The Dean’s Corner

Over the past few months, I have developed a greater appreciation for all that the College has to offer. Our devoted faculty, incredible students and amazing alumni consistently raise the stature of the College through the valuable contributions they make in their personal and professional lives. It has been both exciting and humbling to learn all that is going on in the College.

Last fall, we learned that faculty members Kathy Goggin and Kathleen Kilway were named University of Missouri Curators professors. This high honor is shared by 12 other College faculty members in eight different departments.

In 2011, faculty members Christie Hodgen and Clancy Martin were honored with prestigious Guggenheim Fellowships. For two faculty members at the same institution to receive such an award is amazing. They join 2009 recipient Elijah Gowin as recent Guggenheim Fellowship recipients.

Ian Besse and Rebecca Roberts received awards from the National Center for Academic Transformation. Besse and Roberts will redesign our college algebra course to utilize information technologies and decrease educational costs while improving student achievement.

Felicia Londre was elected Dean of the College of Fellows of the American Theater and Joy Swallow was named to the College of Fellows by the American Institute of Architects, both receiving national attention for their outstanding career achievements. Swallow was also presented the President’s Award for University Citizen-Leadership, recognizing her exemplary leadership for the university. And Anthony Caruso was honored with the Presidential Award for Early Career Excellence, which recognizes faculty who exhibit exceptional promise in scholarship, research or creativity in their first seven years.

Our students earned high recognition as well, including Jennifer Nielsen, who received the Chambliss Astronomy Achievement Award for her presentation based on her research as an undergraduate student at the College. Swallow was also presented the President’s Award for University Citizen-Leadership, recognizing her exemplary leadership for the university. And Anthony Caruso was honored with the Presidential Award for Early Career Excellence, which recognizes faculty who exhibit exceptional promise in scholarship, research or creativity in their first seven years.

As with institutions around the country, UMKC is facing budget challenges. Rest assured that we will continue to seek opportunities to reduce costs and to support our students. One of the best ways to support our students is to increase the amount of financial support they receive through scholarships. Your support and financial contributions will help us to achieve our mission of academic excellence.

Dean F. Wayne Vaught
Empowering advice: “Be a duck”

Alumna’s memoir tells of surviving concentration camps and her mother.

One might think that Bambi Shen (M.A. ’76) was born into a charmed life. After all, being the daughter of a high Chinese official has its privileges. Shen’s mother didn’t see it that way, however, and didn’t hesitate to tell her so, even when Bambi was just five years old. “She told me that I was wrong, wrong, wrong.” Shen says. “I was the wrong gender, born at the wrong time, and so ugly that no man would ever want to marry me.”

It’s unfathomable that a mother would say such things to her daughter, but as harsh as it was, this rejection was just one of the many challenges Shen had to overcome. She faced racism in the American South, coped as the single mother of two boys, and having to return to Taiwan after 40 years to take care of her mother—the woman who had treated her with so much contempt her entire life. Shen paints her story in her self-published memoir, The Uncrushable Rose.

Shen’s father was a Chinese diplomat in Saigon when the Japanese took over Vietnam during World War II, and her family was forced into a concentration camp. They were moved from camp to camp throughout the war, and in her book, Shen tells of barbed wire and spotlights, but she returns to the positive in each of her stories, stressing that as diplomats, she and her family felt safe in the camps. Shen describes life after the concentration camps as a gift that she must “live, with purpose, and be a beneficial presence in the world.”

“She told me that I was wrong, wrong, wrong…”

— Bambi Shen

This positive outlook was reinforced by the nanny she had as a child in Vietnam. “She was not an educated woman,” Shen says, “but she’d use things a child could understand. There were times when my mother would yell at me and I’d run to my nanny, crying. My nanny would say, No, no, no. Do like the ducks. When they get out of the water, they shake, and all that dirty water is gone. Shake it off! A duck shaking water I could see, I could understand. How do you tell a child how to let it go when her mother just yelled at her? Be a duck.”

It was important advice, as Shen’s mother yelled at her often. Shen writes in her book that she was born one day after Christmas. “According to my mother, I would always be ‘one day late, one measure short, one beat behind.’” Shen overcame the abuse by “being a duck” and through education. “Even though I was so put down by my mother,” she says, “as far as self-esteem and self-image is concerned, I attribute my courage to knowing that I was a good student. That was the only measuring stick I had, the only measuring criteria. If you are a good student, you are good. That’s the place I could measure.”

Shen carried on her commitment to education, putting the M.A. in French Language and Literature she earned from UMKC to work teaching in a Memphis high school and eventually at the UMKC College of Arts and Sciences. She’s also found success as a businesswoman, public speaker, interpreter and co-founder of a not-for-profit charitable organization.

