, says that support from UVM's Minority Faculty Incentive Fund has been instrumental in his participation.

Gaitskill to Conduct Writer's Workshop

Writer Mary Gaitskill, whose short story "Secretary," inspired the darkly comedic film of the same title, will be here on Oct. 22. She will lead an open class at 4 p.m. and read from her fiction at 5 p.m. in John Dewey Lounge, Old Mill.

The author of critically praised short fiction collections and novels including *Bad Behavior*, *Because They Wanted To*, and *Two Girls Fat and Thin*, Gaitskill left home at 16 to become a stripper and spent time in mental institutions. These experiences, she has said, are relevant to her writing only in that "my experience of life as essentially unhappy and uncontrollable taught me to examine the way people, including myself, create survival systems and psychological 'safe' places... in unorthodox and apparently self-effacing ways."

Nowhere is that more apparent than in *Secretary*, which chronicles a sadomasochistic relationship between a troubled young woman and her strange but handsome lawyer/boss. The film version of this politically incorrect take on office power relations, directed by Steven Shainberg, earned a Special Jury Prize for Originality at the 2002 Sundance Film Festival.

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The folk group "Faire Winds" plays the Lane Series on Oct. 17. See story below for more information. (*Publicity photo*)

Faire Winds Gonna Blow

The folk quartet Faire Winds, who will play a Lane Series concert on Oct. 17 at 7:30 p.m. at the UVM Recital Hall, Redstone Campus, embody their musical tradition's variety and inclusiveness.

The group is comprised of three premier female singers and an award-winning fiddle player from overlapping generations and different ethnic influences. They play traditional and contemporary songs and tunes from their diverse backgrounds both in ensemble and solo configurations.

Tickets for the show are available by calling the Flynn Box Office at 86-FLYNN, or securely on-line at www.uvm.edu/laneseries.

Marketing the Gridiron

A panel discussion on sports marketing featuring UVM alumni who have worked in executive capacities in the National Football League is set for Oct. 23 at 7 p.m. in 002 Kalkin.

The discussion on sports marketing will feature Gary Gottfried, '76, former vice president of marketing for the Cleveland Browns; Steve Phelps '85, vice president of corporate sponsorship for NFL Properties; and Gene Goldberg '76, vice president of licensing for NFL properties.

President's Lecturer to Explore the Policy of Caring

In Sophocles' classic Greek play "Antigone," the play's hero defies her king's law to bury her dead brother, appealing to a divine morality that trumps the state.

Deborah Stone, an independent scholar and research professor, finds parallels of the story in contemporary America, where she believes individuals often have to struggle against hostile or indifferent public policy to care for loved ones. She will speak on the topic under the auspices of the UVM President's Distinguished Lecture Series on Oct. 20 at 4:30 p.m. in Memorial Lounge, Waterman Building. Stone's talk is titled, "Antigone's Legacy: Fighting for the Right to Care in America."

Stone has studied policy analysis for the last 25 years with a focus on health, welfare and families. She has served on the faculty at Brandeis University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology and Duke University and has held visiting professorships at Yale University, Radcliffe College, Tulane University and the University of Bremen, Germany.

"Caring for each other is the most basic form of civic participation," Stone wrote in *The Nation*. "We learn to care in families, and we enlarge our communities of concern as we mature. Caring is the essential democratic act, the prerequisite to voting, joining associations, attending meetings, holding office and all the other ways we sustain democracy."

Stone's writing is frequently published in *The American Prospect*, *The Nation* and the *New Republic*. She is the author of *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*, which won the American Political Science Association's 2002 Wildavsky Award for an Enduring Contribution to Policy Studies, and *The Disabled State*, a classic in the field of disability policy.

Stone is a member of the National Academy of Social Insurance, and has served on advisory commissions for the Social Security Administration and the Human Genome Commission and has been a fellow of the Guggenheim Foundation, Harvard Law School and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Her lecture is hosted by Susan Hasazi, in the College of Education and Social Services, and by the departments of political science and sociology. For more information, call Hasazi at 656-1354.

