

# TUFTS OBSERVER

APRIL 4, 2011

VOLUME CXXII / ISSUE 4



INSIDE THE

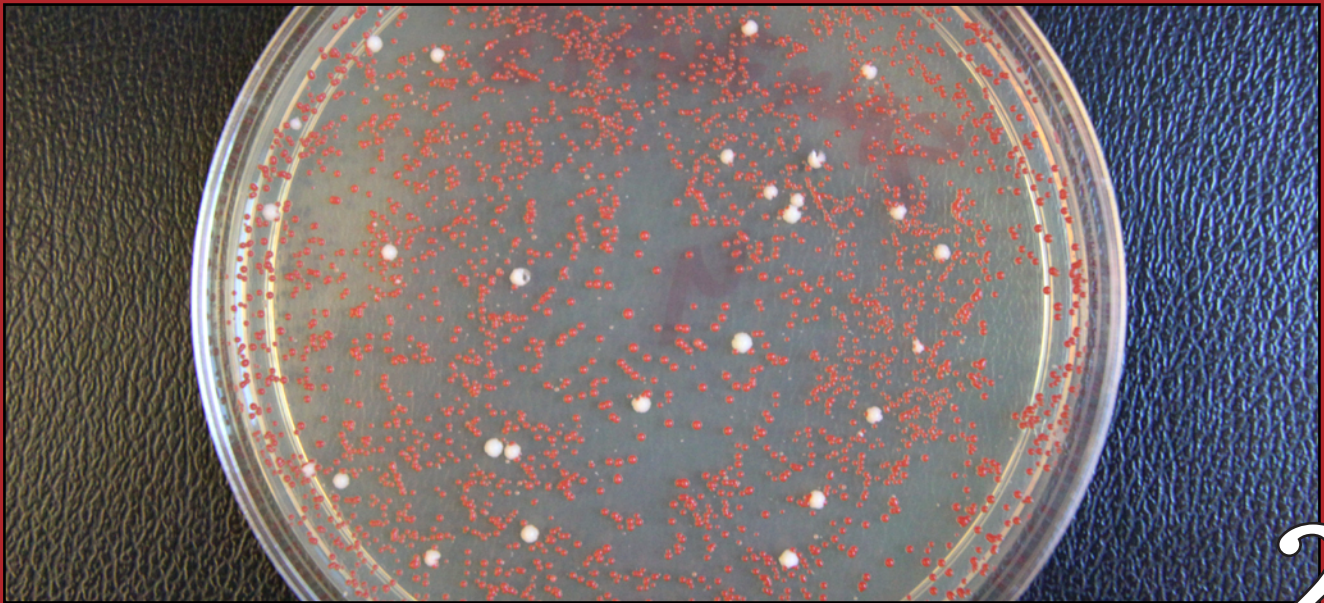


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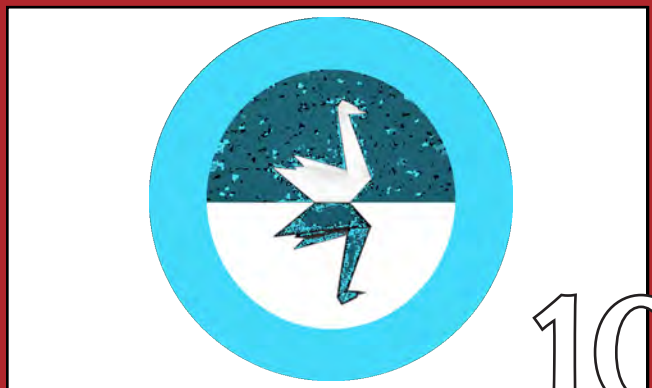
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The *Observer* has been Tufts' publication of record since 1895. Our dedication to in-depth reporting, journalistic innovation and honest dialogue has remained intact for over a century. Today, we offer insightful news analysis, cogent and diverse opinion pieces, creative writing and lively reviews of current arts, entertainment, and culture. Through poignant writing and artistic elegance, we aim to entertain, inform, and above all challenge the Tufts community to effect positive change.



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Since  
**1895**

# RESEARCHING HIGH & LOW:

**t**ufts University provides incredible research opportunities to its undergraduate students; in fact, the Admissions Office estimates that around 80% of students participate in some sort of research during their time on campus. At Tufts, it is easy to participate in research, a form of self-learning that takes one outside and beyond the classroom with hands-on skill building, potential career training, and individualized scholastic exploration. There are myriad funding agencies and support networks associated with Tufts to support student research initiatives; it's just a matter of accessing and seizing them. After all, these opportunities are considered a rarity among most mid-sized schools, so one shouldn't take them for granted.

Most people associate collegiate research with those who are on the pre-medical track or those who are in the School of Engineering. Take senior Karin Skalina, for example, who is doing work on maximizing *E. coli*'s production of an important antibiotic. Or take sophomore Nicholas Economos, who is studying telomeric sequences in yeast with the hopes of applying it to cancer drugs and research on aging.

Though there are many opportunities to do research in science-related areas of study, there are also many other less publicized opportunities for research at Tufts in a variety of other fields.

Associate Dean of Research for the Tufts School of Engineering, Eric Miller, truly appreciates all of the work that undergraduates put into research during their time at the university, regardless of subject matter. Miller excitedly tells the *Observer*, "The undergraduates are awesome. And I mean that in all sincerity. Just a really im-

pressive group of students. They are very bright, they are very interested, they're motivated, so they do good research."

Skalina shed some light on the allure of research. On getting involved, she says, "I had a 'hole' in my schedule and decided to do research for credit to fulfill a Chemical & Biological Engineering concentration elective." After a semester-worth of assisted research, she continued to work with her research advisor, Dr. Blaine Pfeifer, for credit. Eventually she participated in Tufts' Summer Scholars Program, where her projects became more independent. If Skalina hadn't discovered the path of research, her future might have been very different. "I have decided to pursue a career in cancer research," she says. "It is from my experience in Professor Pfeifer's lab that I was able to learn about my love of research."

On a similar whim, Economos "stumbled upon the lab after hearing about it from a friend," but says, "I've loved it since



BY AVERY MATERA  
& DAVID SCHWARTZ

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES, THEIR LIMITATIONS,  
AND WHY YOU SHOULD PARTICIPATE ANYWAY

the day I started.” He sees his lab in terms of the larger picture, explaining, “We have found a few promising plasmids that will hopefully be sequenced sometime soon. Though we are still in the primitive stages of our work, these are the types of discoveries that could hopefully lead to something great.”

Senior Lauren Rubin, a child development major and pre-med at Tufts, took a different approach to research by taking advantage of Tufts’ Community Field Placement course to seek out an educational opportunity. She worked with Dr. Naomi Steiner, a developmental-behavioral pediatrician at Tufts Medical Center, on a study to determine the effectiveness of yoga in helping children with behavioral and emotional difficulties and further examine the feasibility of implementing yoga treatment within the school system. Rubin explains, “The project was already in motion; I joined as a research intern.” She

adds, “The school had limited space and resources, parents were often unresponsive, [and] children forgot about appointments, so I had to think on my feet a lot and be super flexible.”

Rubin gained invaluable experience working on ‘The Yoga Project’, telling the *Observer*, “I found out how much I loved clinical research, and, through my relationship with my research advisor, I now have a job on another one of her projects for the year after graduation.”