In her memoir and her life, Bambi Shen embraces the positive. Even the title of the book comes from her time in the concentration camps. “The Uncrushable Rose was a lesson when my father was planting roses in the maximum security concentration camp,” Shen says. “He’d say, ‘The roses are also in this concentration camp, but it makes no difference to them. Their only purpose is to bloom.’”

“The panoply of things you can take is just all over the board.”

— Vicki Walker

It’s a phrase that echoes through every classroom, hallway and office at UMKC. Never stop learning. Former Missouri State Representative Vicki Walker (B.A. ’91) has embraced lifelong learning through what she refers to as “a hidden secret that I’d like not to be:” Communiversity. And she’s been a part of it since the beginning.

“I’m pretty sure it was 1973,” Walker said of her first class at Communiversity. “I remember the guy coming to my house and teaching me how to play the guitar. He actually came to my house.”

Founded in 1970, Communiversity is the largest all-volunteer adult education program in the country. The organization is self-supporting, raising 90 percent of its annual budget and receiving in-kind assistance from UMKC. “It started out as this hippie place where people went to share ideas and skills,” Walker said. “And it was free when it first started. Nobody paid anything, nobody was paid.”

Today, Communiversity offers courses ranging from starting a business or managing your money to topics such as personal fitness, singles support groups or spirituality. From cooking courses to classes in the arts and music, such as blacksmithing, art appreciation, singing and jazz guitar, Communiversity has a class for almost any interest. And Walker and her husband, Mike, have shared a lot of interests through the years.

“I took a Japanese language class, and it was very cool,” Walker said, “but I can’t speak it today. I took a comedy class.

We’ve done massage for couples. The panoply of things you can take is just all over the board. I’ve taken herb classes. I’m taking a fossil class in May, and we’re going to go on a dig.”

The Walkers aren’t just students in Communiversity classes, however. They’re also teachers. Among the courses they’ve offered: politics, ukulele and Vicki’s specialty, sign language.

“It’s a great way to give back, not only to the community but also to a UMKC program,” Walker said. “And anytime you teach something, you also learn something.

Teaching politics…learning to crochet

Hungry to learn? Thirsty to teach? Communiversity might be the answer.

To purchase The Uncrushable Rose, visit uncrushablerose.com.
The Clarence M. Kelley Memorial Scholarship

The Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology’s Clarence M. Kelley Memorial Scholarship honors Kelley’s service and commitment to law enforcement by supporting a UMKC Department of Criminal Justice and Criminology undergraduate student who meets a rigorous set of requirements and is deemed worthy by the scholarship directors.

Kelley (J.L.B. ’40) represented integrity, embraced innovation, and brought pride and professionalism to every organization he served, and the fund helps prepare tomorrow’s law enforcement and correctional leaders to follow in his footsteps.

Walt Bodine Honorary Scholarship in Communication Studies

Known as the “Dean of Kansas City broadcasting,” Walt Bodine took to the airwaves in his first radio job in 1940. In the seven decades that followed, Walt built a legacy of journalistic integrity in both radio and television.

To be awarded to undergraduate students majoring in Communication Studies at the College of Arts and Sciences, the Walt Bodine Honorary Scholarship in Communication Studies was established to honor Bodine’s legacy.

Joy D. Swallow FAIA/AUP+D Scholarship

A scholarship has been established to honor Joy Swallow, chair of the Department of Architecture, Urban Planning + Design (UDP+D), the American Institute of Architects (AIA) named Swallow a 2011 AIA Fellow. The fellowship recognizes her contributions to architecture and society.

The Joy D. Swallow FAIA/AUP+D Scholarship is awarded to a qualified sophomore student majoring in UDP+D or Architectural Studies. “Having the scholarship named in my honor is a culmination of my belief in our future generations,” Swallow said. “Scholarships are a key component to giving all students equal access, recognizing academic excellence, and ensuring student success.”

Dr. G. Tom Poe Scholarship Fund for Outstanding Achievement in Film and Media Arts

Established to honor the contributions of Associate Professor Tom Poe, this scholarship is awarded to undergraduate students majoring in Communication Studies with an emphasis in Film and Media Arts or a minor in Film Studies who meet qualification criteria.

Poe helped develop the College’s Film and Media Arts program, served as chair of Communication Studies at the College, and has played a major role in the Kansas City film community, serving as a film critic on KCUR’s The Walt Bodine Show, as chair of the Kansas City Film Festival, and teaching and presenting at organizations and schools around the metro.

Charles Wurray Scholarship in Chemistry

The Department of Chemistry’s Emeritus Professor Emeritus Charles J. Wurray established the scholarship bearing his name as a way to help UMCKC chemistry majors achieve their goals. The Charles Wurray Scholarship is awarded to undergraduate Chemistry majors with preference given to students with a 3.0 grade point average and demonstrated financial need.

“I had a scholarship when I pursued my bachelor’s degree in chemistry,” Wurray said. “The scholarship is a way for me to give back by helping other chemistry majors achieve their goals.”

