Events

Friday, October 1, 5 – 7 pm
First Friday at Five Happy Hour, Common Room, HGS

Monday, October 4
Due dates for dissertations to be considered for award of the Ph.D. in December

Tuesday, October 5, Noon and 4 pm
Wilbur Cross Medalist Lectures
See page 4 for details.
www.aya.yale.edu/grad/wilburcross

Saturday, October 9, 9-10 am – 1 pm
Community Service Day
Meet at HGS

Monday, November 29
Calendar resumes, 8-9 am

Full information on events above:
http://calendar.yale.edu/cal/gsas

New Crop of Graduate Students Arrives on Campus

The Graduate School welcomed its newest students on August 26 with a formal matriculation ceremony. Faculty members and senior administrators streamed into Sprague Hall in traditional academic regalia, heralded by the Yale School of Music Brass Quintet.

University President Richard C. Levin addressed the new students and spoke of his own arrival at Yale as a graduate student more than 30 years ago. He introduced Dean Thomas Pollard, who greeted the students saying, “On this occasion we celebrate the achievements and new responsibilities of each entering graduate student. Your arrival brings new energy to the campus. Your enthusiasm and optimism give us all a lift. Your diverse backgrounds broaden our perspectives. Your fresh ideas and willingness to take risks stir up the intellectual ferment that makes Yale a top research university.

“You are here to discover something important that advances your field. Your goal is to create new knowledge. You want to be the first person on earth to make a key observation or connect the dots in a novel way that provides insights about a question that matters to your field. Your discovery might emerge from creative experiments in the lab, from thinking deeply about a problem in mathematics or philosophy or from studying materials in a library or in the field.”

The Citations, the Graduate School’s co-ed a capella ensemble, performed three songs: Fats Waller’s “Ain’t Misbehavin’,” Sammy Faye’s “I’ll Be Seeing You” and John Paganos’s “Change in My Life.” The 15 current members of the Citations are enrolled in Ph.D. programs that range from Molecular, Cellular, & Developmental Biology; Chemical Engineering; Political Science and Statistics to English.

Following the ceremony, new students and their guests attended a reception in the gardens of the President’s House, where they mingled over iced tea, lemonade and cookies before heading to HGS for a picnic lunch and orientation sessions. Later that afternoon, the Graduate Club and Public Service Fair showcased the many organizations and volunteer opportunities open to graduate students.

Admission to this year’s entering class was extraordinarily competitive, with 10,494 hopefuls vying for 534 places. The new students come from 44 different countries around the globe. Most (318) are from the U.S. The second largest contingent (62) comes from China; 23 students are from Canada; 18 from the U.K.; 15 from India; and 12 from South Korea. They earned their undergraduate degrees at 268 different colleges and universities, including Yale, which supplied 18 of the new students. Harvard, Cambridge, University of Chicago and Tsinghua sent nine each, Yale Berkeley and Princeton, eight each; and Columbia, NYU, Peking University and Oxford, seven each.
Matriculation!
Thursday, August 26, 2010

534 NEW STUDENTS

296 Men
238 Women

403 Ph.D
131 Master

ORIGINS

INDIA 15
S. KOREA 12
UK 10
CANADA 23
CHINA 42
USA 311

PROGRAMS WITH MOST NEW STUDENTS

Combined Programs: BBS 71
Chemistry 36
Engineering & Applied Sciences 30
History 26
Economics 19
Cosmopolitan Perspectives

Fully one-third of all graduate students come from outside the United States. For some newcomers there’s a fair amount of culture shock and for almost all, there are surprises, good and bad (but mostly good).

The Graduate School News asked students from a range of countries for their first impressions. Here are some of the responses, provided by students from Mongolia, Belgium, China and Iran.

Arvin Kakhekhani (Physics) did his undergraduate studies at the University of Tehran. He chose to study in the U.S. “because of the great professors, academic atmosphere and research facilities at universities here. Studying here, you are in an efficient system that lets you be in sync with other scientists and students and use your capabilities and resources in the most constructive way. I experienced studying physics for four years in a system that doesn’t do its best to suppress students’ talents. There are tons of very smart students in Iran working hard to compensate for the bad environment, but here the story is the opposite: the system encourages you to grow.”