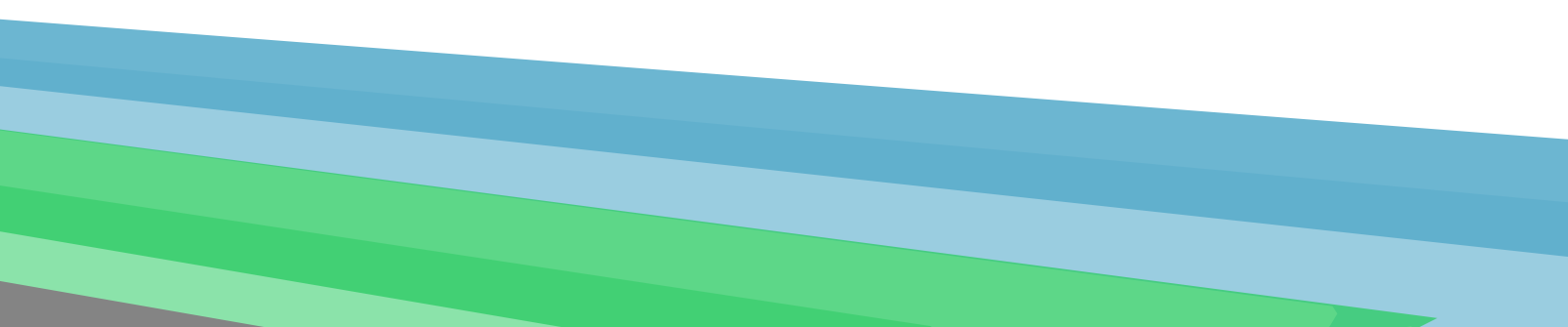
These undergraduate opportunities can lead to postgraduate ones. Not only does one network with the project’s faculty, but through publication and greater community discourse, a student at Tufts can find himself with important and powerful off-campus connections even after his research is done.

Some projects can be entirely independent, if desired, as senior Ryan Stolp proves. A major in engineering psychology,

Stolp used the availability of undergraduate research as a way of further exploring options post-graduation. Stolp excitedly explains, “This is the closest I’ve been able to come at Tufts to doing work that really aligns with my career goals.” He further states, “Having the opportunity to apply what I’ve learned in class has given me a realistic perspective on the application of that knowledge as well as helped make it stick in my brain!”

Stolp is “the inventor, fabricator, researcher, and experimenter, all in one” for a backpack that he has designed to “move in coordination with the internal bone and muscle structure in an organic fashion.”

Though his project has been successful thus far, Stolp expresses his frustration with what he calls the “no-man’s-land between liberal arts and engineering as an engineering psychologist.” He explains, “the engineering department makes it extremely difficult to have access to any of



their fabrication workshops or machine labs, while the psychology department has no resources for, or expertise on, prototyping.” Though one may think that an interdisciplinary research project opens up more avenues for connections, it does the opposite. Since Stolp’s attempt weaves between departments, he loses one specific department’s oversight and its wealth of general support.

Tufts graduate Elizabeth Herman (LA ‘10), has proven that undergraduate research can lead to incredible, tangible opportunities after graduation. For her thesis at Tufts, Herman used the events of September 11, 2001 to “examine how textbook narratives reflect current political characteristics of nations, as well as how accounts are manipulated in order to influence national memory.”

Herman is currently in Bangladesh “researching the political influences on the development of national history curricula,” focusing on the country’s 1971 independence. This project idea was born out of her senior thesis and is one for which Herman was awarded a 2011 Fulbright Scholarship.

Originally, Herman applied to Tufts’ Summer Scholars Program in the hopes of being able to work on the research of Professor Kelly Greenhill of the international relations department. Despite her initial plan, Herman remembers, “[Greenhill] strongly encouraged me to dream up my own project on which she could, in return, support me.”

The Tufts Summer Scholars Program is a scholastic initiative offering apprenticeships for research projects. Its website explains that “every Tufts school, department, and research center provides opportunities for interested students to experience research first hand” via the scholarship. The program, which has been active since 2003, provides an average of 45 Tufts undergraduates with summer research opportunities, a \$3,500 living stipend, a \$1,000 grant for research expenses, and \$1,000 given to the research fund led by the faculty mentor. Any juniors or se-

niors with at least a 3.0 grade point average are welcome to apply. (The Summer Scholars Program is not currently accepting more applications for Summer 2011.)

Each Tufts research project is different in terms of funding, and, while Stolp chose to fund his own project so that there is no conflict of ownership when he pursues a patent on his design, Herman turned to Tufts for funding. Herman explains that her need for monetary assistance rose “from buying textbooks, to getting translations done, to traveling to an international textbook library in Germany to collect a slew of textbooks that I would never have had access to otherwise.” Herman ap-

tasks in a lab or on a computer all day. That definitely is a part of it, but there are definitely opportunities to do research in something that goes along more with your interests, which takes the boring edge off a little bit. There’s something for everyone.”

Many Tufts undergraduates find that research is a viable option for anyone interested. Even freshmen can seize these opportunities, as proved by Eliana Gerson, who working on the same research project as Teresa after finding a posting on TuftsLife. Though it is a lot of work, Teresa says, “I prefer having the research because it diversifies my schedule a bit, and I find that I work better in a more structured schedule.”

Indeed, the idea of “time-consuming” projects is relative. Economos is expected to spend at least ten hours a week in the lab. He cautions, “I can promise... [that] I end up spending *much* more time than that by the time the week has finished. I kind of lose myself in the work after a while, and with so much to get done, six hours in a day [in the lab] can go by in a flash.” Economos proves that structure itself is relative, as

his lab hours are more inconsistent, while Gerson holds her reliable research schedule in high regard.

Similarly, Dean Miller explains that the time spent doing research is entirely up to the student’s preferences going in to the work. Miller says, “It’s really a personal preference thing. [...] They can be in the lab every day, if they wanted to, doing hardcore science.” Miller acknowledges that time is often hard to come by for undergraduates and some students are only able to spend a few hours a week working on their research project. This leniency in hourly commitment means that more students can participate in research, and they can participate at a pace that’s right for them.

No matter how much time per week is spent with it, undergraduate research opportunities can often change one’s future plans entirely, taking him to far off places or, as in Skalina’s case, helping him decide what to do in the future. Sophomore Taarika Sridhar, for instance, is conducting a re-

*[Tufts undergraduates] are very bright, they are very interested, they’re motivated, so they do good research.*

**ASSOCIATE DEAN ERIC MILLER**

plied to the Undergraduate Research Fund for funding twice, but explains, “there’s a limit on the amount of funding you can receive in a given year,” so the Institute for Global Leadership helped provide extra funding for translators.

In fact, Tufts’ Undergraduate Research Fund’s website states that, “because of limited funds, it would be unusual for grants to exceed \$450.” This monetary cap can make it difficult for undergraduates to pursue ambitious projects. Moreover, while there is a variety of other funding opportunities associated with Tufts or other organizations, finding the time for applicable grant applications for undergraduates can be exhausting.

And the total time spent with research projects can be rewarding. William Teresa, a sophomore researching the evidence of discrimination in children, tells the *Observer*, “People probably think all research is the same, that it’s very science-oriented and only involves boring and repetitive

search project focused on identity politics and development in Assam in northeast India. She spent time with her research partner writing pre-research papers and ended up flying to Assam and living there for a month during summer 2010. Sridhar returned to the area over winter break in 2010 to continue her research. Her project, which she made her own, gave back to her with culture, relationships, and knowledge.

