Two Rice alums comment on communication in other countries

Dave Hokanson and Kristine Moore are more than familiar with the challenges Americans face working abroad. Dave, who received his BS and Masters in Chemical Engineering from Rice in 1977/8, works as a Process Control consultant for ExxonMobil. He lived and worked for three years in Europe and for over a year in Singapore, where he continues to provide consulting services. His enthusiasm for his job stems from the number of friends he has made abroad. He enjoys getting to know the cultures and the people from other countries. Dave’s advice for students who may some day travel for work? “Study up on the place (where you will be working) and do massive amounts of reading. Realize you will make mistakes, but learn from them. Learn about the subcultures of different areas. From the outside it’s easy to say they’re all the same, but there are wide differences.”

Kristine Moore, who received a BS in Civil Engineering from Rice in 1984, is currently a Business Development Manager for Shell International Exploration & Production. She is involved with projects spanning multiple regions, including Europe, West Africa, Russia/Caspian, and the Middle East. She works primarily out of Houston. She designs and facilitates programs for business travelers, company employees and their families to prepare them for life and work overseas. She is also a partner in Intercultural Training Associates, a company that offers similar services.

While ENGI/NSCI 307 will focus on effective communication with engineers from other cultures, her programs typically also include such topics as:

* How the country’s cultural values developed.
* How to adjust to the local lifestyle.
* How to recognize and practice behaviors that develop trust and cooperation in an unfamiliar environment in order to complete the assigned project.

Ute now brings her vast wealth of experience to Rice University. Her main goals for students taking the class are that they:

1. Leave the course with a basic awareness of American culture and how it differs from others.
2. Understand that much of what is to be learned in international relations is practical knowledge.
3. Realize that underlying values, such as trust and honesty, are cultural, not universal.

Dr. Cezeaux observes, “It’s a big world out there. Students need to be consciously aware of the cultural differences in the work world.” 

In order to be successful in the international workplace, Americans working in foreign countries must understand their counterparts: why they work, what motivates them, how they are rewarded, and what their values and priorities are.
Dr. Penny Hirsch Shares Innovative Ideas With Rice Faculty

Penny Hirsch, PhD, Associate Director of the Writing Program at Northwestern University, spent two days at Rice this fall consulting with science and engineering faculty to discuss integrating communication into engineering courses. She also gave a lecture on “Engineering Design and Communication: An Interdisciplinary Approach to First Year Seminars.”

Dr. Hirsch was instrumental in developing an innovative course that introduces first-year students to fundamental aspects of the design process, including creative problem solving, user-centered design, writing, speaking, and graphics. This course is part of Engineering First, a two-year sequence of courses that integrates math, programming, and engineering analysis. Engineering and communication faculty team teach sections.

Dr. Hirsch’s joint appointment with Northwestern’s Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences as well as with Northwestern’s McCormick School of Engineering and Applied Science makes her admirably suited to cross-disciplinary collaborations. She especially enjoys helping students understand the consulting role they play as designers for real clients and adapt for specific audiences in their communication.

In addition to teaching at Northwestern, Dr. Hirsch and a partner run a communication consulting firm that serves clients in engineering, health care and waste management. As a result, her pedagogical approach is informed by her knowledge of best practices in actual workplace communication.

The Cain Project has scheduled a return visit on February 11-14 to give faculty further opportunities to meet with Dr. Hirsch. Please contact Julia Amborski, the Cain Project coordinator, at Ext. 6141 to schedule a consultation.

Sloan Faculty Use Communication Map as Part of New Curriculum Planning

The Cain Project is proud to be part of the new Professional Master’s Degree Program in the Wiess School of Natural Sciences. Degrees are offered in three areas: Nanoscale Physics, Energy Exploration, and Environmental Analysis and Decision Making. The Sloan Foundation sponsors these programs as part of a national initiative.

Graduates are expected to move easily into management careers in consulting or research and development, design, and marketing of new science-based products. The Cain Project will help ensure that graduates are prepared for the communication challenges they will face as interdisciplinary leaders.

As faculty planned the curriculum for each of these tracks in the spring semester 2002, Visiting Professor Rebecca Burnett from Iowa State University created an innovative “map” of possible communication roles and tasks that the Master’s students might perform in industry.

The faculty determined in which courses students would learn about necessary aspects of communication. The map will also function as an assessment tool, helping faculty keep track of curriculum changes and portions of the communication instruction that need to be expanded or refined. Professor Burnett returns periodically to consult with faculty.

As the program progresses, Cain Project instructors will assist with presentation coaching, workshops, and materials development. Julie Zeleznik, an instructor in the Cain Project, and Linda Driskill, Director, are especially interested in the challenges of interdisciplinary communication. Their goal is to ensure that students learn about the special opportunities and problems involved in communicating across fields and in industry.

Dr. June Ferrill, who teaches ENGI 305, New Ventures Communication, and is active in various entrepreneurship activities in the city, will be involved in coaching students for Rice Alliance for Technology and Entrepreneurship’s programs.

New technologies require managers to produce communications once handled by separate professionals. Participants will write project reports and design marketing presentations and research posters suited to their industries or careers. The variety of communication instruction participants will receive should enable the Sloan Master’s graduates to lead through excellence in communication.
The Cain Project offered three types of thesis-writing support this past semester: a Saturday thesis-management workshop, a pilot four-session class for those at the thesis proposal-writing stage, and two semester-long thesis-writing groups. All were led by Cain Project Instructor Jan Hewitt, who was assisted by Janie Hammons, a writing coach from the Cain Project.

