Experts weigh impact of technology, Internet on democracy

BY SCOTT BRINKERHOFF

Government should follow the example of the online encyclopedia Wikipedia by tapping into the expertise of ordinary people, a New York Law School professor said during a UConn symposium on “e-democracy.” The Feb 7 event was sponsored by the Connecticut Public Interest Law Journal.

The digital age and Internet are benefiting democracy but also bringing challenges, speakers agreed. Panel discussions at the UConn Law School event covered campaigning on the Web, the mechanics of voting, political speech, and the power of blogging.

The keynote speaker, Professor Beth Noveck of New York Law School, described a “Wikipedia-like” project she has under way with the U.S. Patent Office. Its purpose is to use technology to improve the quality of information that patent examiners see before deciding whether to grant a patent.

The idea behind the project, she said, is to allow experts on various subjects to “self-select” and weigh in on pending patents, in much the same way that people contribute to the online encyclopedia Wikipedia.

Noveck said the Patent Office and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), to name just two Washington groups, tend to make decisions based on consultation with people who may not be the true experts.

“We confuse professionalism with expertise,” she said. Governance and rule-making, she added, “should be split into smaller tasks to allow people to participate where they can and should; in other words, when participation fits with their skills, their know-how, and their passions.”

The Patent Office has a significant backlog and often makes far-reaching decisions in only 18 hours, Noveck said. Patent examiners routinely use Google to research the science embodied in applications, coming up with a vast number of citations, but Noveck’s project focuses instead on inviting a “micro elite” to comment.

“We don’t need 10,000 people participating in the work of the EPA, to decide on an issue about asbestos, or 10,000 people...
Students urged to complete software survey

A group studying the feasibility of the University providing discounted software packages to all students is seeking input from students via a survey.

The survey is available through a link on the UConn student home page: students.uconn.edu.

Faculty and staff are encouraged to urge students to complete the survey.

The survey, which takes less than five minutes to complete, asks students what software they commonly use, and polls them on potential participation and cost options.

It has been compiled by the Student Software License Group, an ad hoc committee of the University’s Software License Group, which was charged with searching for less expensive software solutions for faculty and staff. The ad hoc committee was formed to explore the possibility of extending cost savings such as volume licensing to students, with a goal of providing UConn students with the opportunity to obtain essential software at greatly reduced rates.

The results of the survey will be incorporated into the Student Software License Group’s recommendations to the University administration.

Other speakers looked at the intersection of technology and democracy in a political context.

The power of blogging was illustrated in a comment by Paul Schiff Berman, Jesse Root Professor of Law, during a panel discussion he moderated.

Berman said one of the panelists, Tim Tagaris, who has served as internet director of two Connecticut-based political campaigns, had correctly predicted in his blog that Hillary Clinton’s campaign was in money trouble, days before that became common knowledge.

Tagaris’s insight, Berman said, stemmed from his observation that Clinton had mentioned her web site address in three consecutive speeches, an unusual comment for her. The reason, Tagaris surmised, was that she wanted people to log on and contribute.

Tagaris, one of several internet professionals to discuss their work, said the online part of a campaign needs to complement the rest of the campaign, not be a substitute for it.

Several speakers noted that some candidates seem more comfortable with the freewheeling environment of the Internet, while others are cautious.

Democrats Ned Lamont and Howard Dean, respectively candidates for senator and president several years ago, fell into the comfortable category, said Diana Cohen, visiting assistant professor of government and law at Lafayette College.

“They allowed open discourse to occur right on their web sites, even though they couldn’t control it,” she said.

In today’s campaign, Barack Obama seems to be making more of a serious connection with voters on his web site than Hillary Clinton is on hers, said blogger Melissa Ryan of CTLocalpolitics.net and MyDD.com.

Experts also recalled the 2000 presidential election and its aftermath in Florida, where voters learned for the first time about “chads” and “hanging chads.” This year, they agreed, chads won’t be a problem, but such technologies as scanners and touch screen computers may bring new ones.

One expert said the new technologies are subject to both human error and viruses. State Sen. Gayle Slossberg (D) said the General Assembly is closely watching how the new systems work, and will randomly audit results – in public – following the election.

Slossberg speaks on a panel about the mechanics of voting, during a symposium on ‘eDemocracy’ held at the Law School on Feb. 7.

University Medal-winners continued from page 1 on the Meriden Redevelopment Authority and helped to oversee a major redevelopment of the downtown area.