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Awards and Honors

Mark Starrett, associate professor of horticulture and **Norman Pellett**, professor emeritus of plant and soil science, received the American Society for Horticultural Science Extension Publication Award for their book, *Landscape Plants for Vermont*. The award was presented at the ASHS conference in Rhode Island on Oct. 5. This publication is available through the [Vermont Master Gardener's Program](#).

The **Center on Disability and Community Inclusion** has been awarded a new five-year grant by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, to continue its work with Vermont children and youth with deaf-blindness. The project aims to increase the capacity of state and local agencies to improve outcomes for children with deaf-blindness and their families to live, go to school, play, work and have friends in their communities.

Publications and Presentations

Kathleen Liang, assistant professor of community development and applied economics, organized a symposium, "Teaching Agricultural Entrepreneurship Through Service Learning In Rural Areas," at the 2003 American Agricultural Economics Association conference held in August in Montreal. The symposium discussed opportunities, mechanisms, and challenges for universities and others seeking to develop service-learning curricula for teaching entrepreneurship to youth groups in rural areas. The presenters shared teaching materials, demonstrations, evaluation tools, and interactive discussion. Liang's co-presenter was Paul Dunn, a distinguished professor at the University of Louisiana at Monroe.

Kathleen Liang presented an article at the same conference, "China's International Tourism under Economic Transition: National Trends and Regional Disparities." The paper focused on the changes in the national trends of China's international tourism since 1982 and analyzed the changes in tourism-related factors and disparities by province since 1995. The co-authors are Qingbin Wang and Rong Guo.

Oct. 8 – 14, 2003

Publications and Presentations

Katharine Furney, assistant professor of education, Professor **Susan Hasazi**, and two of their colleagues recently published "A longitudinal analysis of shifting policy landscapes in special and general education reform" in *Exceptional Children*, the quarterly scholarly journal in the field of special education.

Rebecca Gajda, assistant professor of education, reviewed *The Abandoned Generation: Democracy Beyond the Culture of Fear* by Henry Giroux in the Aug. 27 issue of *Teacher's College Record*.

Jane Kolodinsky, professor and chair of community development and applied economics, and **Thomas DeSisto**, research specialist in the Center for Rural Studies, published an article in the *International Journal of Consumer Studies* titled "Understanding the factors related to concerns over genetically engineered food products: are national differences real?" JoAnne Labreque of the University of Montreal also shared authorship of the paper.

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Teaching Honoree Loves Movies, Books, Students

By Lynda Majarian



He doesn't just look tough: English Assistant Professor Todd McGowan's philosophically informed film courses offer students great challenges and rewards. (Photo: Bill DiLillo)

Todd McGowan is a bit embarrassed by the attention generated by his recent Kroepsch-Maurice Award. But the positive buzz this energetic assistant professor of English has created among students and faculty made it almost inevitable he would receive this formal recognition of excellence in teaching.

Less than three years since joining the university to teach both undergraduate and graduate courses in

literature and film, McGowan has established himself as one of the most popular and in-demand teachers and advisors in the English department.

Whether the topic is *Birth of a Nation* or *Basic Instinct*, McGowan's ability to draw students into class discussion is unparalleled. In fact, many undergraduates attest that his is the first class where they've actively participated. "I couldn't help but to voice my opinions," notes one student. Another comments, "When you respect a professor, you are willing to work hard."

And hard work it is. McGowan loads his syllabi with extensive reading requirements and challenges students to form and explain their own interpretations of films and texts. "They have to have a position — any position," he says. "I actually prefer it when they disagree with me, because it shows they are thinking for themselves."

As a philosopher at heart, McGowan laces his lectures with readings and theories posited by Descartes, Hegel and their thoughtful brethren. "I don't know how else I would talk about film," he says. In his science fiction course, for instance, the reading list was comprised solely of philosophical material.

