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Writing for The Square,
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A Slam Dunk for Poets

In their first year as an official university club, the NYU Slam Poetry Team, SLAM! at NYU, won the national championships at the College Union Poetry Slam Invitational last fall. (For the uninitiated, slam poetry is a more physical, emphatic version of poetry reading, with roots in theater and rap.) Team members includeFake Guillermo (GAL ’14), Arianna Barin (TSA ’14), Sofia Eilhii (GAL ’13), Joseph Asmodi (TSA ’13), Connor Sampson (TSA ’13), and Eric Silver (CAS ’13). Coached by alumnus Stephanie Hultsma (TSA ’11) and former GSA advisor Brian Dilton, the young poets held forth on such varied subjects as small bunnies, overpowering mothers, sandwiches, and issues of race and identity. In one poem, Barnes told how her aunt had passed away the year before; “It isn’t,” she said, “It isn’t, meet at the ocean, where I am no longer brown girl…where you are no longer passing for anything. The salt of the Pacific may burn a bit, but Gina—it’s just the skin.”

Music education

by Eileen Reynolds / GSAS ’11

Students at the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development are giving a whole new meaning to the term “world music”—by collaborating with artists in live concerts that span multiple continents. Each semester, graduate students in the Collaborative Projects in the Performing Arts course team up with international partners to develop works incorporating music, video, and movement designed to be performed simultaneously in New York and sites from Florence to Abu Dhabi. The performances require a bit more than Skype: An advanced networking platform called InterNet2 allows streaming video to be rapidly transmitted across the Earth, and the JackTrip audio conferencing system ensures that performers can hear one another clearly, without feedback or even a half-second delay. John Gilbert, who teaches the course with Tom Beyer (GAL ’98, STEINHARDT ’06), says, “It’s a little bit like putting on a TV production or a rock show.” Some students show up on the first day of clasnot knowing how to set up a tripod but, by the end of the term, Gilbert says that they’re comfortable enough with the high-tech audiovisual equipment to switch between camera angles and even apply visual effects to streaming video in real time.

In April, students in the NYU Abu Dhabi new music ensemble, led by Celina Chang (STEINHARDT ’11), joined Gilbert and Beyer’s students in an InterNet2-powered concert with additional performers in London and South Korea. And this fall, Chaleri and Gilbert are co-teaching a collaborative course from their respective campuses. Chaleri has also arranged for students in Abu Dhabi to take classes, workshops, and even weekly private lessons with more than a dozen instructors who teach via Internet from a studio at Steinhardt. Guitar instructor

A SOLAR LAMP IN EVERY HOME

Anyone who’s ever burned a kerosene lantern knows that the flames can be nonexistent and the smoke a constant annoyance. And yet millions of Africans rely on those polluting lanterns to cook by, study by, and generally live by. That may soon change.

Last April, a group of NYU Abu Dhabi students won a $1 million grant in the 2012 Hult Global Case Challenge (with partners SolarAid, One Laptop per Child, and Habitat for Humanity) for their plan to replace one million kerosene lanterns with solar lamps starting in Kenya, moving on to Uganda and Tanzania, and eventually some 40 countries across Africa. The solar lamps, designed by SolarAid, have been fitted with a battery that can be easily removed and replaced by users—a feature that the NYU Abu Dhabi students pushed for. Competing against 4,000 other teams, the multinational team of students—NYUAD juniors Madhav Vaidyanathan, Songyishu Yang, Muhammad Arwa Idam, and Gary Chien, and Neil Parmar (GSA)—aimed to help SolarAid in its mission to eradicate the kerosene lamp from Africa by 2020.

The NYU team wanted to create a model that would also provide for maintenance and involve the local jewel (the Swahili version of a handyman). As such, the residents will purchase the lamps through incremental payments and will repair locally. “I really believe that charity is not a solution,” Islam says. “The rural people of Africa need to be the architects of their own development. They are the ones who will actually purchase [the lamp], own it, cherish it.”