“He, Kalmanowitz is an example of what we hope all of our alumni will become – a leader both in his profession and in his community,” says Hogan. “He sets a fine example for all of us.”

Technology and democracy continued from page 1

The Department of Student Activities is seeking nominations and applications for the 2008 Student Life Awards.

This is an opportunity to recognize students’ contributions to the University community and their leadership roles. Students may be nominated for a variety of awards recognizing scholarship, community service, outstanding programming, leadership, school pride, and more. Many of the honors include a cash award. There are also awards recognizing outstanding advise ment and support of students and student organizations by faculty and staff members.

More information about the awards and the nomination process can be found at www. leadership.uconn.edu (click on ‘Student Life Awards’). Nominations will be accepted through Friday, Feb. 29.

Award recipients will be recognized during “Recognition Week” April 14-18. For more information, call 860.486.6588.

A conference on “Transnational Feminism, Community Activism, and the Politics of Empowerment” will take place on Friday, Feb. 29 and Saturday, March 1 at Rome Ballroom. The conference, which is sponsored by the Women’s Studies Program, will feature a keynote address by Cecilia Fire Thunder, the first tribally elected president of the Ogala Lakota (Sioux) Nation.

Fire Thunder is one of the founders of the National Organization on Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and of Canglesk, an organization that provides advocacy and services on issues of domestic violence and sexual assault to citizens of the Ogala Sioux Tribe.

The conference will also include a performance of spoken word slam poetry by writer, hip hop theater artist, and poet activist Aya de Leon on Friday evening, and breakfast on Saturday morning with Nancy Wyman, the first woman elected as State Comptroller of Connecticut.

For more information and to download the registration form, go to www.womensstudies.uconn.edu.

Registration for graduate students and others with limited means is $20 for one day, $35 for two days. For the public, registration costs $45 for one day, $85 for two days. There is no charge for UConn undergraduates to attend. Checks should be payable to Women’s Studies Conference, and sent to the Women’s Studies Program, Beach Hall U-2181, 354 Mansfield Road, Storrs, CT 06269.

The UConn Women’s Studies Program focuses on the critical analysis of gender and the pursuit of knowledge about women, and is committed to a vision of women and gender that is international and cross-cultural.

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From left, Kristina Jablonski, a freshman pre-teaching major, Cara Flynn, an exploratory freshman, and Annette Housse, a sophomore psychology major, enjoy an ice cream at the SUBOG One Ton Sundae event, Feb. 8.
Researchers make progress in areas of heart disease, muscle injury

by Chris DeFrancesco

Researchers at the UConn Health Center have identified a gene they believe plays a significant role in the development of heart disease.

Lead investigator Lisa Yue, assistant professor of cell biology, says the TRPM7 gene provides a conduit that enables calcium to get into fibroblasts, a type of heart cell. Abnormal calcium levels in fibroblasts can lead to cardiac fibrosis.

“Fibrosis often leads to a variety of cardiac diseases, including irregular heartbeat, enlarged heart, heart failure, and sudden cardiac death,” Yue says. “If you can control the calcium level, you can stop the fibrosis. Our focus is on the TRPM7 channel protein. The question now is: how do we moderate this channel to prevent fibrosis?”

Yue, a faculty member in the Pat and Jim Calhoun Cardiovascular Center, presented her findings at an American Heart Association conference in Orlando, Fla., last fall. The study abstract was published in the American Heart Association Journal Circulation.

Vuc’s team is continuing the study and has yielded novel information that will give us a better understanding of how certain cardiac diseases can originate, says Vuc, a professor and director of the Calhoun Cardiology Center.

The research team included Jin Xu, assistant professor of cell biology, in her lab at the Heart Center. Yue also was the principal investigator on a study that found a possible key to reducing vulnerability to skeletal muscle injury, published in the December issue of the American Journal of Physiology Heart and Circulatory Physiology.

Liang led a team of scientists who have identified a specific receptor (adenosine A3) with protective qualities that decrease muscle injury in mice.

The Department of Defense provided funding for this research, with the objective of determining how to reduce muscle injuries in U.S. military personnel.

“Our soldiers suffer a high rate of skeletal muscle injury during the rapid-fire physical training, as well as during combat in adverse conditions, such as in a harsh climate or at high altitude,” Liang says. “Having a way to treat and reduce skeletal muscle injury in soldiers has the potential to be very beneficial.”