McGowan's forthcoming book from SUNY Press, *The End of Dissatisfaction*, builds on the work of theorists including Jacques Lacan, Slavoj Zizek, Joan Copjec and Theresa Brennan "to explain why the American cultural obsession with enjoying ourselves actually makes it more difficult to do so." He has also just finished writing another text, *Between Desire and Fantasy*, on psychoanalytic film theory.

Heady stuff, but it's balanced by his fervor for his favorite film, the comedy, *Groundhog Day*. Ironically, he jokes, "By watching the film repeatedly, I'm actually perpetuating the theme."

McGowan's mix of intellectual prowess, personality and passion for his subject matter may be one of the keys to his popularity. "Other than reading books and seeing films," he admits, "there's really nothing else I like to do."

He melds complex theoretical concepts with pop culture and contemporary

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[A State Affair](#)

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images that help students relate to their studies. “The day after the California gubernatorial election, I compared Arnold Schwarzenegger’s style to fascism,” he recalls. “That really got a reaction.”

Another secret of McGowan’s success may be the innovative ways he integrates his own experiences into class discussions. In some cases, he *is* the discussion. To illustrate concepts in psychoanalytic theory, for instance, McGowan once had a class psychoanalyze him.

He remained silent while students observed his body language—how he moved in the classroom, gestures, and the like. “The class concluded I had an oedipal complex,” he says, adding that his mother wasn’t thrilled with that evaluation. When he shared her opinion with the students, he says, “they claimed it was evidence their assessment was accurate.”

Overall, McGowan and his pupils have formed a sort of mutual admiration society. “The students here are outstanding,” he says. “Unlike students I’ve taught at other schools, my students at UVM don’t complain about the workload. I actually consider many of them colleagues.”

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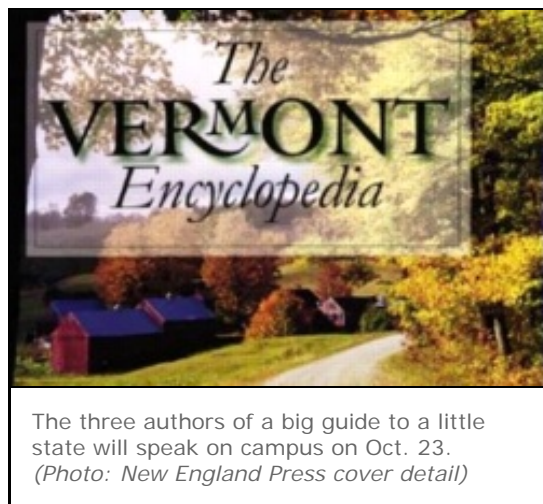
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New Encyclopedia's an Affair of State

By Jon Reidel



The three authors of a big guide to a little state will speak on campus on Oct. 23.
(Photo: New England Press cover detail)

The classic descriptions of Vermont found in the many travel guides attempting to capture the state's essence sound strikingly similar.

"Pervading the area is a distinct rustic charm, a sense of community and a refined elegance that continues to draw tourists and transplants in search of quieter lives more attuned to the rhythms of New England's distinctive seasons," reads one guide. "Scattered

throughout its valleys and foothills are sleepy towns, elegant villages and progressive cities whose economic histories are based on farming and logging," claims another.

There is no mention of some of the state's more substantive achievements and unique characteristics. Travel guide readers do not learn of Vermont's colonial tradition of freezing elderly people in the winter and unthawing them in spring. The state's major contributions to the field of nudism, or that it is home to the elusive fur-bearing trout.

And there is nary a word about the invention of the world-famous Jogbra by three Burlington women, or of the state's formative role in the early automobile industry in the form of the 18 ultra-exclusive Wasps, produced in the 1920's for the mega-rich of the day.

Small state, big reference

Eclectic bits of Vermont history like these, in addition to the more well-known historical contributions of the nation's fourteenth state, form the heart of the recently released *Vermont Encyclopedia*, which was compiled by UVM emeritus professors Sam Hand and Ralph "Harry" Orth and their Johnston State College emeritus colleague John Duffy.