**Thesis-management Workshop**
Fifteen students attended the interactive Saturday workshop, open to all graduate students in science and engineering. Speakers included Linda Driskill, Director of the Cain Project; Lindley Doran, Director of the Rice Counseling Center; Dan Wallach, Assistant Professor in Computer Science; and Jan Hewitt. Their topics focused on handling stress; avoiding carpal tunnel problems; and planning, writing, and defending a thesis.

Thesis-writing advice from a student’s perspective came from a panel of three successful graduate students, all of whom had participated in a thesis-writing group: Stephanie Glenn, who received her PhD in Civil and Environmental Science last May; Eric Allen, PhD candidate in Computer Science; and Richard Swartz, who defended his PhD in Statistics in November.

Those attending were enthusiastic about all aspects of the workshop. One student commented, “Great coverage. By far the best workshop I’ve attended in the last 2.5 years here! Thanks!!”

**Proposal-writing Group**
When nearly 50 graduate students applied for the 20 openings in the two thesis-writing groups, the Cain Project offered a short pilot course for the 20 applicants at the proposal-writing stage. The four sessions first gave an overview of the proposal-writing process and then gave detailed suggestions for thinking through the content, organization, style, and order of writing. The students wrote a problem statement, received written feedback, and then rewrote the statement.

**Thesis-writing Groups**
The always popular thesis-writing groups focused on such topics as deciding what to include, deciding what to write first, foregrounding key ideas, organizing the material, explaining rather than simply reporting, reducing wordiness, using passive voice appropriately, writing topic sentences, and adding transitions. The students wrote an abstract, received written feedback, and then rewrote it, checking to see if they had answered the following seven key questions:

* What is the problem you address in your thesis?
* Why is that problem important?
* How does your work fit into the larger scientific/engineering context of your field?

In addition to the weekly group meetings, students met individually with either Jan Hewitt or Janie Hammons to discuss up to 30 pages of manuscript. Three students have already defended; many others expect to finish by May.

Apply Now

**To Join a Spring Thesis-writing Group with Dr. Hewitt**

**WHO:** Any graduate student in science or engineering ready to write a thesis may apply to join a group. A faculty advisor may also submit a student’s name.

**WHEN:** Applications will be accepted between now and Tuesday, January 14, 2003. Classes start the week of January 20.

**HOW:** Send an e-mail to jhewitt@rice.edu with the student’s name, department, e-mail address, and phone extension, along with the advisor’s name and e-mail address. In a few sentences identify the degree sought and where the student is in the writing process. Indicate a preference for a Wednesday class from 4:00 – 5:30 or a Thursday class from 10:30 – noon.

**Note:** Next proposal groups will begin in May and October.
Who’s New at the Cain Project?

Julia Amborski joins the Cain Project as the new Administrative Coordinator. She has a long history with Rice University. A member of Baker College, she graduated from Rice with a BA in Psychology/Sociology in 1991. After graduation she pursued a career in the catering industry but returned to Rice 7 years ago to help establish Rice Catering. In 1999 she accepted the newly created job of Assistant Manager at Cohen House. There, she eventually assumed the duties of the Club Manager. Julia decided to leave the food industry to begin her new position with the Cain Project in July. She brings strong organizational skills, a love of working with people and a firm commitment to Rice. Julia says that working at Rice is like working with one big family. The network of support she has established over the years has proved to be invaluable in her new career. Those clients she worked with in her previous positions at Rice are now the same people she encounters on a daily basis with the Cain Project.

Sharon Gibson-Mainka joined the Cain Project this summer as an Instructional Technologist and Communications Pedagogy Specialist. Sharon has a BS in Professional Writing from the University of Houston-Downtown and a MEd in Instructional Technology from the University of Houston Main Campus.

ACT NOW!

ENGI/NSCI 307 will meet for six weeks on Tuesdays from 7:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m. beginning on January 14, 2003. For more information contact Dr. Ute Cezeaux at Cezeaux@aol.com or visit the course web site at http://www.owlnet.rice.edu/~cainproj/engi307.

Her background in instructional technology will be put to good use as she collaborates with the faculty supported by the Cain Project, assisting them with the design of instructional materials for their course websites, as well as helping them integrate technology into their curriculum.

Prior to joining the Cain Project, Sharon was the Director of User Services for the University of Houston Law Center. She has also taught web design and PowerPoint classes for continuing education programs. She plans to conduct usability studies on instructional web sites for the Cain Project.

Who’s New at the Cain Project?

Julia Amborski

Sharon Gibson-Mainka

Staff Highlights

(Alumni comments... Continued from page 1)

of Shell’s headquarters in The Netherlands with colleagues who represent a cross-section of cultures from all over the world. Some of her most interesting communication challenges arise when leading a team of people who bring a wide range of cultural differences, languages, working styles and behaviors to the group. “It is important to recognize, understand and then determine how to leverage the diverse talents, styles and experiences contained in a multi-cultural team.” She has found that American approaches to leadership and communication often need to be modified to be most effective in other countries. Kristine’s advice? “Learn as much as you can before you go. Seek out people who have lived and worked there before and ask lots of questions... Try to put yourself in the shoes of others. Be curious, sincere, and always keep your sense of humor!”

Both Dave and Kristine encourage students to take advantage of this new course in order to increase their global awareness.

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