CHESS CHAMPS

With no coach, no international recruits, and no scholarships, the NYU Chess Team is definitely an underdog in the competitive chess world. However, in December at the Pan-American Intercollegiate Team Chess Championship, NYU was among the final four who qualified to compete for the President’s Cup. Rounding out the finalists were: the University of Texas at Dallas, the University of Maryland Baltimore County, and Texas Tech, who went on to win the April competition. Even if the ultimate prize eluded NYU, team captain Evan Rosenbery (CAS ’10, STEINHARDT ’11, ’12) notes that they “surprised a lot of people.” And he’s confident about the team’s chances for next year because, he says, “You will never sit down and play the same game of chess twice.”

In brief

Over age 60. Lynn Videla, dean of the Silver School of Social Work, says she has a key reason along with the one-child policy that Chinese authorities are prioritizing social work: “China is a rapidly aging society, and an unintended effect of the one-child policy is that there’s an elderly,” Videla explains. “There’s hopes of attracting young people to say this is a key reason, along with also a shortage of women for young babies are born than female.”

The NYU Abu Dhabi students’ project demonstrates a traditional reading, with roots in theater and rap.) During the competition, held at California’s University of La Verne, NYU beat out 45 other teams with gripping and candid performances.

This year’s SLAM! At NYU members included Kate Guenther (GAL ‘11), co-director of the NYU-ECNU Collaborative Projects in the Performing Arts and Gilbert are co-teaching a collaborative course from their respective campuses. Chaleri has also arranged for students in Abu Dhabi to take classes, workshops, and even weekly private lessons with more than a dozen instructors who teach via Internet from a studio at Steinhardt. Guitar instructor
by Eileen Reynolds / GSAS ’11

A NEW REVIEW RAISES BROWS HIGH TOWARD VIDEO GAMES

by Renée Alfuso / CAS ’06

A facetrounced in video games since he first played Atari at the age of 7—but now, as a scholar of the medium, he can honestly tell his wife that all that time spent on the couch with a game console in his hands counts as research. A visiting assistant professor of media, culture, and communication at the Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development, Lebovitz recently founded The New Review of Video Games, an online magazine dedicated to taking electronic play seriously. The magazine, which provides a wide, curious, intelligent but unfettered reexamination of the field’s greats, general, lore, and form. The primary purpose of the reviews is to provide a fresh, interesting, human insight into the medium rather than a forceful criticism of one’s own standards. The reviews are to be read as a source of entertainment, a way to explore the medium, and perhaps to learn something new.

"Video games enact, in a perfect way, the key drama of life: We’re here in this world, we don’t know the rules, and as for the designer? We’ll probably never meet him. We don’t understand it at all. We’ve got to figure it out in some way, and even if it’s preordained, there’s got to be some freedom for us."

WHAT GAME WOULD YOU RECOMMEND FOR SOMEONE WHO DOESN’T LIKE RUNNING AROUND SHOOTING PEOPLE?

Professor Lebovitz has directed his passion for video games into academic research.
W hat happens in your brain when you’re moved by a piece of art? That depends on the piece and the person. A new study published in the journal *Neuron* found that among participants viewing the paintings of Edward Weston, confirmed that emotional reactions to art can be highly subjective, and may reflect as much about the viewer as the canvas. “When we are moved, it’s because we feel like we are learning something about ourselves in the world,” posits Edward Vessel, a neuroscientist at NYU’s Center for Brain Imaging, who led the study along with Gaillotta Starr, acting College of Arts and Science dean and a professor of 19th-century literature, and Navia Rubin of the NYU Center for Neural Science.

Using functional magnetic resonance imaging at MRI, the team took moment-to-moment snapshots of which parts of the brain were active as a person reacted to paintings. Subjects were then asked to rate the paintings on a scale of one to four—with four indicating that the work was deeply moving. The paintings were all museum-quality but deliberately unfamiliar, so that notions of an artist or work would not color participants’ ratings. Across the board, the occipito-temporal, or sensory, section of everyone’s brain was activated upon viewing the paintings. However, only when subjects rated a painting four did a specific network of frontal and subcortical regions—areas of the brain involved with self-referential thoughts, identity, and emotional mind wandering—light up. The novelty of this research is that it paves out the systems that may be moved by visual art—and likely music, dance, or literature—even if we respond to different works.”