Research can finally bridge the gap between intellectuals in the field and interested students while also promoting a beneficial working relationship between an undergraduate and a high-profile professional. In Sridhar's case, she first developed her research idea during the 2009-2010 Education for Public Inquiry and International Citizenship (EPIIC) year-long course. She then met her research advisor, Mr. Sanjoy Hazarika, director of the Center for Northeast Studies and Policy Research in Guwahati, Assam and New Delhi in India at EPIIC's yearly

symposium. Sridhar remembers that she "pitched... [her] idea to him, and it just took off from there." In classrooms, students are accustomed to working individually or with their peers, providing both new types of learning and new types of interactions for those that pursue it.

Research is an incredible way for any type of Tufts student to get involved in a different type of learning. Published articles, stimulating results, new networks, credits, and memories are a testament to this. And, as mentioned earlier, projects run the gamut, from silk to September 11th. College affords undergraduates the opportunity to explore most areas of research, regardless of prior experience. Though there are financial and time-related problems that come along with undergraduate research, the *Observer* urges all interested to partic-

ipate—  
be it for  
a course,  
through Summer Scholars, or  
independently—in  
undergraduate re-  
search, regardless of its  
limitations. ☺

# START your OWN

CONCEPTUALIZE IDEA

SEEK OUT RESEARCH ADVISOR

APPLY FOR FUNDING

PHYSICAL COMPONENT & LAB WORK

WRITE-UP

PUBLICATION

DISCUSSION

EVALUATION & APPLICATION

BY CARA PALEY

In a “math-minded” discipline like engineering, many are unsurprised to find the field is still dominated by men. In kindergarten, supposedly “math-minded” boys construct LEGO fortresses while “nurturing, artsy” girls play house and dabble in watercolors. And yet, compared to its highly imbalanced past, more women than ever are nose-diving into engineering, proving to onlookers that they too can design buildings and ace Differential Calculus. Engineering departments once as male-heavy as locker rooms are seeing record numbers of women tackle arduous course-loads and spearhead achievement. For them, it *is* rocket science.

A proud icon of this trend, the Tufts School of Engineering is growing and thriving, enticing more and more students into its competitive doors. At the heart and head of it all sits Dean of Engineering Linda Abriola, recently honored as one of the 500 most influential women in the sciences. Abriola appeared in *American Women of the Sciences since 1900*, an encyclopedia that praises female scientists whose contributions have been undervalued.

“I was both humbled and amazed,” Abriola said. “I’ve seen the list of women, and it is certainly wonderful to be considered in their company.”

Thanks to efforts jointly pioneered by the Dean’s Office and admissions board, Tufts Engineering has been reeling more female engineers into its top-notch facilities. Today, women account for 20% of Tufts faculty and 30% of its student body, according to Abriola.

“I think there’s a lot of good effort underfoot now,” she said. “If we want to be a leader in science and technology, we’re going to have to recruit women and underrepresented groups. It’s been a huge loss, and people are recognizing that now.”

The numbers of emboldened women pursuing engineering are promising across the board. At the infamously male-oriented MIT, female students account for 1,507 out of 4,712, or 32% of engineering students, according to its office at the registrar website.

Regina Barzilay, an associate professor within MIT’s Electrical Engineering and Sciences department, attributes the growing influx of women to the university’s ongoing recruitment efforts.

“MIT’s search committee consistently lends itself to finding strong female candidates,” Barzilay said. “The environment at MIT does everything it can to promote young women in the field. And in response, we’ve noticed some consistent increase of female students.”

Barzilay adds that MIT offers the perfect backdrop for her own research, which uses mathematical modeling to investigate our natural language processes.

At Tufts, Abriola harnesses mathematical modeling for a radically different aim: to unearth facts about our ecosystem, namely the harmful effects of pollution and toxic waste. Her interest soared following the Love Canal disaster of the early ‘80s, a public health disaster induced by an influx of toxins in a New York community.

“People had to abandon their houses,” Abriola said of the disaster. “I became even more interested in the natural environment

and how we could use it to our advantage to deal with pollution issues.”

But Abriola relates that, at the time of her education virtually no women joined her in the pursuit of engineering degrees. The complex, mathematical basis of engineering was largely a “guy-thing,” simply not labeled a girl’s trade.

“I never had a female mentor when I was at school,” Abriola said. “I never had a female science or engineering professor. I never even saw a woman faculty member.”

Despite the paucity of female guidance, Abriola glided through male-dominated college classrooms, graduate programs, and research groups—the only woman in her graduate engineering program at Drexel University. At Princeton, she was one of only a few women pursuing an engineering masters degree. Essentially, she was one of a scant few women throughout the entirety of her career.

“It certainly was tough,” she said. “You really have to have a thick skin. I think I survived basically through stubbornness. I wanted to demonstrate that women could do it. I didn’t give up very easily.”

# ENGINEERING FEMALE SUCCESS





“Struck” by the school after her first visit, Abriola praises Tufts as the perfect landscape for aspiring female engineers.

“The environment here for women is so much better than what I experienced,” she said. “Tufts Engineering is a school I would have wanted to go to.”

One science-minded woman drawn to Tufts is Emily Shaw, a junior who studies civil engineering. Shaw said that civil engineering has a relatively high number of female students here at Tufts, totaling about a third of the department.

“Personally, I love math and science—I’m just a concrete-numbers kind of person,” she said. “I definitely think that as we progress through the generations, engineering will become much more acceptable for girls.”

Shaw proposes that most girls are attracted to civil engineering for its inherent “artsy” feel, compared to more cut-and-dry, numerical modes of thinking.

“As much as chemistry can be, it’s more of an art,” Shaw said. “Building a building’ is more of a stereotypical guy thing to do. A lot of the chemical engineers are interested in biotechnology, which can be considered more ‘nurturing.’”

While female contribution is surging, a long road to equal representation in engineering lies ahead. According to Abriola, the percentage of female engineers at universities totals just 17%.

“Unfortunately numbers are not where they should be, and I think a lot of people are concerned,” said Abriola.

The most male-heavy of its counterparts, Tufts’ electrical engineering department especially speaks to the slanted ratios still burdening the field. Nicole Levasseur, who decided to try her hand at all the “concrete numbers” stuff, is one of only five women in her class. But even five is impressive given that the class of 2011 has only one female electrical engineer, according to Levasseur.



“At first it was kind of intimidating,” admits Levasseur. “But now that I know all the guys it’s not a big deal anymore. It’s just another part of the school.”

At least the still-slim female ratio in engineering has its perks where getting a job is concerned. Along with academic programs, professional engineering sites are eager to curb gender imbalance by recruiting more female candidates.

“It’s like, you’re a girl and you’re an engineer—you’re in!” said Shaw, who hopes to land a position at a biotech company. “It’s easier to get the job because engineering is looking to diversify and they don’t quite have that diversity right now.”

And it looks like Tufts’ ambitious women have found the right entrance into the field’s professional arena. From the time she occupied the deanship, Abriola has done all she can to transform Tufts into a prestigious yet congenial learning haven.

“Since it offers small classes, professors all really get to know you,” commented electrical engineering student Levasseur. “I definitely feel comfortable with everyone in my class. We’re all pretty much on the exact same playing field.”

Among her contributions, Abriola laid the framework for the school’s infrastructure, created its first financial and communications team, and hired the bulk of today’s staff. She essentially laid the groundwork for the competitive, front-running reputation the Tufts Engineering School boasts today.

“The [Engineering] School had only been an [official] school since 2001,” Abriola explained. “The dean wasn’t equivalent to other [deans]. Now it grants its own graduate degrees, and the dean reports to provosts. I helped create all of that.”