The research team included Jang Zheng, Dr. Ruohu Wang, and Dan Wu, from the Health Center, and researchers from the U.S. Army Research Institute of Environmental Medicine in Natick, Mass., and the National Institutes of Health in Bethesda, Md.

“This work describes our novel findings on establishing a mouse model of skeletal muscle injury, and perhaps of equal importance, on a new therapeutic target to treat skeletal muscle injury,” Liang says. “Agents that stimulate adenosine A3 receptors appear to attract therapeutic target because their use is not associated with any side effects, such as changes in heart rate or blood pressure.”

“Out work showed that administration of such agents in intact animals can bring about a significant reduction in the muscle injury without any apparent ill effects,” he adds. “Since there is no clinically effective drug that can reduce skeletal muscle injury, the work opens up a new area that could lead to better treatment for muscle injury.”
Chemist explores nanotechnology to address greenhouse gases at source

BY MICHAEL RIX

Much of the discussion about fighting global warming centers on new technologies and behaviors that could limit carbon dioxide emitted on the subordinate that causes climate change – such as using hybrid cars, nuclear power instead of coal, and biofuels instead of diesel.

UConn chemistry professor Challa Kumar and ThoughtVentions Inc. (TV) have developed a prototype that will test another approach: Instead of trying to produce energy without creating CO₂, gases, they are looking for a way to “sequester” the greenhouse gases that are produced at the source so they don’t reach the atmosphere, literally creating a kind of chemical filter for, say, a coal power plant.

For the UConn team, their work is funded by a joint $100,000 Small Business Innovation Research grant from the National Science Foundation.

“Currently, coal-fired power plants emit nearly 60 percent of the total carbon emissions, but current economy cannot afford to shunt these plants down,” says Kumar. “Instead, we believe that our approach would mean that the CO₂ pollutants produced at a power plant are stopped from escaping into the air, thereby reducing their build-up in the atmosphere. This approach could buy us enough time to develop alternate, cleaner sources of energy.”

A large fraction of power in the U.S. is generated by burning coal and it is estimated that the nation has enough coal reserves to last for more than 200 years, says Kumar. Clean coal technology may reduce our dependence on oil imports from the Middle East, he adds.

The technology would work this way: Kumar and his collaborators would attach a specific enzyme to nanoparticles that would trap the carbon dioxide molecule, after it is created but before it is released into the atmosphere. Enzymes are catalysts that can accelerate specific chemical and biological processes. For example, the enzyme the research team is investigating for carbon sequestration also plays a key role in respiration, where it facilitates the sequestration and exhalation of carbon dioxide through our lungs. A similar enzyme in saliva is responsible for the zing of cola drinks, causing the sudden release of carbon dioxide bubbles in the mouth.

The enzyme-laden nanoparticles created by the research team would then convert the carbon dioxide from the flue-gases of a power plant into water-soluble “bicarbonate” – a harmless material. The research teams at UConn and TV will develop a particle gas absorber that will be used to sequester carbon dioxide for disposal in geologic formations such as depleted gas fields, deep ocean bottoms, or deep saline formations. Almost would be prohibitively high. If successful, Kumar’s method is expected to reduce the cost substantially, making it far more economically viable.

The $100,000 grant from NSF is “seed money” to begin building a prototype device to test and check whether it works the way Kumar and his collaborators believe that it will.

Kumar says, “This is a radically new approach to battling pollution and global warming.”

Companies will prosper by ‘going green,’ says conference keynote

BY CAROLYN PENNINGTON

Ray Anderson often refers to himself as a “recovering plunger.”

Anderson is the founder of Interface Inc., one of the most profitable carpet manufacturing companies in the world. But his Herculean efforts to make his company 100 percent sustainable by the year 2020, which are what is winning him accolades.

Anderson was the keynote speaker at last week’s conference on Alternative Products and Green Chemistry sponsored by the Health Center’s Occupational and Environmental Health Center. The conference attracted more than 150 business owners, state and local health officials, academics, and environmentalists from all over the region.

Anderson helped set the tone for the conference – a conference focused on identifying the tools and resources business leaders need to compete in a greener marketplace and comply with new international chemical policies.

For the first 21 years of Interface’s existence, Anderson never gave a thought to what his company – a petroleum-intensive industry – took from or did to the Earth, except to be sure they obeyed all laws and regulations.

Then in August 1984, he had a “spear in the chest” epiphany after reading Paul Hawken’s The Ecology of Commerce.