Arvin is understandably bit homesick, since he doesn’t expect to be able to go home until he completes his degree, due to single-entry visa restrictions. On top of that, he broke his right elbow falling off a bike soon after arriving, but he remains upbeat and enthusiastic.

“The differences between U.S. and Iran are huge,” he says. Using food as an example of the cultural gap, he noted that before coming to New Haven he had never tasted sushi, Vietnamese noodles, Indian food, burritos, s’mores or avocados. In Iran are huge, “he says. Using food as an example of the cultural gap, he noted that before coming to New Haven he had never tasted sushi, Vietnamese noodles, Indian food, burritos, s’mores or avocados. In addition, Yale offers a program
except for a few research seminars that focus on archival and historical source analysis and not so much on theory.” Students get together informally to talk about the readings, but there’s almost no opportunity to discuss course material during classes.

In addition, Yale offers a program she couldn’t duplicate at home, since “the History of Science and Medicine, as a field, hasn’t really been integrated into the Belgian academic landscape yet.”

Valerie is pleased with her department and happy that it is small. She feels that “people seem to really care for and support each other.”

Valerie has observed that, “Yale takes pride in how easy it is to interact with other people; what always surprises me in the U.S. is how easy it is to interact with others; how you can get people on the street or in a grocery store, how you can easily start talking to a stranger, and this mode of relating to others seems so much more natural! I think Europe (or at least the part I’m from) would definitely have something to learn from the States. The insistent use of people’s first names is also a surprising habit to me.”

On the down side, she finds it difficult to buy fresh groceries without a car and feels a bit frustrated “by the fact that I can’t walk alone at night.”

One of the unexpected pleasures of life in New Haven for Valerie is “seeing squirrels everywhere on my way to class, jumping down trees, crossing the streets carelessly, nibbling acorns on the sidewalk!” They are untamed and virtually invisible in Belgium and France.

Liangbin Cai (Computer Science), who is from China, reports that his “first impression of New Haven is that this place is so beautiful and so green. The architecture of Yale, the greenery, the blue sky, all of those things attract me a lot.” He’s concerned that his program is small, but he’s made a lot of friends and found the orientation activities “very helpful and exciting, especially the social activities.”

He was surprised by the overwhelming number of extracurricular options open to him, saying, “the opportunities and activities offered by the university are so much better and diverse than at home.”

Liu Siyu (Statistics), “Obviouly, everything is quite different from in China. When I went to the very first class, I did not expect students to be as diverse as I saw. There were students from different races, countries, grades and majors sitting in one classroom. During the class, professors encouraged students to challenge them, which inspired students in a very positive way.”

Outside of the classroom, he has noticed other differences, too. “Although New Haven is a small city, I am able to be exposed to American food, Indian food, Thai food, Mexican food, etc. There are plenty of social activities, like the block party at the OSS, where I talked with a New Haven policeman. I got to know their real life might not be as cool as it thought from seeing Hollywood movies. Rather, it is bravery and a sense of responsibility that drive them to protect the city. Hearing these stories and observing the differences between life here and in China gave me a breath of fresh air. I am really enjoying studying at Yale.”

http://www.graduate.yale.edu/students/
Thomas D. Pollard, M.D., Sterling Professor of Molecular, Cellular & Developmental Biology, and professor of Molecular Biophysics & Biochemistry and Cell Biology, became Dean of the Graduate School on July 1.