With the help of 140 contributors, primarily experts in their respective fields, Hand, Orth and Duffy, have produced the only modern day encyclopedia on Vermont, and the first in more than 70 years. But unlike the older versions, which focused heavily on the founding fathers and industrial giants of the day, the 2003 edition (which the trio decided to launch in 1999) covers more ground without becoming a study in trivia.

For those interested in how the volume was edited, the three retired professors will give a talk and answer questions from the public on Oct. 23 at 7:30 p.m. at Memorial Lounge, Waterman Building.

The 1,050 entries include all of the traditional figures and events one would associate with Vermont such as Ira Allen, George Aiken, Calvin Coolidge, and the history of the founding of the state in 1777. But the book also includes more recent icons such as Phish, Howard Dean, and Ben & Jerry's. An entry on "Films of Vermont" lists recent flicks like *What Lies Beneath* starring Harrison

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Top Teacher

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Ford and Michelle Pfeiffer, *Me, Myself, and Irene* with Jim Carrey, and *Cider House Rules* with Tobey McGuire.

A number of entries capture significant parts of Vermont history that many people may not be aware of. Entries pertaining to slavery, for example, illustrate Vermont's long-standing anti-slavery tradition, pointing to the state constitution as being the first to include language that made the practice illegal. Another entry tells a story of Ethan Allen encouraging a female slave to sue for her freedom, an unheard of practice at the time.

Eventually, with thousands of entries pouring in over the years, the three editors had to draw the line. Orth says it became difficult to choose which ones to discard. After dividing entries into groups to make sure they didn't leave out any categories such as the environment, for example, they decided they needed to define what made something truly "Vermont," then define the term significant.

"We wanted to create a resource book that would tell you anything you'd want to know about Vermont," Orth says. "We wanted to include all the Vermonters who ever amounted to anything. But we realized that we couldn't include every person who ever did something for the state, so we had to define what significant meant."

Should they include a company like Maypo, for example, which produced the famous cereal in Burlington for many years, but was bought by a larger out-of-state company? Ben & Jerry's was a no-brainer despite being sold to another out-of-state company a few years ago.

Love trumps money

In the end, Orth says the three friends of 30 years were pleased with the final product, especially in light of the fact they produced the tome on the miniscule budget of \$1,500 they received from University Press of New England. With the diverse talents of Orth, a professor of English, Duffy, a professor of humanities and English, and Hand, a UVM scholar who was dubbed the "Dean of Vermont Historians" by the *Rutland Herald*, many of the entries fell within their respective expertise. "We had no secretary, no fact checker, no nothing," Orth says. "Luckily we're all retired, so we had time to do it ourselves. It took us about five years."

None of the professors expect to make money on the book, although they could receive some royalties if sales exceed a certain benchmark. Stacks of the book are currently sitting at the front entrance of Barnes & Noble on Dorset Street. Orth says he wouldn't mind seeing the stacks disappear, but says he knew from the start it was a labor of love.

"We'll eventually have to do an update," Orth says, using Dean's presidential candidacy as an example of an entry needing updating. "It was a lot of fun and we all learned a lot. We're teachers and we believe that learning never ends."

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Survey of Influence

By Jon Reidel



A group of medical students hopes to influence a statewide debate with an Oct. 17 presentation of their survey of doctors' views on physician-assisted suicide. (Photo: Bill DiLillo)

When a group of UVM medical students who had never met each other got together to select a topic for their public health project, currently a graduation requirement for all medical students, they wanted it to have a positive effect on society.

Instead of choosing a simple project that would easily satisfy the requirement, second-year med students Beth Cronin, Alexa Craig, Will Edward, James Metz, Ria Vergara, Logan

Murray and Eric Suess took on one of the most controversial topics facing the Vermont State Legislature: a bill that would legalize physician-assisted suicide.

"We knew it would be a lot of work," Murray says. "But we wanted to do something that would have influence on the outcome of something meaningful."

The influence of the project, overseen by Gail Rose, a research associate in the department of psychiatry, could be profound after the results of a statewide survey of physicians on assisted suicide are presented at the Vermont Medical Society's annual meeting on Oct. 17 in Woodstock. The students have been working on the survey since April and believe they have completed the most comprehensive, unbiased research on the topic.