It spurred him to develop “Mission Zero,” the company’s goal of eliminating any negative impact on the environment by the year 2020, through pioneering new technologies, redesigning products, and reducing waste, while increasing renewable materials and sources of energy.

“My competitors said it was impossible, and called me a dreamer,” says Anderson. “Now they are scrambling to catch up,” says Anderson. “The status quo is an opiate, a powerful opiate. Abandoning the comfort of the status quo can produce unimaginable results, but it does not come naturally – only through extraordinary commitment.”

Anderson’s commitment has paid off in two ways – in higher company profits and lower environmental impact. Interface’s sales have increased by 60 percent, and now top $1 billion. At the same time, his factories use 55 percent less energy derived from fossil fuels, and six of 11 factories run completely on renewable electricity.

“The enzyme-laden nanoparticles created by the research team would then convert the carbon dioxide from the flue-gases of a power plant into water-soluble “bicarbonate” – a harmless material. The research teams at UConn and TV will develop a particle gas absorber that will be used to sequester carbon dioxide for disposal in geologic formations such as depleted gas fields, deep ocean bottoms, or deep saline formations. Almost would be prohibitively high. If successful, Kumar’s method is expected to reduce the cost substantially, making it far more economically viable for use on a large scale.

The $100,000 grant from NSF is “seed money” to begin building a prototype device to test and check whether it works the way Kumar and his collaborators believe that it will.

Anderson did not address only the business community in his talk. He challenged the academics in the audience to become part of the solution. He encouraged them to teach new ways of thinking, and train students to become “agents of change, rather than caretakers of the system of destruction.”

He also discussed government’s potential role in a greener marketplace. Anderson believes government’s greatest power is not its regulatory power, but its taxation power.

“We should begin to shift taxes away from good things like your income and mine – things you want to encourage – to bad things, like waste and pollution, things you’d really like to discourage and tax right out of existence.”

He said that has already begun to happen in Europe: “If enlightened politicians in this country were just as good as Europeans, we could truly begin to change the world.”
High-achieving student-athletes recognized for academic success

Continuing an established tradition, on Feb. 12 the Division of Athletics honored the University’s student-athletes who have a 3.0 grade point average. The ceremony took place at half-time during the UConn women’s basketball game.

Approximately 300 student-athletes and team managers were eligible for the Scholar-Athlete honor at the University, after earning a 3.0 grade point average in the 2007 spring and/or fall semesters. They also were named to the Athletic Director’s Scholar-Athlete Honor Roll. Members of the UConn pep band and cheerleaders with a 3.0 GPA were also honored.

A number of student-athletes were honored for earning a perfect 4.0 GPA in either or both the fall and spring semester of 2007. These include four members of the women’s track team and field; Physicia George, a physiology and neurobiology major; Cassie Buckwalter, an education major; Mercedes Ball, an economics and political science major; and Kaithlin Vaughn, a molecular and cell biology major. Two members of the rowing team: Elizabeth Littlewood, a physiology and neurobiology major; and Stephanie Bryant, a human development and family studies major; William Magin of the men’s swimming and diving team, a bio-medical major; and Nicole Trotter of the women’s ice hockey team, a biology major; Megan Doran of the women’s tennis team, a pre-kinesiology major; and Joseph Michaels of the men’s tennis team, a marketing major.

The UConn women’s tennis team, coached by Glenn Marshall, was again recognized as the top Husky athletic team in terms of grade point average, with an average GPA of 3.2. A total of seven Husky teams earned an average grade of 3.0 or above during the past academic year.

Staff members from UConn’s Counseling Program for Inter-collegiate Athletes were also recognized during the event, including Bruce Cohen, director, Linda Bourgeois, Felicia Crump, Alan Ingraham, Nick Pagliaro, and Phillip Rivers.

High-achieving student-athletes recognized for academic success

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CALENDAR

Tuesday, February 19, to Monday, February 25

Tuesday, 2/19 – Marine Sciences Lecture. “Fisheries Management Policy” by Seth Macek, University of Rhode Island. 7:30 p.m., Room 203, Marine Sciences Building, Avery Point Campus.


Wednesday, 2/20 – Statistics Colloquium. “House of the Mode in Genomics and an Ensemble Alternative: Forgotten Role of Extracellular Regulation,” by Brian Brown, University 4 p.m., Room 344, CLAS Building.