After completing his M.D. at Harvard Medical School, Pollard did an internship in internal medicine and then fulfilled his military service doing basic research at the National Institutes of Health. During this time he “discovered several interesting things about cellular movements” that changed the course of his life. He originally intended to pursue a career in neurology, but friends at Johns Hopkins University and later directing the first Department of Cell Biology at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, where he was also the inaugural director of the Graduate Program in Cellular and Molecular Medicine. He spent nine summers teaching and later directing the MBA. Pollard did an internship in internal medicine and then fulfilled his military service doing basic research at the National Institutes of Health. During this time he “discovered several interesting things about cellular movements” that changed the course of his life. He originally intended to pursue a career in neurology, but friends at Johns Hopkins University and later directing the first Department of Cell Biology at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, where he was also the inaugural director of the Graduate Program in Cellular and Molecular Medicine. He spent nine summers teaching and later directing the "Phylogeny Course," a research course for graduate students and postdocs that has been offered continuously since 1992. From 1997 to 2001, he was president of the Sloan Kettering Institute for Biological Studies and adjunct professor at the University of California, San Diego. And then, at the urging of faculty friends at Yale, including three of his former graduate students—Enrique De La Cruz, David Rimm and John Sinard—and former post-doc (Mark Mostoller), he came to New Haven in 2001.

Pollard started his busy day in his lab on Science Hill, where he and his team use biochemical, biophysical and cellular methods to study cellular motility and cell division. He teaches a popular undergraduate course in cell biology and a graduate course in biochemical and biophysical methods. The second edition of his textbook Cell Biology (with William C. Earnshaw) was published in 2007.

His research earned him the 2004 E.B. Wilson Medal from the American Society of Cell Biology and the 2006 Gairdner International Award (with Alan Hall of Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center) for “discovering the molecular basis of cellular motility and the mechanism of its regulation.” Information critical to our understanding of embryonic development, the spread of malignant tumors in our bodies, and how humans defend against infections. Pollard is a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the National Academy of Sciences and the Institute of Medicine. The Dean serves as a president of the American Society for Cell Biology and of the Biophysical Society and chaired the Commission on Life Sciences of the National Research Council of the National Academy of Sciences. For more than two decades he has provided leadership in his scientific societies in advancing research and generating excitement and energy that you will need to reach your goals.

To begin, each of you should ask the question: why am I here in graduate school? The answer for scholars is that you are here to discover something important that advances your field. Your goal is to create new knowledge. You want to be the first person on earth to make a key observation or connect the dots in a novel way that provides insights about a question that matters to your field.

The academic community rewards explorers, those who find something new where others have failed to look or failed to appreciate what they were observing. Ideally your discovery will have growth potential, so you can use your discovery to build your career, and as you and others can drive knowledge in your field to a higher level.

But you will ask, how can I discover something important? My advice is to start with a good question—
Wilbur Cross Medalists

The Wilbur Cross Medal, the Graduate School's highest honor, will be awarded to five outstanding academicians: former Dean Jon Butler, Stephen Greenblatt '64 B.A., '69 Ph.D. (English), Fred I. Greenstein '60 Ph.D. (Political Science), Timothy J. Richmond '75 Ph.D. (Molecular Biophysics & Biochemistry), and Paul Wender '73 Ph.D. (Chemistry).

Each of the alumni medalists will give a public lecture, meet with current students and faculty, and attend a festive dinner hosted by Dean Thomas Pollard and the Graduate School Alumni Association on October 5.

STEPHEN GREENBLATT

Greenblatt is the Cogan University Professor of the Humanities at Harvard University. One of the world's leading literary scholars, he is an author of 13 books, including Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare and Marvellous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World. Greenblatt is general editor of The Norton Shakespeare and The Norton Anthology of English Literature, 8th edition, and former president of the Modern Languages Association. "Greenblatt has shaped a generation's methodology and put literary's relation to culture and history at the center of interdisciplinary debate in the Humanities," says Langdon Hammer, professor of English and American Studies. "It would be hard to name another literary scholar of comparable width and deep influence in the American academy over the past thirty years."

According to David Scott Kastan, the James B. Duke Professor of English, Greenblatt 'pioneered what has come to be called the New Historicism, a 'recontextualization of traditional critical practices that has moved literary studies over the last quarter century toward a subtle understanding of how literature engages the historical world in which it is written and read.'"