But achieving inclusivity, according to Abriola, takes not only finalizing university development, but also communicating differently about the field’s very essence. It’s about breaking the coded jargon, tool-handling stereotypes of engineering’s traditional past and touting it as an embodiment of much more.

“I don’t see someone solitary sitting in a lab when I think about engineering,” said Abriola. “It’s been a very creative and social career. I hope I can help people see that it’s a great job to have for women and I don’t want to see them discouraged.”

It might be a while before engineering entirely ruptures stereotypes and engenders equal gender statistics. But what’s important isn’t so much the numbers, but the progress. While Tufts’ 30% of female engineers might not seem so weighty, the statistic is significant when pitted against a history of virtually no female engineering students or faculty in academia. Between Dean Abriola’s supervision and ongoing recruitment efforts, the Tufts Engineering School has grown into a prestigious haven for male and female engineering students alike. And, as proven by Abriola’s success, these progressive environs have paved the way for tangible female contribution to the field. When we hear that the next Eiffel Tower or Golden Gate Bridge was the handiwork of a math-minded woman, perhaps we won’t be so surprised. ☺

“The environment here for women is so much better than what I experienced... Tufts Engineering is a school I would have wanted to go to.”





# RUNNING BEHIND

*The Race to Reform Education in America*

BY ALEX KAUFMAN

On March 14, President Obama gave a speech at the Kenmore Middle School of Arlington, Virginia calling on Congress to make sweeping reforms to the No Child Left Behind Act due to its conspicuous failure.

“In the 21st century, it’s not enough to leave no child behind,” President Obama said. “We need to help every child get ahead. We need to get every child on a path to academic excellence.”

In 2001, President Bush announced an act to ameliorate the conditions of public schools nationwide: the No Child Left Behind Act. Not only did the Act pass, but it had bipartisan support in both the House and Senate, passing 384-45 and 91-8 respectively.

But now, nearly 10 years after its passage, it has come to national attention that the bill may not be doing what it originally intended to do. This year, according to the Secretary of Education, more than 80,000 public schools are predicted to fail under the standards set by No Child Left Behind.

Some critics claim that these efforts were doomed from the start. In an interview over the phone, Tufts University Education Professor Steven Cohen called the Act “ill conceived, poorly written, and horribly executed.”

Above all, Cohen questions the Act’s standards of measurement. “[The No Child Left Behind Act] didn’t lower standards,” he said. “It gave standards a bad name. It made a certain *number* the goal of education and therefore a whole lot of schools are worried [that they] can be closed down if they don’t meet the number.”

He notes that the focus on getting a good score on a certain test, as opposed to qualitative absorption of the material, is a detriment to our education system.

There are still some benefits to the No Child Left Behind Act, though. The Act’s statistical findings helped point out the failure of some schools and school districts, especially for those of us whose eyes weren’t as focused on American edu-

cation. “To me,” Professor Cohen continues, “if you need No Child Left Behind to realize that some schools weren’t doing well, you weren’t looking.”

One main failure of No Child Left Behind may be that it standardized public education assessment without centralizing the standards. Under the Act, each state has been allowed to set its own testing standard. New York’s educational system is different than Florida’s, for instance, and the two states

use different tests to achieve their distinctive, state-oriented goals. Furthermore, each district has the power to set educational goals to fill in gaps in state policy. Cohen therefore posits that evaluating according to a single statistical assessment might not yield an accurate portrait of each school system’s educational success.

“In the United States, there are 14,000 education systems just in public schools, one per each district,” Cohen said.

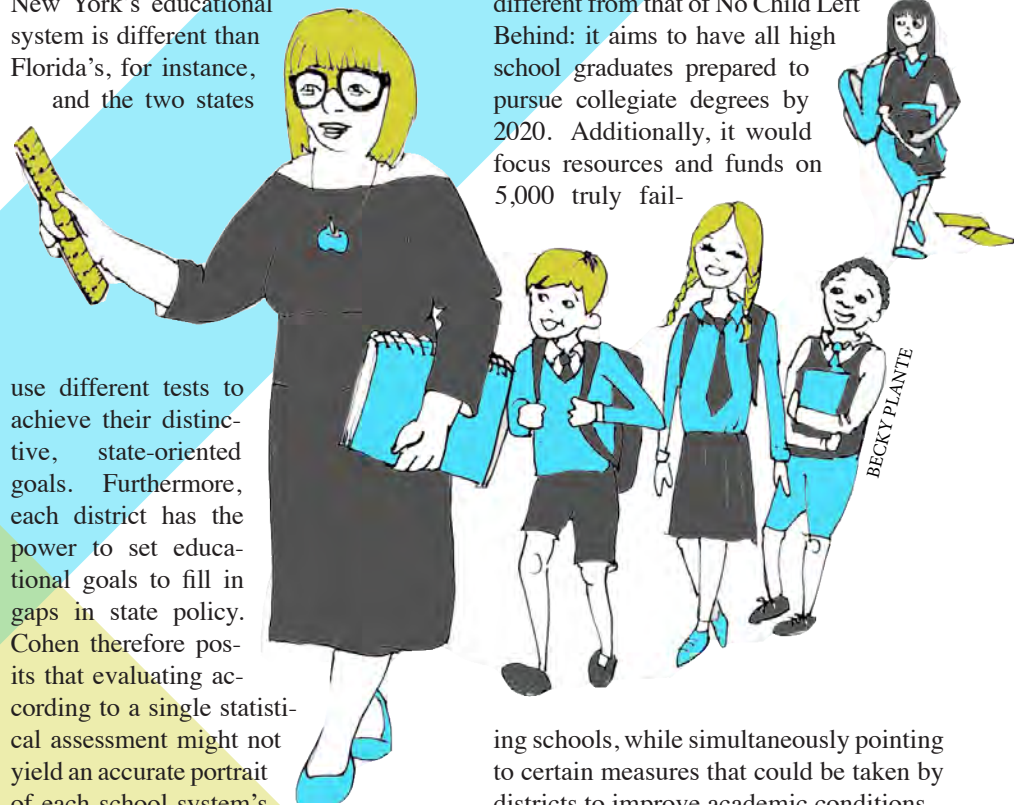
Cohen adds that the effects of No Child Left Behind are evident even at the university level. “I can say on an anecdotal basis that students who come through the public school systems where the choice of exams have become the only way to assess how they’re doing have tough adjustments [to college].”

Due to the obvious failures within the current education system, with a projected 82% of schools missing this year’s target,

both President Obama and Secretary of Education Duncan are calling on a more than supportive Congress for a major overhaul of the No Child Left Behind Act.

President Bush’s Act set a goal for reading and math proficiency and improved testing scores in *all* schools by 2014, a goal unanimously perceived as unrealistic.

This new system’s standard is far different from that of No Child Left Behind: it aims to have all high school graduates prepared to pursue collegiate degrees by 2020. Additionally, it would focus resources and funds on 5,000 truly fail-



ing schools, while simultaneously pointing to certain measures that could be taken by districts to improve academic conditions.

As with any piece of legislation, the new education proposal has met its critics. Debt-hawks from the Republican-led House are unwilling to give Secretary Duncan the funds to repair our education system.

But it seems that everyone agrees on several of the most important proposed changes. Replacing the pass-fail system with a system that takes a more individual stance on education and assures students’ academic growth is a top priority. By judging schools not on testing scores but on graduation rates, Duncan and Obama may be able to rally the Republican-led House to support future reforms. ©



# << LIKE RIDING a BIKE >>

BY RUTH TAM

With Green line expansion in the works, students at Tufts University have discussed the convenience of another T line close to school. Underestimated by most students, biking is much more readily available than the T, and with the recent growth of Tufts Bikes to create a bike share, Jumbos now have an advantage to other Boston students looking to travel on a dime.