The advocacy groups Death With Dignity Vermont, Inc., and Vermont Alliance for Ethical Health have already completed two physician polls on the subject. The findings of the two polls were drastically different, with the results supporting the positions of each organization.

The alliance sent out questionnaires to 1,489 Vermont physicians and received a total of 325 responses for a response rate of 23 percent. A response postcard was sent asking, "what is your position on the proposed Vermont Death With Dignity Act (physician-assisted suicide) legislation?" with checkboxes for "I oppose" and "I support." Final results showed that 226 physicians (70 percent) opposed the proposed bill, while 95 (29 percent) supported it, with four undecided.

After writing 74 physicians and following up with phone calls, Death With Dignity found that 45 of them supported the potential legislation. Based on these findings, DWDV decided to poll an additional 1,579 physicians on the subject. After combining the two surveys, the organization found that 242 physicians supported the legislation and 79 opposed it for a 20 percent response rate.

A broader poll

The survey conducted by the UVM medical students was more in-depth in

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terms of the number of questions asked and in the number of responses. Although the results won't be announced until the Vermont Medical Society meeting, Craig said they were less balanced than she expected. Craig and her collaborators were pleased with the response they received: Of the 2,770 surveys they mailed out, 1,052 were returned, more than tripling the number of respondents of either of the other surveys. They also received 15 typed pages of written comments.

"I think the biggest thing in terms of credibility is the number of responses we received," Murray said. "It gives our survey some clout."

Craig said students took the survey one step further by giving physicians seven scenarios in which they were asked if they would support the legal prescription of a dose of medication to a patient. One example asked if they would support physician-assisted suicide for a pulmonary fibrosis patient with less than six months to live. Another scenario asked whether they'd support the procedure for someone with incurable metastatic cancer with pain adequately managed by medication. Physicians could answer the questions by checking the following boxes: definitely not; probably not; uncertain; probably yes; or definitely yes.

Part of the reason for the scenario questions was to give physicians a chance to express how they felt on a number of topics rather than be forced to give a blanket response about physician-assisted suicide that encompasses all illnesses.

"We wanted to know what they thought about different scenarios, because this isn't a black and white issue for any of us," Craig said.

The issue at hand

The bill currently being considered by the legislature would require that patients wanting physician-assistance to die be at least 18 years old; have been given a diagnosis of less than six months to live; and be mentally competent and not depressed. Craig said that given these limited criteria, students felt like there was room to broaden the discussion using the responses of physicians to the scenario questions, and their remarks in the additional comments section.

The student group said that although they've developed some opinions on the subject, they didn't want the final results to be affected by their views in any way. With this in mind, they modeled their survey after ones conducted in other states by organizations that were generally considered unbiased, with the scenario questions coming before the more politically charged ones.

"We wanted to add information to the conversation," Suess said. "We weren't looking for any specific results, we just wanted to have an indirect influence on the discussion. Unfortunately, in this argument people are throwing around facts that are incorrect. We want to provide helpful, factual information."

the view will update this story with the medical students' survey findings after they are made public on Oct. 17.

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Of Darwin and Dribble

Harvard professor and UVM alumnus Peter Ellison visited campus to discuss his creative, wide-ranging work in evolutionary ecology

By Tom Weaver



Harvard professor and UVM graduate Peter Ellison reflects on his evolutionary research during his recent on-campus lecture. (Photo: Bill DiLillo)

Spitting saliva samples into test tubes has become such familiar business to the women of the Congo's Ituri tribe that they have coined one of Swahili's newer phrases — *kazi ya mate*, which is accurately, if indelicately, translated as "spitwork." For Professor Peter Ellison, founder and principal investigator of Harvard University's Reproductive Ecology Laboratory, *kazi ya mate*, a non-invasive, field-friendly way to monitor steroid hormones, has proven

to be an integral part of his lab's multi-faceted, cross-disciplinary research.