"Through the force of his writing, as well as his charisma as a teacher and speaker, Stephen Greenblatt has achieved the fame and status of a public intellectual. He has worked to save the lives of scholars at risk in countries beset by war or political intolerance. He has also reflected hard on the state of his own profession, on its publishing or贫穷 policies in a time of contracting academic publishing," wrote David Quin, the Sterling Professor of English in his nominating letter.

FRED I. GREENSTEIN

Greenstein, professor emeritus of politics at Princeton University, has been a leader in the field of political science. In the course of his career, he taught at Yale (1959–66 and 1982–87), Harvard (1966–69 and 1971–76), and Princeton, where he taught for many years and served as the director of the Research Program in Leadership Studies at Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School. He held several leadership roles in the International Society of Political Psychology and served as its president in 1996–97.

Greenstein's 10 books include Leadership in the Modern Presidency, the eight-volume Handbook of Political Science (with Nelson W. Polsby), The Presidential Difference: Leadership Style from FDR to Clinton and The George W. Bush Presidency: An Early Assessment. "One of the most distinguished alumni of the Yale Political Science Department, Greenstein has been a major contributor to the systematic study of political psychology and its application to presidential decision-making and leadership," says Peter Swenson, the Charlotte Marion Saden Professor of Political Science. "In the study of politics, possibly nothing is more important than the subject of leadership. In recent times, no one in American political science has given more life to that subject than Fred Greenstein. Where does leadership come from? What has it been? What could it be? What should it be? These have been Greenstein's questions."

TIMOTHY J. RICHMOND

Richmond has been a professor at ETH Zurich's Institute for Molecular Biology and Biophysics since 1987. Genomic DNA is packaged in chromatin, which plays a fundamental role in the regulation of gene activity. Richmond is best known for defining the classic structure of the nucleosome, a subunit of chromatin composed of a short length of DNA wrapped around a core of histone proteins. His work provides a basis for understanding decades of biochemical, physical and genetic studies of chromatin.

"I believe that Tim Richmond combines skill and creativity in both x-ray crystallographic and biochemical approaches to understanding macromolecular assemblies at a level that is not exceeded by any other laboratory," wrote Nobel Laureate Thomas Steitz, the Sterling Professor of MB & BB at Yale. "His focus has been to establish the atomic structures of large macromolecular assemblies, particularly those involved in protein-DNA complexes and to relate these structures to the biological processes of chromatin assembly and transcription regulation. These structures are vital to understanding the structure of chromosomes and how this packaged storage form of DNA can be activated to allow the expression of the genes it encodes."

Richmond's many honors include membership in the Academy Europe, the National Academy of Sciences and the Deutsche Akademie der Naturforscher. He was awarded the Louis-Jeanne Prize in Medicine in 2003 and the Marcel Benoist Prize in 2006 for his contribution to elucidating the structure of nucleosomes, the basic building blocks of chromosomes, at an atomic level.

PAUL WENDER

Wender is the Francis W. Berkshire Professor of Chemistry at Stanford and a world leader in the field of “green chemistry” — chemistry with a minimum of impact on the environment—and “function-oriented synthesis,” which has made major contributions to interdisciplinary research, especially in chemo-therapy.

"Paul Wender has exhibited extraordinary creativity in the synthesis of complex natural products, often using remarkable transformations that introduce much structural complexity into one step," says William L. Jorgensen, the Sterling Professor of Chemistry. "On a personal side, Paul is a model scientist with the highest standards and integrity."

Wender began his career as a synthetic chemist, with a special expertise in "the most daunting molecular architectures to be presented by the natural world," wrote Gary Bradvág, the Eugene Higgins Professor of Chemistry. "Wender continues today as perhaps the world’s pre-eminent molecular architect for complex molecular assembly. In so doing, his name has become synonymous with molecules such as taxol, phorbol, resiniferatoxin and a host of others that inspire awe in every laboratory concerned with synthesis."