Two months after the group's creation in September 2010, its members submitted a proposal for a cut of the Tufts Community Union (TCU)'s \$200,000 surplus from the previous academic year. The proposal received overwhelming support from a campus-wide poll, which led to Senate's nearly unanimous approval of a \$50,000 grant for the project.



"Not only did they have a coherent plan, they surveyed students on their own," said TCU Associate Treasurer Matt Schuman, a senior. "They really took the initiative."

In February, the bicycles ordered from Kona World Bikes arrived on campus and were built by the group's members. A couple weeks later, the bike shop was opened in the basement of Lewis Hall as an addition to the Crafts Center. And last Friday, the group unveiled its bike share program with a campus-wide event.

At the kick-off event, the three aspects of Tufts Bikes (the bike share, the bike shop, and bike events) were celebrated and the group got closer to their overarching goal of creating a bike culture on campus.

"If someone's trying to get some place, they walk or take the bus or the T. We want people to add 'bike' to that list as a viable alternative," said freshman Neil Aronson, the vice president of Tufts Bikes.

Biking already appears to be a viable alternative for many. Nationwide trends have shown an increase of bike commuters and

Boston is following suite. Mass-Bikes and Bikes Not Bombs, two local organizations, and Urban AdvenTours, a bike shop and business, are only several examples of the growth of bike culture in Massachusetts. Possible motives for this growth range from the increase of gas prices to the addition of bike lanes in more urban areas. Following the need for a practical mode of transportation, Tufts Bikes have now joined groups spreading the growth of bike culture around Boston.

This charge has given the group the opportunity to choose its main ideas to propagate to the campus. Although a popular view of biking involves environmentalism, founding member Daniel Heller, a senior, was quick to affirm his view on the matter.

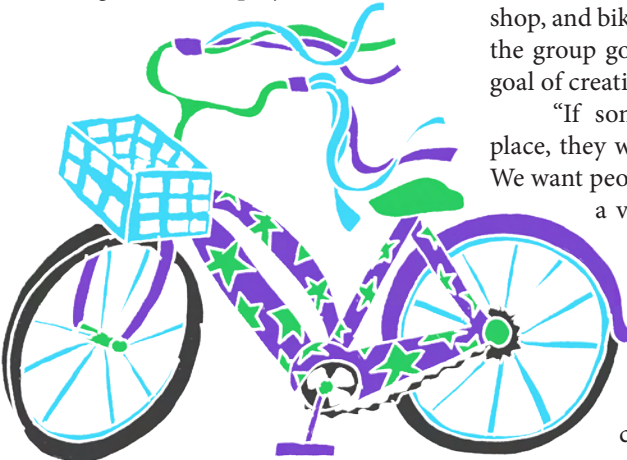
"I don't think [of] bicycling as an environmental issue," he said. "If you view it as an environmental issue, it stigmatizes it in the eyes of people who don't want to see themselves as doing something environmental. Ride a bicycle because it's a better way to get around, not because you're saving the world."

Other members of the group see both sides of the argument.

"I think any form of transportation is an environmental issue," qualified Aronson. "Transportation is a huge part of our environmental situation. While I don't think [environmentalism] should be a central part [of Tufts Bikes], I think it should be one of the many reasons that make Tufts Bikes a compelling program to have."

In addition to providing different motives for biking, Tufts Bikes hopes to provide an outlet for future learning and experimentation. Classes will be offered to both novice and veteran bikers and taught by trained students.

"This is going to be a great asset for Tufts in terms of attracting potential," Aronson said. "We're starting with 30 bikes, but I want to see where this will go." ©



## How to : rent a bike

- (1) Go to the Tisch library front desk and ask to check out a bike
- (2) Sign a safety waiver
- (3) Receive a key, a helmet, and a lock
- (4) Pick up bike outside Tisch or at the campus center upper patio
- (5) Return bike within eight hours



# The Soviet Swan Thief

## Apocalypse

*Professor Alexander Vilenkin talks physics, parallel universes and Soviet Russia*

BY ELI MACKINNON

Alexander Vilenkin has a disconcerting tendency to smile when he talks about the end of our universe. I'm careful to say *our* universe because according to Vilenkin, the Director of Tufts' Institute of Cosmology, what most people think of as the universe is really only a drop in the ocean, or more precisely, a quantum bubble nucleation in the eternally propagating ocean of false vacuum. I sat down with Professor Vilenkin in his office to discuss where everything came from, where everything's going, what the previous sentence means and which zoo animals are most susceptible to being eaten by thieves. He had all the answers. During the course of the interview, Professor Vilenkin and I were instantaneously annihilated an infinite number of times. Sometimes Vilenkin didn't even flinch.

In 1973, Alexander Vilenkin was a physics student looking for a job in Kharkov, Ukraine. Two years earlier he had graduated from a prestigious university and had been accepted to a number of graduate programs in physics. He planned to accept an invitation from the professor who had supervised his undergraduate thesis to continue their work together in graduate school. But somewhere along the

line, Vilenkin had found a way to agitate the KGB (the former USSR's state security and intelligence agency). He was informed that the open graduate position, along with the open positions at all the other schools he had applied to, had been unexpectedly eliminated. Even the fact that Vilenkin's father was a professor at the school he planned to attend didn't make a difference. Vilenkin recalled, "My father was not a very practical man. He did not know who to bribe."

To this day, Vilenkin still doesn't know exactly what he did to get blacklisted ("The KGB never tells you why they do these things"). On top of eliminating his graduate position, the KGB also took an opportunity to reevaluate Vilenkin's military exemption status. Vilenkin had been excused from conscription due to a childhood bout with polio, but once he was on the state's radar, they decided it was time to double check.

He spent the next two years in "non-combat troops," a physical labor detail that, according to Vilenkin, the USSR assigned primarily to soldiers with criminal records—people who couldn't be trusted with weapons. After the army, Vilenkin realized that his standing with the government would prevent him from getting "any decent job," so he assessed the skills he had to offer and landed a job as a night watchman for a

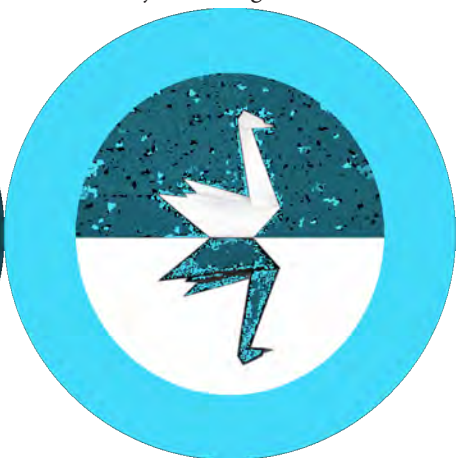
concession stand at a zoo in Kharkov. "The main quality that they were looking for was that one shouldn't be a complete drunkard, because there was some wine in the kiosk," said Vilenkin. In the wayward years following his days as a promising physics undergraduate, Vilenkin never lost sight of his true passion. Whenever he could, he spent his nights in the kiosk studying.

"Some friends of mine came to the zoo at night to discuss physics but the difficult part was that my colleagues, the other night watchmen, their idea of a well-spent night was to get drunk. So they would come to the kiosk and say, 'Sashkoa [the Ukrainian diminutive for Alexander], do you have a ruble? If we each have a ruble we can get something.' Of course, in Russia, to refuse to drink with somebody is the greatest insult, so you cannot do such a thing."