Ellison, a UVM alumnus from the Class of 1975, returned to his alma mater on Oct. 9 as part of the President's Distinguished Lecture Series, delivering a talk on "Evolutionary Ecology and Human Reproduction." The event gave the capacity audience in Old Mill's John Dewey Lounge a glimpse of the innovative research and long career of one of the university's most accomplished alumni in academia.

Origin of the academic

"I hated anything scientific," Ellison says during a breakfast interview the day after his talk. The toast and eggs can wait as the professor with the Harvard doctorate in biological anthropology takes the analysis of his high school self a step deeper. "To me it was dry, uninteresting, unimaginative." He confesses to a prep school chemistry course flunked through neglect. Literature and philosophy were Ellison's passions and drew him to St. John's College and the school's great books focused curriculum.

That all changed when he read Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. "It stopped me in my tracks. I had never encountered anything so powerful in my life," Ellison says. Once odious, science became the priority and motivated Ellison and his soon-to-be spouse, Pippi, to seek out the broader options available at a university.

The couple had met in freshman Greek at St. John's and followed similar paths of awakening interest in the sciences. Married at age 21, highly focused on their scientific disciplines, and living in a downtown Burlington apartment above Sheila's Uniform Shop, the undergraduate Ellisons inhabited a world more akin to grad students. They built collegial relationships with faculty, earned their departments' top student awards and graduated Phi Beta Kappa.

Peter Ellison was working on his doctorate at Harvard and Pippi was in graduate school at Brandeis in the mid-1970s during the highly contentious "Sociobiology Wars" swirling around Harvard Professor E.O. Wilson. As

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[Top Teacher](#)

Todd McGowan is a bit embarrassed by the attention generated by his recent Kroepsch-Maurice Award. But the positive buzz this energetic assistant professor of English has created among students and faculty made it almost inevitable he would receive this formal recognition of excellence in teaching.

[A State Affair](#)

The classic descriptions of Vermont found in the many travel guides attempting to capture the state's essence sound strikingly similar. Not so the 1,050 electric entries that comprise a new *Vermont Encyclopedia*, a "labor of love" by two ex-UVM professors and a Johnson State colleague.

[Survey of Influence](#)

When a group of UVM medical students got together to select a topic for their public health project, instead of choosing a simple idea that would easily fulfill the requirement, they took on the highly controversial subject of physician-assisted suicide.

differing perspectives from the social sciences and evolutionary biology went head to head, it was a fascinating time to be a graduate student in Boston's rich academic world. "We weren't polarized by it, but engaged in this debate," Ellison recalls. "We had a wonderful time trying to find a way that the perspectives that each of us was learning to use could be integrated."

Fearsome puzzles

The integration of perspectives across disciplines has been a key part of Ellison's career, the work of his lab, and his 2001 book, *On Fertile Ground: A Natural History of Human Reproduction*. One reviewer wrote of the publication, "Peter Ellison has now turned a fearsome set of data-rich puzzles into a single elegant story."

The same could be said for the professor's talk at UVM, where his skill in front of a class was on display in a wide-ranging presentation examining the evolution of reproductive biology and human health issues across cultures. His research has looked beyond the biology of reproduction to consider how such factors as diet, disease and labor relate to fertility. And his laboratory's studies of Western societies have explored everything from the issue of women who postpone childbirth into their late 30s to the testosterone levels of athletes and sports fans before and after competition. (Of particular interest to the Red Sox and Yankees faithful, Ellison once facetiously said in a National Public Radio interview that fans of a losing team "may have a hard time growing a beard the next morning.")

Distilling his UVM lecture into a "take home message," Ellison referenced the epidemic of obesity in the Western world where sedentary lifestyles have skewed the balance of food intake and activity, "pushing human biology into an area that is really very extreme." He closed with a thought that was equal parts reminder and warning. "The biology we're endowed with is the product of evolutionary history. Procuring food, doing work, forging families — they have sculpted our physiology. Increasingly, we live in a world very far removed from the environments that have shaped us."

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