His concept of "the Ideal Synthesis" has "inspired generations of chemists to design remarkable chemical transformations that achieve complex structure instantaneously. There is not a serious graduate course on chemical synthesis, probably world-wide, that does not feature Professor Wender’s chemistry," wrote Scott J. Miller, the Inénnane du Pont Professor and Chair of Chemistry, in his letter of nomination. "A member of the National Academy of Sciences and a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Wender has also won teaching prizes at Stanford.

WILBUR CROSS

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STUDENT RESEARCH

British Merchant-Adventurers in China

Jessica Hansen’s research explores the political and commercial links between Britain and China in the second half of the 18th century through the misadventures of two British merchants, both named George Smith.

Although scholars sometimes confound the two, they were, in fact, very different. One Smith lived illegally in Portuguese Macao and loaned money at exorbitant interest rates to cash-strapped Chinese businessmen, moving silver through the East India Company’s treasury between Canton, India and across the Indian Ocean as far as Bengal until he died in 1791, “Jessica says. In 1768, he volunteered to return to India where he lived out his days as a Chinese interpreter. The other Smith was responsible for firing the salute. The gunner. So George Smith managed to cause by bad loans. The other Smith was a trader who settled in Macao and later in Bengal and trafficked in pepper, cotton, tea, camphor, opium and other goods within India and across the Indian Ocean as far as China. His troubles began in 1784, when the private ship he hired, the Lady Hughes, was seized by Chinese authorities.

Jessica says, but it was extremely conscious of potential breaches in security. China and Britain had no official diplomatic relations until 1792. It was illegal for foreigners to reside permanently in China. It was illegal for them to learn to speak Chinese. Whatever dealings the Smiths had with local merchants was done through interpreters.

The Qian dynasty emperors, who ruled from 1644 to 1911, were not anti-foreigner per se, and employed a number of European Jesuits in their court to advise on astronomy, for instance, but they were concerned that foreigners running around freely in China might cause disturbances, and that their congregation with native Chinese might lead to rebellion or social and cultural unrest. On the other hand, “there was a lot of money to be made quickly,” she says, so men like the Smiths took risks and willingly faced obstacles in the hope of making their fortune.

Foreign businessmen were permitted to trade in China, but only in Canton and only during a specific “trading season.” After that, they had to leave the country. The tensions that would ultimately lead to the Opium Wars were always just beneath the surface. “This period was a prelude to the violent imperial actions that followed,” she says. “It troubles me that at the micro-level, individual desires for wealth and status—or even a comfortable living—driven people to do awful things, with huge consequences.” By following the lives of two men, her project aims to demonstrate how the economic and social motives of individuals drove major developments like international commerce, global capitalism and imperialism in the early modern (1500–1800) period.

Jessica says. “It troubles me that at the micro-level, individual desires for wealth and status—or even a comfortable living—driven people to do awful things, with huge consequences.” By following the lives of two men, her project “aims to demonstrate how the economic and social motives of individuals drove major developments like international commerce, global capitalism and imperialism in the early modern (1500–1800) period,” she says. Entrepreneurial British traders influenced politics back in Britain in the process of developing British-Chinese relations, while trying to make money for themselves, she points out.

Jessica came to Yale intending to do her dissertation on a topic that involved Germany and England, but Jonathan Spence, the Sterling Professor of History (now Emeritus) said something in an undergraduate lecture she attended that piqued her curiosity. He mentioned that little was known about the 18th century trade in China and the relationship between Britain and China in the years leading up to the Opium Wars, and she realized that she wanted to explore that unknown territory.

At the time, she knew no Chinese: a serious disadvantage for someone intending to read obscure primary sources stored in Taiwanese and Chinese archives. She sat in on William Zhou and Jianhua Shen’s first-year language classes, and later spent a year studying in Taiwan. She studied ancient (classical) Chinese with Pai Keulemann, a professor of East Asian Languages and Literature, and is currently taking what she calls “an amazing Chinese contemporary literature class” with Professor Su Wei.

“Probably one of the greatest resources I have had at Yale is the Chinese language department. I don’t believe a foreigner can ever truly master Chinese,” she says, but her skills are considerably stronger now than when she first came to campus.