Thursday, 2/21 – Ecology & Evolutionary Biology Seminar. By Scott Edwards. 4 p.m., Room 130, Biology/Physics Building.

Friday, 2/22 – Consortium of Universities for Advancement of Hydrologic Science Seminar. “What Does a Hydrologist need to Know and Do about Climate Change Adaptation?” by Samanu Lall, Columbia University. 3 p.m., Room 206, Cardman Building.

Friday, 2/22 – Statistics Colloquium. “BIG Statistics,” by Dennis Lin, Pennsylvania State University. 4 p.m., Room 344, CLAS Building.


Exhibits

Through Friday, 2/25 – Student Union. SHARE F.E.E. Hours: 11 a.m. 5 p.m., Room 350, Student Union. Free admission. Opening reception, Wednesday, 2/20, 7 p.m.

Through Wednesday, 3/12 – Celeste LeWitt Gallery. Morocco of Silence, paintings by Enzo El Bissatnine Pascot, and Wild America, photographs by Gary Melnysyn. Daily, 8 a.m.-9 p.m. 

Through Sunday, 3/30 – Stamford Campus Gallery. UConn Stamford Art Show, works by students, faculty, and staff. Hours: Monday-Thursday, 8 a.m.-7 p.m.; Friday, 8:30 a.m.-5 p.m.; Saturday, 9 a.m.-noon. Free admission.

Through Sunday, 3/30 – William Benton Museum of Art. The Art of Drama: Arts and Crafts from the Japanese American Internment Camps 1942-1946. Also, Pamina Traaylor’s Tagged, photo images transferred onto solid-sculpted glass *tongues*. Also, through Sunday, 5/1, Rome, Italy and Europe. Hours: Tuesday, Friday, 10 a.m.-4:30 p.m.; Saturday, 1-4 p.m. Free admission. Wednesday, 2/20, gallery talk by Steven Kern on The Art of Gaman exhibits, 12:15 p.m.

Through Wednesday, 4/30 – Health Center. Quilling Pleasures, cloth and paper quilling by Phyllis Small. Daily, 8 a.m.-9 p.m., Main and Mezzanine Lobbies.


Meetings

Tuesday, 2/19 – Parking Advisory Committee. 5 p.m., Room 301, School of Business Board Room.

Monday, 2/25 – University Senate. 4 p.m., Room 7, Bishop Center.

Ph.D. Defenses


Lectures & Seminars

Tuesday, 2/25 – UConn EEOC Human Rights Lecture Series: “The Role of Gender in the Evidence” by Ezekwe Harkins, Texas Latino America/ West Africa. 12:30 p.m., Room 222, CU Building.

Building

Wednesday, 2/20 – “Recent Cases” Law Lecture. A Law School course in which a different faculty member each week presents a recent case of interest to common. Open to the community. 4 p.m., Room 150, Chase Hall, School of Law.

Thursday, 2/21 – Comparative Pathology Seminar. “Design of Peptide Nanoparticles as a Platform for Subunit Vaccine Design,” by Peter Burkhard. 11 a.m., Room A001, Avater Building.

Building

Through Friday, 2/22 – Student Union. SHARE F.E.E. Hours: 11 a.m. 5 p.m., Room 350, Student Union. Free admission. Opening reception, Wednesday, 2/20, 7 p.m.

Through Monday, 2/25 – Jazz Showcase. 7 p.m., UConn Stamford Art Center.

Sports

Tuesday, 2/19 – Men’s Basketball vs. DePaul. 7 p.m., XL Center.

Wednesday, 2/20 – Women’s Basketball vs. Marquette. 7 p.m., XL Center.

Friday, 2/22 – Men’s Ice Hockey vs. American International. 7:05 p.m., Freitas Ice Forum.

Saturday, 2/23 – Women’s Ice Hockey vs. Maine. 5 p.m., Freitas Ice Forum.

Tuesday, 2/25 – Women’s Basketball vs. St. John’s. 7:05 p.m., Gampel Pavilion.

Wednesday, 2/26 – Women’s Ice Hockey vs. Maine. 5 p.m., Freitas Ice Forum.

Performing Arts

Tuesday, 2/19 – Trinity Irish Dance. Company of 20 dancers. 8 p.m., Jorgensen Center for the Performing Arts. Tickets. $25-$30 regular, $7 students. For tickets and information call 860-486-4226.