Alumnus Matt Ramsey as a Blue Man

“I called them a week before I was heading for New York,” he said. “I called and said ‘Hey, this is Matt Ramsey,’ and before I could finish my sentence, the person on the other end of the line said, ‘Matt Ramsey! I am looking at your headshot right now.’

Ramsey auditioned, completed the company’s training and was accepted as a Blue Man – a rare feat. “It’s hard to find Blue Men,” he said. “We look all over the world and we still have a hard time finding the right combination of musical ability and acting ability. It’s a different style of acting, but the concepts of connection and stage presence and movement and body awareness…that all comes from your classical stage training.”

Ramsey says UMKC played a major role in his success as a Blue Man and as a person. “It’s a product of my training with Dale Rose and (Patricia McIlrath Endowed Chair in Theater Arts, Acting) Tod Sweatt,” he said. “Unless you can partner and listen and be vulnerable and be present with the other people on stage or wherever you are, then you’re not listening and you won’t be a good Blue Man. And that translates to life off the stage, too.”

College Scholarships

On June 12, 2011, our UMCKC family, including many alumni of the College of Arts and Sciences, mourned the unexpected death of one of our most esteemed and beloved faculty members, Dr. Carol Koehler, chair of the Department of Communication Studies.

In informing the College faculty and staff of Dr. Koehler’s death, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Wayne Vaughn, expressed the feelings of so many, writing: “In a world with greater social and political awareness…that all comes from your classical stage training.”

Dr. Koehler’s interests, her greatest passion was the importance of the College’s internship programs, believing that internships provide students with a vital link between theory, practice and professional success. As the Communication Studies Department director of internships, she forged relationships on our students’ behalfs with organizations and businesses throughout the Kansas City area and well beyond. As the internship mentor to so many students, the Kansas City area will continue to reap the rewards of Dr. Koehler’s work for years to come. In recognition of Dr. Koehler’s many contributions to the College of Arts and Sciences and her devotion to the importance of the College’s Alumni Association, the College dedicated a memorial bench outside Haag Hall in her honor.

In addition, the College of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Communication Studies have established the Carol M. Koehler Memorial Internship Scholarship to be awarded to an outstanding student selected in the Communication Studies Internship program.
One brewer’s gonzo journey

Fueled by success and great beer, Jim Caruso (B.A. ’89, M.A. ’90) is on a quest. It’s not a quest for treasure or a new world or anything so tangible. He’s on a quest to inspire — and to find “the edge.”

“I woke up every day energized to find an edge that is interesting and worthy of pursuing, and to go to that edge,” said Caruso, partner and CEO of Flying Dog Brewery. “You have to inspire people to push themselves, because anything interesting in life is right at the edge. And anything on the inside of that is beige.”

Beige, by the way, is not a good thing in Caruso’s world. It’s dull and commonplace. Caruso says his career path exposed him to more than his share of beige, beginning in his early days in a restaurant chain, where he worked his way up to a corporate vice president position.

While Caruso did find this stage of his career to be painfully beige, he admitted it led to opportunity. Through a few savvy business decisions, he cashed-out when the restaurant chain went private. He had an excellent job offer right away, but with his finances in good shape, Caruso said he had a better idea.

“My name had come up with the chair of a company in Denver,” he explained. “They were looking for someone to be president of Vicorp, a $500 million restaurant company. I told them, ‘I’m really determined to go to grad school full time, and I’ll call you when I’m finished.’”

Caruso completed his master’s degree in economics at UMBC, and was considering earning a Ph.D. when he remembered what he had told the company.

“So I called them,” he said. “The guy said, ‘Are you finished with school?’ I told him I was and he asked if I could come out the next day.”

Caruso flew to Denver, and six months later, he was president of Vicorp. When he took control of the corporation, it consisted of more than 230 restaurants worth a total of $870 million, but it was failing. Caruso made aggressive changes that turned the corporation around, but even with that success, in his mind, it was still beige.

He wanted more.

“How you have to inspire people to push themselves…”

– Jim Caruso

Hickenlooper. And he met the trio whom Flying Dog Brewery calls its “Gonzo Godfathers.”

To Flying Dog, gonzo means going beyond traditional beer tastings and pint nights at bars and the brewery. To Flying Dog, gonzo means standing up for what they believe in, and Flying Dog believes in free speech. The brewery has fought—and won—several battles with government censors regarding label wording and beer names.

“You don’t want to insult people,” Caruso said of the brewery’s labeling and free speech fights, “but when you stand for something, it makes the people who believe in you believe in you even more. Hunter Thompson was a great inspiration for that.”

As Caruso avoids the beige and seeks the edge, he says he hopes to inspire others to do the same. But he encourages everyone to find his or her own edge, because, as Gonzo Godfather Thompson said, “The edge… there is no honest way to explain it because the only people who really know where it is are the ones who have gone over.”

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