The University’s libraries have also proven to be rich resources for her project. The Reinkele Rare Book and Manuscript Library’s collections include a journal written by another young private trader who lived in India and sailed to China during the period she is studying, as well as a manuscript copy of Lord Macartney’s Journal, written before and during his mission as Britain’s first-ever ambassador to China. Access to these materials is “amazing,” she says. In addition, the East Asian Collection in Sterling Memorial Library has many volumes of Chinese Imperial documents that are helping her tease out the historic relationship between China and the British Empire, and she is especially happy to have access to a microfilm copy of the East India Company’s China Factory Records (the originals are available in the British Museum). Her advisor is Keith Wrightson, the Randolph W. Townsend Jr. Professor of History. “He has been incredibly supportive and encouraging throughout the long and sometimes arduous Ph.D. process,” she says. “I couldn’t have asked for a better advisor.”
The Amadeus Basin is proper Outback. Kangaroos, no clouds, dried-up rivers (a sure bet for firewood), and a red Mars-like landscape. The sedimentary rocks of the Amadeus are beautifully exposed in the McDonnell Ranges that run east and west of Alice Springs with dramatic gaps and gorges—the ideal targets for geological exposures. Because the strata dip almost 90° (that is, vertically instead of horizontally), the geologic record can be seen in essentially its true thickness as you traverse. It’s basically like seeing the basin in cross-section.

To reach the study site, they travel by 4x4—and change tires a lot, due to the rough terrain. They camp “in the middle of nowhere, right on the outcrop or close by, when we can,” be says. Camping is primitive, either with tents, or — weather permitting — directly under the bright constellations of the Southern Hemisphere.

The researchers drill out finger-sized cores using a modified commercial chain saw. “We slide a sheath with a compass and a sundial over the drilled core, to document the orientation of the core. We collect hundreds of cores in the field and then measure them over the course of several months in the lab. At Yale we are able to measure many more samples than the average paleomagnetic lab because we have an automated sampling—changing-system — a Caltech—designed conveyor belt that measures 180 samples with the push of a single button.”

Scrambling over boulders in the wilderness is not without its dangers. As an undergraduate, Ross did fieldwork in the Amadeus basin, but in rocks a few hundreds of meters below his current research area and almost 300 million years older.

“The field season was very productive, but an accident occurred which cost me half of my right thumb,” he recalls.

“We had spent several days working on the slope in, ironically, Ross River. At a section where all fires were required, I was searching out a left foothold when a tornado-sized boulder hit me and rolled towards me. Luckily I had a small half to my right, so I was able to pivot my body out of the way as the whole thing came loose. Unfortunately my right hand did not get out of its handhold in time. Nick [Princeton graduate student Nick Swanson-Hysell] wisely had chosen his own path up the slope and was luckily far from the trajectory of the loose rock that would have otherwise surely taken his life. Nick quickly bandaged what was left of my thumb and the two of us started our descent down to the anchor, while the strata of adrenaline, I was sure-footed. We only had a two-hour drive west to the Alice Springs emergency room. Had the accident happened in our previous locality, we would have been a half-day’s drive away. My operation in Alice Springs went well, and we even got a little more fieldwork done afterwards.”

Back in New Haven, Taylor is currently processing the last of Evans’ archived samples from the Flinders Ranges of South Australia. His findings should resolve just how fast the Early Cambrian rotation took place—“a definitive test of rapid 17°,” says Ross.
Yale researchers have discovered the mechanism that allows one antidepressant to take effect in hours, rather than in the weeks required for most antidepressants currently on the market. The findings were described in the August 20 issue of the journal Science, and graduate student Nanxin Li (Psychology) was first author.

The Science article, “mTOR-Dependent Synapse Formation Underlies the Rapid Antidepressant Effects of NMDA Antagonists,” describes observations made by Nanxin and his lab colleagues (including Neuroscience graduate student Jason M. Dwyer), showing that the drug ketamine acts on a pathway that rapidly produces new synaptic connections between neurons—a process known as “synaptogenesis.” In addition, they were able to pinpoint a critical enzyme in the pathway, mTOR, which controls protein synthesis necessary for new synaptic connections. These findings may speed development of a safe, rapid and easy-to-administer ketamine-like drug, but without the side effects and abuse potential.