Thursday, 2/21 through Friday 2/22 – The Valagras Monologues. 7-9 p.m., von der Mehden Recital Hall. $12 non-students, $10 students, all proceeds go to the New England Women’s organizations that help stop violence against women.

Thursday, 2/21 – Academy of Ancient Music with Richard Eger. Hear the music of Bach, Handel, and Telemann as it would have experienced in an 18th century drawing room. 8 p.m., Jorgensen Center for the Performing Arts. Tickets. For students and information call 860-486-4226.

Monday, 2/25 – Jazz Showcase. Samplings from the UConn jazz solo, band and combo ensembles. For tickets and information call 860-486-4226.

Potpourri


Tuesday, 2/19 – Connecticut Student Poets, high school poets, selected as winners of the 2007-2008 Connecticut Poetry Circuit Student Contest, will read with teachers, 7:30 p.m., UConn Co-op.

Wednesday, 2/20 – Yiddish Tish Discussion Lunchroom. Provides an opportunity for faculty and students to practise their Yiddish listening and/or speaking skills in an informal manner. Noon, Room 62, Dodd Research Center.

Thursday, 2/21 – Crooked Road Straight with Tina Brown. Brown discusses the path taken by Linda, a second generation welfare recipient and heroin addict, over five decades in Hartford, one of America’s poorest cities. 5:30 p.m., Room 427, Student Union.

Friday, 2/22 – Spring Symposium. “Affordable & Fair Housing: Reality or Another American Dream?” 8 a.m.-4:15 p.m., Davis Courtroom & Starr Reading Room, Starr Hall, School of Law.

Sunday, 2/24 – Spirituality Study Group. Includes discussion, reflection, dream interpretation and guided meditation. $10 per class. 7 p.m., Oukale Dining Room.

Monday, 2/25 – Andrew Higgins Poetry Reading. 7:30 p.m., Koveiner Auditorium.
Psychology professor discusses memory and conversation

BY SHERRY FISHER

Informal, everyday conversations often consist of people trading stories about themselves, says UConn psychology professor Jerome Sehulster. "The content of these "about-self" stories is supplied or supported by our autobiographical memory," he says, memory of our personal and experienced past.

Sehulster, who is based at the Stamford Campus, spoke on "Things We Talk About and the Structure of Autobiographical Memory," on Feb. 7. If you talk long enough part of a UConn-Stamford Faculty Colloquium Series, now in its second year. The lectures are intended to bring student, faculty, and the community to the campus, and showcase the faculty.

People present themselves to others in virtually everything they do: how they dress, how they speak, the words they use, the company they keep, and the cars they drive. "And when you think about conversation, apart from talking about the present moment like, 'My arm hurts,' any recount of past experiences is going to require memory and language," he said. "Therefore, if we watch how our everyday conversations go, given that these are supported by autobiographical memory, we should be able to infer or gain insights about the structural characteristics of that memory." Sehulster said that if autobiographical memory supports everyday conversations by supplying the content, "then we could say that perhaps there is a proportional relationship between the amount of cognitive space that we've allotted to supporting that content. For example, a person might be able to talk about a topic frequently because he or she has a lot of space for that particular topic." If that is so, he added, "it follows that individuals would differ in the amount of time they could talk about a topic. One of the questions I ask my students is: 'How long could you talk about a topic? How long could you talk about the New York Giants? How long could someone talk about Proust's Remembrance of Things Past?'"

According to a study Sehulster conducted, the topics most frequently talked about in adult conversations vary by age, gender, and marital status. "Younger adults -- particularly older married adults, talk more about leisure activities, especially sports, music and partying, shopping, fashion, and romance. Older adults -- particularly older married adults, talk more about commuting, work and family, and household-related topics," he said. Sehulster said the amount of time a topic is covered in the news media is roughly proportional to the frequency with which people talk about it in everyday conversations. "How many people watch sport-related shows on cable?" he asked. "How many people watch that as opposed to ballet? People talk more frequently about sports than they also talk about ballet." Sehulster said that during conversations where stories are told sequentially, the content of one individual's story becomes a trigger to the next participant's story, and will usually "match the mood of the conversation."