Soon Vilenkin was promoted from his post at the concession kiosk to one of the night watchmen for the zoo proper. He never saw any action in the line of duty, but his position was no mere formality. Apparently, zoo animal theft in Kharkov was a persistent problem. "It was a pretty hopeless enterprise. There was a single rifle there that only one of the guys knew how to shoot, and the zoo was large so occasionally things would disappear. People would steal a swan, for example. A swan, you probably



RUTH TAM





# s Are Infinite *and the* pse Arrives in a Bubble

could eat a swan, but they would steal an eagle,” said Vilenkin.

When Vilenkin wasn't studying physics or contending with the pressures of Russian social etiquette, he sometimes wandered the zoo grounds and commiserated with the down-and-out captives. “It wasn't like the zoos in the US where they have these spacious habitats. There they were in these little cages and they were in pretty sad condition, so I would go around and talk to these poor animals. There were animals who would come to you if you would come to them, deer for example, and bears.”

If it seems improbable that we live in a world where paradigm-shaking cosmologists get their start petting caged bears in the moonlight for minimum wage, then maybe it is. After Vilenkin emigrated to the US in 1976 and got his PhD from SUNY Buffalo just one year later, he began to formulate a bold theory about the origin and nature of the universe, a theory that asserts that there are actually an infinite number of worlds where Vilenkin never got the job as a night watchman. There are also an infinite number where he did and an infinite number where he saved the eagle.

Vilenkin speaks with the kind of soft-‘i-as-hard-‘e, palatalized Eastern European accent that makes you almost believe him when he says things like, “We are having

this exact conversation in an infinite number of other places in the universe but those places are very, very far away.”

The theory is called eternal inflation and although it remains on the avant-garde of promising cosmological models (the avant-garde of cosmology being a contender for the weirdest of all the avant-gardes), Vilenkin first came up with the idea almost thirty years ago. It arose as a natural corollary to the slightly more modest in scale but still startling theory of cosmic inflation, a theory originated in 1979 by a close friend of Vilenkin's, the MIT physics professor and theoretician, Alan Guth.

Before Guth proposed cosmic inflation, the familiar Big Bang theory had very little to say about the ‘bang’ itself. It provided a satisfying account of the evolution of the early universe immediately following its fiery initiation, but it didn't even attempt to explain what caused the ‘bang’ or where any of the matter that ‘banged’ came from in the first place. “It was the theory not of the bang but of the aftermath of the bang,” said Vilenkin.

Guth's theory of cosmic inflation faced down the “bang.” He proposed that the observable universe was birthed by the exponential expansion and subsequent decay of what Vilenkin refers to as “a peculiar material which is called false vacuum.”

This is where, as they often do, things get hairy for the layman, but the skeleton of the idea can be understood by anyone who has blown up a balloon or baked a loaf of raisin bread. The theory hinges on the fact that gravity has a foil, a Mr. Hyde to its Dr. Jekyll. This repulsive gravity has the same effect on space that blowing up the balloon has on the latex or putting the raisin bread in the oven has on the bread. It causes space itself to expand, repelling everything in it away from everything else in much the same way that the baking bread expands and pushes apart the raisins. The “peculiar material called false vacuum,” which might be roughly described as a bit of space with some energy stuffed inside of it, turns out to be a prime purveyor of repulsive gravity. And what is perhaps easier to understand than a false vacuum's essence is its consequence, which can be briefly summed up as everything getting very big very quickly. According to Vilenkin and Guth, this is exactly what happened at our universe's inception. “In a fraction of a second, a region which was subatomic in size, less than an atom, was exploded to dimensions much bigger than the observable universe,” said Vilenkin.

The physics community quickly embraced cosmic inflation because it solved a few persistent problems that the convention-





al Big Bang theory couldn't address, such as why our universe has a uniform temperature (matter stuffed into a region a billionth the size of a proton would quickly reach a thermal equilibrium) It also explained where the matter we observe today came from. According to Vilenkin, a region of false vacuum tends to decay to a lower energy state by the same sort of probability that governs the decay of a radioactive element to a stable one, and when it stabilizes to a true vacuum, marking the end of the inflationary epoch, it releases its latent energy in a fireball of matter, providing the same expanding soup of hot matter postulated by the conventional Big Bang theory.

Today, most physicists accept some form of cosmic inflation and a number of its predictions have been observationally confirmed to a very high accuracy. Vilenkin's theory of eternal inflation concerns itself with some of inflation's wider and weirder implications.

Vilenkin's thin with silver hair, peaking eyebrows and a baseline smirk make him look like he could be Carl Sagan's drug dealer. It's not clear if he has always looked this way or if you start to take on the appearance when you stare at infinity for a living. As he eagerly devoured the equations of cosmic inflation in the early eighties, Vilenkin began to realize that a region of rapidly expanding false vacuum would propagate at a far faster rate than it decayed. In other words, by the time one region of false vacuum probabilistically decayed into a true vacuum, setting off a big bang in the process, there would already be another vast region of false vacuum around it, which would then precipitate more big bangs. "The big bang was not a unique event in the history of the universe. Multiple bangs went before it and countless big bangs will occur in the future in remote parts of the universe. Each of these big bangs creates a small bubble. This bubble rapidly expands and inside it we have galaxy formation and all that stuff. We live in one of these bubbles," said Vilenkin.

The repercussions of this universe-as-a-marshmallow-in-microwave model are staggering. One of the most bizarre is that every conceivable possibility of how the events in one of these bubble universes can unfold must be repeated an infinite number of times. If you can imagine it, it can and will and is and has happened, always. Vilenkin

has proven mathematically that although the false vacuum will continue to expand indefinitely, creating new bubble universes forever, there is a vast but finite limit to the number of ways in which matter can arrange itself in one of these bubbles, so on an eternal scale, every permutation will recur eternally. What this means in practice is that in an infinite number of bubble universes, Bill Murray will unexpectedly fall to earth from an overhead airplane killing you instantly before you finish reading this sentence. According to the director of Tufts' Institute of Cosmology, one of only few people in the world who supposedly really understands the most sophisticated physical equations humankind has yet achieved, that statement is actually true.

The realization that every snowflake is not technically special in the face of eternity isn't exactly uplifting. Naturally, Vilenkin's first reaction to his breakthrough was existential dread. "I was pretty depressed about it because of the loss of uniqueness. My thought was that we humans are not good or bad, but if you could think of our civilization as unique, then you could say that it has to be cherished as a work of art without making a value judgment. But eternal inflation tells you that it's not," said Vilenkin.

He has since come to terms with the idea, and he maintains that even though "we do not have significance on the scale of the entire universe," we can probably still help ourselves to a hearty measure of idiosyncrasy in our own bubble. "Indications are that it takes some very unlikely event to trigger the origin of life so it could well be that in the entire visible universe we are the only place where this happened, the closest billion light years. In this picture," said Vilenkin, "we are not that insignificant. We are responsible for quite a bit of real estate, and whether or not we screw it up, on that depends the future of the visible universe."