In a related achievement, Nanxin won the Albert Bandura Graduate Research Award, given by Psi Chi—the international honor society in psychology—in conjunction with the Association for Psychological Science (APS), for the best overall research in the field of psychology. The prize recognizes his work on the ketamine project as written up in his paper, “Rapid antidepressant effects of ketamine: role of vascular endothelial growth factor.”

Nanxin and his colleagues work in the lab of Ronald S. Duman, the Elizabeth Mears and House Jameson Professor of Psychiatry and Pharmacology. Duman is Nanxin’s dissertation advisor and senior author of the article. The team found that ketamine not only quickly ameliorates depression-like behaviors but actually restores connections between brain cells damaged by chronic stress.

“It’s like a magic drug—one dose can work rapidly and last for seven to 10 days,” says Duman.

Ketamine has been used as a recreational drug, known as “Special K” or sometimes just “k,” as a means to treat people with suicidal thoughts, a benefit usually not seen until weeks of treatment with traditional antidepressants.

Its clinical use has been limited, however, because it has to be delivered intravenously under medical supervision and in some cases can cause short-term psychotic symptoms. It has also been used as a recreational drug, known as “Special K” or sometimes just “k.” Nanxin earned his B.S. in psychology at Peking University in China.

“I am extremely pleased with my experience here at Yale,” he says. “I am deeply indebted to my dissertation advisor Ronald Duman, my DGS Susan Nolen-Hoekema, my lab mates and colleagues in the Division of Molecular Psychiatry of the Medical School and in the Behavioral Neuroscience Program of the Department of Psychology.”

Nanxin’s wife Wei Zhang is also a graduate student at Yale. Her field is Cell Biology.
Outstanding Alumni

Owen Williams

Owen Williams (Ph.D. 2005, History) took office as president of Transylvania University this past summer. He is the twenty-fifth president of the 230-year-old liberal arts college in Lexington, Kentucky.

“Owen Williams was the presidential search committee’s unanimous choice from a sizable pool of exceptionally qualified candidates,” said William T. Young Jr., chairman of Transylvania’s Board of Trustees.

“His educational background, his managerial experience, his ability to relate to people of differing backgrounds, his drive, curiosity and enthusiasm, and his dedication to an excellent liberal arts education are all factors that influenced our decision."

Williams, 58, earned an A.B. in philosophy from Dartmouth College in 1974, an M.A. in intellectual history from Cambridge University in 1976, and then spent 24 years on Wall Street as director of the government bond department at Salomon Brothers, executive director at Goldman Sachs and chairman of Bear Stearns Asia. He lived and worked in Tokyo for more than a year and spent three years in Hong Kong.

A decade ago, Williams enrolled at Yale to prepare for a second career. While earning his Ph.D., he also completed an M.S.L. degree at Yale Law School in 2007, where he was an articles editor for the Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities and coeditor of the Yale Legal History Forum. His dissertation, advised by Daniel Blumenthal, “Unequal Justice Under Law: The Supreme Court and America’s First Civil Rights Movement, 1877-1887,” examined the ways in which the United States Supreme Court impaired African Americans’ access to justice, voting booths and public spaces after the Civil War. With Peter H. Hinks and John R. McKitrick, he edited The Encyclopedia of Antislavery and Abolition (Greenwood Press) and has published articles and book reviews in several journals.

Williams’ honors include the Raoul Berger Legal History Fellowship at Harvard Law School in 2008, the Samuel Goleib Fellowship in Legal History at New York University School of Law and the Fletcher Jones Fellowship at the Huntington Library. At Yale, he held the Fletcher Jones Fellowship at the Library of Congress to finish researching and writing the book, which evolved from his dissertation, “Spectacles of Conscience: Christian Nonviolence and the Transformation of American Democracy, 1914-1956.” The dissertation was awarded the 2005 Allan Nevins Prize from the Society of American Historians as the best-written dissertation in the field of American history. Jean-Christophe Agnew was his advisor and Jon Butler and Michael Denning were on his committee.