Sehulster said that a person's autobiographical memory must be organized such that there are "access routes to the memory. If we talk about the memory of our holiday party this past year, and being out on the beach with our bonfire, somebody might say, 'oh bonfires, I remember the time so and so... That memory of your bonfire might have been the Boy Scouts, Cub Scouts, or Girl Scouts, in which case the next story is about Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, or Cub Scouts." Remembrances of events differ in value, creating a sort of social currency, Sehulster said. "Filling a story about being at the Super Bowl has a lot more currency than having watched the Super Bowl on TV," he said. "Remembering a Super Bowl that is long past will have more currency -- especially if your listeners have only read about it." According to a study Sehulster conducted, the topics most frequently talked about in adult conversations vary by age, gender, and marital status. "Younger adults -- particularly older married adults, talk more about leisure activities, especially sports, music and partying, shopping, fashion, and romance. Older adults -- particularly older married adults, talk more about commuting, work and family, and household-related topics," he said. Sehulster said the amount of time a topic is covered in the news media is roughly proportional to the frequency with which people talk about it in everyday conversations. "How many people watch sport-related shows on cable?" he asked. "How many people watch that as opposed to ballet? People talk more frequently about sports than they also talk about ballet." Sehulster said that during conversations where stories are told sequentially, the content of one individual's story becomes a trigger to the next participant's story, and will usually "match the mood of the conversation."

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Master's degree continued from page 1

And researchers need to learn to create shared discourses through clinical trials and out to patients, says the other co-director, Peter Snyder, professor of clinical neuro-psychology and cognitive neuroscience in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences and the medical school's Department of Neurology. "The degree addresses both needs and is expected to attract physicians, medical and dental students, and graduate or post-doctoral students in psychology, nursing, pharmacy, bioengineering, and other fields."

The degree is not terminal but can be completed as part of an M.D., D.D.S., or Ph.D. program, or as post-doctoral training. Physicians can work on the degree part-time over two or three years. The program is taking applications from doctors affiliated with UConn at Hartford and St. Francis hospitals as well as the Health Center. Offering a clinical and transdisciplinary degree strengthens UConn's hand in applying for an NIH Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA), a major award for universities with medical centers. The NIH estimates that total funding for CTSA awards around the country will be $574 million over about five years. So far, 24 academic health centers in 18 states have received them.

Training in an area that is such a national priority means that graduates are going to be a very desirable commodity," says Professor Charles Lowe, head of the psychology department. Career tracks available for people trained in clinical and translational research include academia, research careers with pharmaceutical companies and government agencies, and working for social programs or non-governmental organizations. "You need the knowledge base to go from textbook to application," says Snyder.

Jackson, a native of a Chicago suburb, did undergraduate research at the Beckman Institute for Advanced Science and Technology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She wanted to continue in research as a graduate student but also keep a clinical focus.

Her master's degree work involved preparing a thorough literature review on what is known about biomarkers for Alzheimer's disease. Biomarkers would enable clinicians to identify people at risk for Alzheimer's before they show symptoms. Her review paper was accepted without revision by the Journal of Alzheimer's Disease and was published in January. She also prepared a proposal for a pre-doctoral grant from NIH. Her Ph.D. work will carry forward her research proposal on Alzheimer's.

Bringing the fruits of research on Alzheimer's into clinical practice is particularly important, says Snyder, as baby boomers grow into old age. More than 24 million people around the world are now estimated to have Alzheimer's disease, and that number is expected to grow to 81 million by the year 2040. Researchers who develop grant-getting skills and learn how to interact with clinicians in industry will have a competitive advantage, and those are areas that the new master's degree covers, says Snyder.

Students in the new degree program typically take three core courses and a series of electives. They learn the history of clinical research, ethics, modern research methodology, and advanced biostatistics, among other things. They also learn "by hook or by crook," - grant writing, partnering with industry sponsors, corresponding with journal editors, and creating slide presentations.

Training in biostatistics and modern statistical modeling is particularly important because of the massive amounts of available data -- much of it confidential -- that must be managed in clinical research, says Snyder. As many as 54 faculty members at the Health Center and the Storrs campus have agreed to teach or mentor students in the program. The program formalizes what some physicians previously learned "by hook or by crook," searching out mentors to guide them in research. Many students do not want to pursue a double degree -- Ph.D. and MD -- because it takes so long, says Kenny. "This way they can blend research, clinical care, and teaching." Research opens a creative path and new options, she says. "It's a whole different way to attack a problem, without a patient before you."

As many as 50 percent of the physicians who start out teaching at academic medical centers are not there five years later, she says, because they don't see opportunities to combine research with teaching and clinical work. This program would give them a foothold for learning how to do research and get into it.

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