Until recently, eternal inflation was thought to be totally speculative, an interesting possibility that had no hope of ever being proved or disproved by direct evidence. For this reason, many physicists dismissed the idea as fantastical and pointless. However, there is now reason to believe that if Vilenkin is correct, he may see evidence for his theory within his lifetime. Although most bubble universes will never come in contact with one another because the false vacuum between them is expanding at a rate far fast-

er than they are expanding within the false vacuum, every once in a while a bubble will nucleate very close to the boundary of a pre-existing one. When this happens the bubbles can collide and, depending on the difference between their vacuum energies, one bubble will either bump into the other and then retreat or it will encroach on the other's territory, annihilating everything it engulfs as it expands. If the former situation (call it the bump-and-retreat) happened somewhere near the visible horizon of our own pocket of the universe, it would leave a distinctive, perfectly circular fingerprint in the Cosmic Microwave Background, or CMB (a ubiquitous haze of thermal radiation left over from the 'big bang' that is most luminous in the microwave spectrum). And if one or more of these fingerprints, which will appear as cold spots in the CMB, is located it will provide compelling evidence for Vilenkin's theory.

The search is already underway. Four candidates have been located by the Wilkinson Microwave Anisotropy Probe, an orbiting satellite launched in 2001 that was designed to probe the CMB; and Vilenkin is hopeful that the Planck satellite, a spacecraft launched in 2009 that is studying the CMB at an even higher resolution, will help to settle the nature of the potential collision marks.

Unfortunately, Vilenkin also finds time to speculate about the evil twin of the bump-and-retreat collision: the breach-and-destroy. When I ask Vilenkin about his bet for the ultimate fate of our own cozy corner of the universe, he tells me that he imagines that if we last long enough, then one day we will all be randomly annihilated by a surprise bubble nucleation before Bill Murray can even land on our heads.

Of course, the probability of something like that happening at any given moment is exceedingly slim, but according to eternal inflation, for any given moment, there are an infinite number of universes where that precise instant is doom. Vilenkin takes obvious delight in this bleak absurdity. As he explained the idea, he was careful to remind me that "it may be coming already." Just to be sure, I clarified, "So in an infinite number of universes it will happen in the next second?"

He responded, "Absolutely." For a moment then, we sat in silence in the afternoon light, staring at each other and awaiting our deaths. But it turned out that we were in one of the lucky infinities. ©



# FOX DEN BREAKFAST CLUB











All photos by Louise Blavet

[www.fdlbc.info](http://www.fdlbc.info) for information/folklore



# PRESERVING TUFTS TRADITIONS:

## Will the Naked Quad Run Pass the Tests of Time?

BY KYLE CARNES

On March 14th, Tufts' outgoing President Larry Bacow announced one of his last actions in office: ending university support and sponsorship of the Naked Quad Run. The reaction to this action by a very popular president against a very popular event? School-wide shock.

Immediately after Bacow's announcement, there was an explosion of campus and nationally published editorials either supporting or decrying the seemingly last public act of the president. According to Bacow's statement, the main charges against NQR were the excessive and dangerous drinking culture surrounding the event and the physical peril it posed to students. In addition, the administration cited the logistical nightmare of controlling a giant running mob of drunken and naked college students during finals period. Despite these legitimate reasons, over the last few years Tufts has put on and sanctioned the event. Puzzlingly, though, the administration now stands poised to demonize a tradition known as an expression of Tufts' unique culture. Why such an about-face in Tufts' public policy and social programming?

Years ago, new Tufts President Larry Bacow published an email to the student body, where he stated, "the combination of consumption of alcohol with a mad dash through an icy, hilly campus at night cannot continue." He was referring, of course, to NQR, and this was his first statement against the run—it wouldn't be his last. Bacow's attempts to stop the tradition in the early days of his presidency were met with outrage, so as a compromise, the current system of university sponsorship began.

Now, 10 years later, Bacow has phrased his objections similarly, saying, "given that we can no longer manage the run, we cannot allow this 'tradition' to continue." The first time a statement of this kind was issued, NQR wasn't ended; it was changed. This time, though, Bacow's statement indicates that there will be no more concessions by the administration and NQR must go. With multiple alcohol-related hospitalizations in the 2010 event, and interactions between students and police resulting in arrests and a police assault case, it seems reasonable that the drinking culture that encompasses

NQR is much to blame for the decline in the observed manageability of the event.

Alcohol abuse is pervasive at NQR, yet it arguably is not dissimilar to other weekends at the University. Yet running naked in the dead of winter, drunk, and in a mob of similarly inebriated students is not a common weekend outing at Tufts,

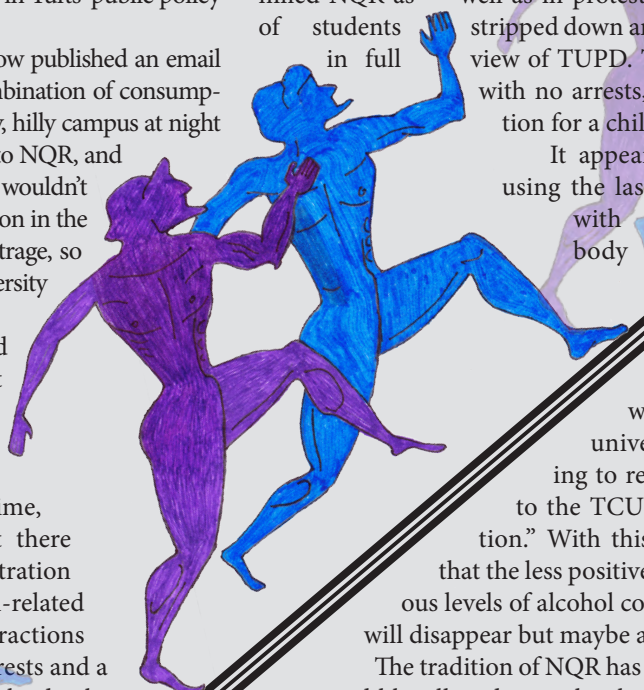
hence the much higher risks associated with NQR. It is debatable whether or not students would run the event without drinking in excess. One student, who asked not to be named, says regarding the social aspect of alcohol at the event, "Had the group of people that I was with chosen not to drink and had run it sober, I would have run sober. But I wasn't going to run [sober] alone with a bunch of drunk people."