“Act of Conscience is truly groundbreaking,” says Agnew. “No one before Kip Kosek had grasped the degree to which the movement—culture of the Fellowship of Reconciliation—its transnational, nonviolent and intercessory practice of fellowship—had remodeled the Social Gospel in such a way as to infuse the Civil Rights movement with a new and morally energizing ethos of civil disobedience. And, the book’s a great read!”

Francisca Bleichert

Francisca Bleichert (Ph.D. 2010, Genetics), a Miller Postdoctoral Fellow at U.C. Berkeley, was one of three recipients of this year’s Stanford Biochemistry Founders’ Award for Doctoral Excellence. She was invited to speak on her research at the scientific symposium convened in connection with the award. Her talk was titled “A dimeric structure of archaial methylation guide ribonucleoproteins.”

At Yale, Bleichert studied ribosomes in Susan Baserga’s lab. Ribosomes are the factories that synthesizes proteins within cells. Ribosomes contain many chemical modifications in their nucleic acid components, the RNAs. These modifications are added by small RNA-protein complexes. One such RNA-protein complex (rnp) guides and carries out the methylation (addition of a methyl group) of ribosomal RNA during the synthesis of ribosomes. In the process of doing that, it also helps the ribosomal RNAs fold into the correct structure.

“We have used electron microscopy to directly visualize these methylation-guide rNPs for the first time and were able to determine their three-dimensional structure,” she explains. “The structure—surprisingly—shows that methylation-guide rNPs are assembled quite differently from what had been assumed previously, and it suggests new ways in which they perform their function.”

Before coming to Yale, Bleichert earned her M.A. from the University of Leipzig, Germany.

Mary Ann Carolan (Ph.D. 1989, Italian), respectively. The GSAA Executive Committee will also continue the enjoyed advice of Immediate Past Chair Carlos Riobo (Ph.D. 1998, Spanish and Portuguese). With this able new leadership and an additional voting member, the GSAA looks forward to an exciting year of working with alumni and serving the broader Graduate School community.

In order to accomplish its mission, the GSAA forms a number of committees, each with specific mandates. Our Communications Committee seeks the best ways to communicate with alumni across the globe, overseeing our newsletter column and website, as well as looking into the possibility of a GSAA presence on social-networking sites. It also advises the GSAA and Graduate School on communications with alumni.

Our Regional Outreach Committee works to create a strong alumni presence in local areas and encourage alumni to participate actively in local Yale clubs, ensuring that the unique Graduate School perspective is included among the other voices of Yale alumni. In addition, the Regional Outreach Committee hopes to encourage Graduate School alumni participation, already not insignificant, in the Global Day of Service.

This year, we will also be reaching out beyond mother Yale through our newly formed Best Practices and Standards Committee, which hopes to form relationships with the graduate alumni boards of other Ivy Plus schools. Finally, in every year, six members of the GSAA will serve on the Wilbur Cross Medal Selection Committee along with the Dean and four members of the faculty. In November, the GSAA will meet in New Haven. While our primary focus is alumni, the GSAA also looks forward to interacting with current graduate students, faculty, administrators and alumni of other Yale schools. This year, we especially look forward to working with Tom Pollard, the new Dean of the Graduate School.

This is certainly true for those of us on the Graduate School Alumni Association (gsaa), as we gear up for another year as well.

This year, the gsaa will be chaired by Rahul Prasad (Ph.D. 1987, Engineering) with the help of Vice-Chair Valerie Hotchkiss (Ph.D. 1999, Medieval Studies). This year’s Secretary and Treasurer are Anthony Sabatelli (Ph.D. 1984, Chemistry) and Thomas Pollard, dean; Gila Reinstein, editor; Bjorn Alkemade, design, production; Yale PFP, production supervision; Michael Marlandl, Harold Shapira, photography.