“The pieces of art that have the most universal appeal,” Vessel says, “are those that have layers of complexity and can resonate with people personally, regardless of who they are.”

—Nawie Howel

### BEAUTY WITHIN THE BRAIN

#### Neurol science

The work of psychologists Amy Smith Slep and Richard Heyman, with that negligent parenting, caused by conflict, results in children eating about how oral health is affected by parental discord. “One theory is that it parses out the systems that may be moved by visual art—and likely music, dance, or literature—even if we respond to different works.”

#### Mechanical engineering

Swimming With the Robots

Fish are the ultimate synchronized swimmers. But when one fish takes the lead, what becomes of the others to follow? Mechanical engineer Maurizio Porfiri and his team of researchers at NYU-Poly’s Dynamic Systems Laboratory are exploring that age-old question in a new way by building robotic fish that can rival the ranks of the animal kingdom. Porfiri and Stefano Marras, a researcher at the Institute for Coastal Marine Environment in Italy, built a robotic fish that mimics the back-and-forth tail movement of a real fish. The white plastic-covered contraption—twice the size of the golden shimmer fish’s it’s meant to be modeled after—looked at, but in this case, it’s realistic movement that counts. A battery inside the robotic fish sends a current to the flexible back end, causing the tail to bend just like the musculature in a real shiner. In one experiment, Porfiri’s robot fish team placed individual golden shiners into a water tunnel and found that when the robotic tail was set at a certain frequency, 60 to 70 percent of the fish fell in line behind it, as though in a school. The results, featured in a cover story last February in the Journal of the Royal Society Interface, suggest that one reason fish schooling is to save energy. Swimming behind a leader offers a hydrodynamic advantage similar to the aerodynamic one that a bicyclist enjoys when drafting closely behind another rider.

In a subsequent study, Porfiri created a cortical robot designed to catch the eye of the visually oriented zebrafish. Shaped like a plump, fertile female and painted with the species’ characteristic blue stripes, it attracted followers as long as the lights were on. In the dark, the zebrafish were scared off by the robot’s mimicry. Future studies aim to create a robot fish that flaps its tail silently.

Before the robotic fish join schools on the open seas, they will also need longer-lasting batteries, the ability to dive deep into the water and swim against currents, and effective intelligence—will allow them to respond to the movements of living fish. Porfiri hopes his robots will someday act as aquatic “sheepdogs.”

#### Nursing

CLINICAL TRIALS AND TRIUBULATIONS

For people living with HIV/AIDS, being selected for a clinical trial can be like scoring a VIP pass. Suddenly one has access to the nation’s leading experts on the disease and the latest medical treatment. But participation in clinical trials among HIV-positive African-Americans and Latinos has historically lagged behind that of white patients, which not only means they miss out on care, but also presents a problem for researchers seeking to understand the effects of new medications on diverse groups.

Marya V. Gaudie and Nellie R. Leonard, senior research scientists at the NYU College of Nursing, set out to identify intervention strategies to address that ethnic disparity. Between 2008 and 2010, they recruited 540 HIV-positive New Yorkers for the ACT2 Project, a peer-driven intervention in which the African-American and Latino participants, in a series of interactive small-group sessions, learned about AIDS clinical trials (ACTs) and discussed possible obstacles to participation among people of color. “A lot of assumptions that have been made—that people of color aren’t interested in clinical trials—are not borne out when they’re asked,” Gaudie says. After the program ended, the participants received support for navigating the clinical-trial system and were allowed to recruit up to three peers for ACT2.

ACT participants were 30 times more likely than a control group to sign up for screening for clinical trials. Of those who were screened, about half were found eligible for studies, and nine out of 10 of those enrolled. “These are large effects for behavioral intervention,” Gaudie says. She described one skeptical participant who arrived at the fine session and declared, “I’d rather die than be a lab rat.” By the end of the study, she volunteered to get screened.