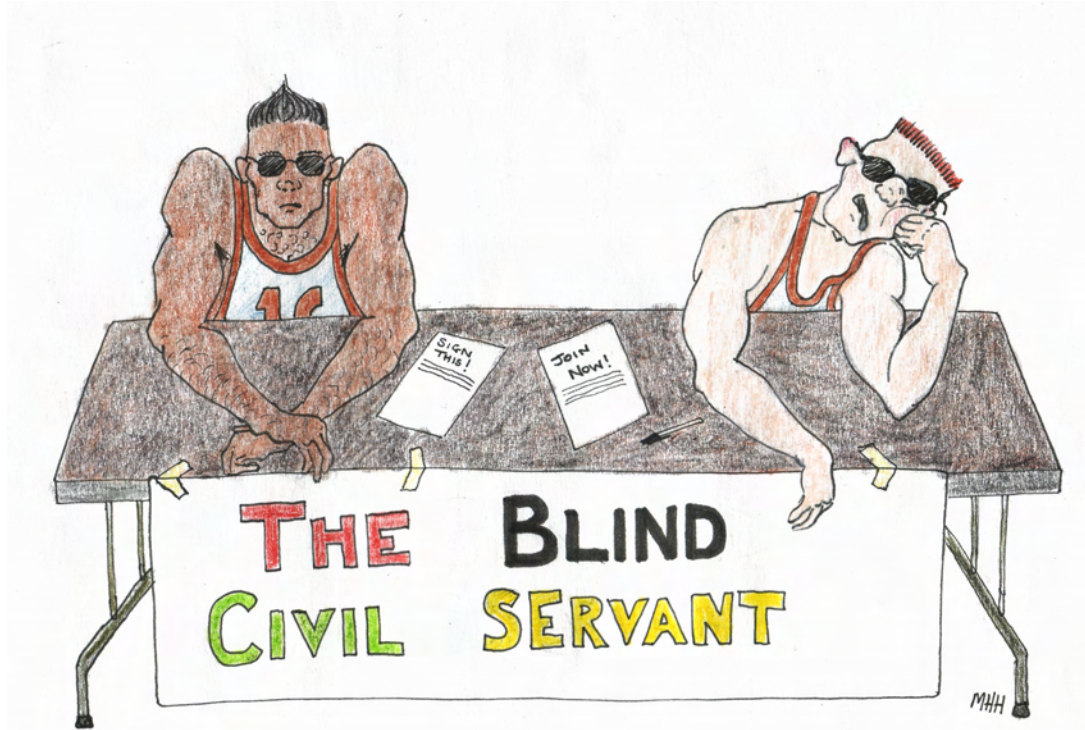
The amount of students who run NQR has risen drastically with the sanctioning of NQR, and its official title of Nighttime Quad Reception, by the administration. Bacow notes this in his March 2011 letter to the student body. "Efforts to manage the risks associated with the run may only have helped it grow. An activity that once engaged only a modest number of students now draws a significant portion of the undergraduate population." It doesn't seem likely that any amount of proposed changes to the event itself would bring back a university sanctioned NQR, but a change in student behavior might bring the administration around. Recently, in support of a non-drunken and more dignified NQR as well as in protest of its cancellation, a group of students stripped down and ran around the Rez Quad, in full view of TUPD. This event ended peacefully, with no arrests, and with decent participation for a chilly Monday night in March.

It appears that President Bacow is using the last of his political capital with the student body to

finally end a "tradition" that he has never agreed with. And as he leaves the university, Tufts is actively looking to replace NQR with, according to the TCU senate, a "new Tufts tradition." With this new tradition, it could be that the less positive attributes of NQR--dangerous levels of alcohol consumption and aggression--will disappear but maybe at too high a cost.

The tradition of NQR has been around since the eighties, and like all traditions, has been handed down and inherited by multiple generations of practitioners. It seems unrealistic, even silly, to believe that the best characteristics of NQR--spontaneity and freedom--will shine through in this forced creation. And if traditions are born and grow over time, is it even possible for a tradition to be created from a submission contest? The answer is unclear, but what is clear is that any future event is up to the student body of Tufts University, not just one group of students. And definitely not the same administrators who canceled the event in the first place. ©





*When social activism turns into social performance*

BY ALEC ERNEST

I t's about 11:45 Monday morning, my least personable time of the week. I'm pushing my way through the campus center, thinking about coffee and muffins, when someone asks me to sign something. I heard what he asked, but that's not what I'm considering. I'm trying to decide whether or not he's going to give me a coffee when I sign his paper. But unfortunately for his cause, he's not a barista; he's an athlete. And not just any athlete, but one I happen to already know is an enormous douchebag. What he's asked me, now irrelevant, is to sign some kind of "commitment" to stop "male violence against women." However, my douchebag-hating, coffee-addicted brain is not available for autographs, and I tell him, "I don't want to get involved."

MOLLY HUGHES-HALLETT



Normally, I think tablers would accept that. The marijuana petitioners once asked me to sign something, and I said “No way!” which was enough for them. No hassling, no heckling, maybe they were just too baked. But these athletes, coach included, were not going to take no for an answer. Instead, they decided to stand up and shout, “This guy doesn’t want to sign against violence towards women!” The coach then pulled out his cell phone and threatened to photograph me, as if to jokingly bully me into signing a contract of domestic peace. As if next time I’m about to smack my girlfriend around, I’m going to consider, “Oh damn, the basketball coach made me sign a contract, so I guess I better not.” As if he and his hooligans are the last line of defense for young women beleaguered by the upper class white undergraduate males that beat them. I keep walking, because I really do need a coffee before I can handle this shit. Monday morning is hard enough without people accusing me of misogyny.

But think about this situation another way. Four or five men much bigger than me asked me to do something. I felt uncomfortable with their request, and very clearly said no. I did not consent. Rather than respecting my declination, those four or five men made me feel more uncomfortable by trying to bully me into doing something that I did not want to do. To them, my discomfort was an opportunity to make a joke, to prove to each other how funny they could be while forcing someone into something. Not exactly the most appropriate strategy to employ for a group of guys lobbying against the power dynamics of harassment. The strange disconnect between their cause and their behavior perfectly represents the problem with Tufts’ absurd culture of social activism: the “cause” too often overshadows the thought that should support it.

The Athletics Department, in association with the Violence Prevention Program at Tufts, decided to have athletes table for the White Ribbon Campaign, in an effort to raise awareness of violence against women and to encourage males to take “an active role” in preventing it. Despite my feelings about the athletes supporting it, the White Ribbon Campaign is certainly a worthy cause. As Professor

of Sociology Sarah Sobieraj informed me, violence against women is particularly bad on college campuses, where nearly 1 in 8 women will be the victim of acquaintance rape. Because women can only take so many steps to protect themselves, raising male awareness is a crucial element of preventing sexual violence. The little paper those jocks wanted me to sign did not ask me to protest violence against women, but rather to “promote respect, dignity and equality.” It asked me to “speak out against attitudes and behaviors that contribute to sexual assault and domestic violence.” The campaign does not just fight for women, but other marginalized groups as well, by also asking males to “confront sexism, homophobia, racism, and other forms of oppression.” How could I possibly argue with that? Down with oppression! The real question is, why is applying those ideas so hard?

College male culture itself is part of the problem. We boys want to be the most and the best, all the time. Drink the most beer, get the best grades, make the most money, lay the most girls. Add athletics, and you need to score the most points, lift the most weight, be the best player. So when fraternities are throwing thinly veiled CEOs and Hos parties celebrating images of sexualized women, sometimes under the guise of charitable fundraising, it’s hard to say there is not a climate of sexism, and of sexual violence. There is an implicit pressure to perform, to take advantage of the girls running around in 80s workout clothes. An athlete was quoted in the *Tufts Daily*, “We kind of create the ‘cool male culture’ here, and we have control of that. We

can be the change if there needs to be one.” So perhaps enlisting the athletes to change “cool male culture” was a good idea.

But there’s still something missing. No one supports oppression, and almost anyone will speak against it. But signing to commit is just that: illegible writing on a piece of paper that’s going to get lost in some football player’s locker, rather than actual commitment. Furthermore, I have to question how much they care about the issue when they themselves, albeit in jest, harass me into signing so they can get to lunch sooner. In these situations, I think of my gay friends who have been called “a faggot,” or my Arab friends who have been called “a terrorist,” all by athletes. I remember the sports-oriented frat that used “smoke” as a code word for black people trying to come inside. My experience at the campus center was simply a few jokes told by a few jocks, but they clearly

CONTINUED ON PAGE 20

**ON THE SURFACE, IT WAS SIMPLY A FEW JOKES TOLD BY A FEW JOCKS,**

but their actions revealed the purely symbolic nature of their request:

“Sign this paper so we can make like we give a fuck about this cause.”



# HUMOR

underestimated the symbolic value of their actions. And in so doing, they revealed the purely symbolic nature of their request: "Sign this paper so we can make like we give a fuck about this cause."

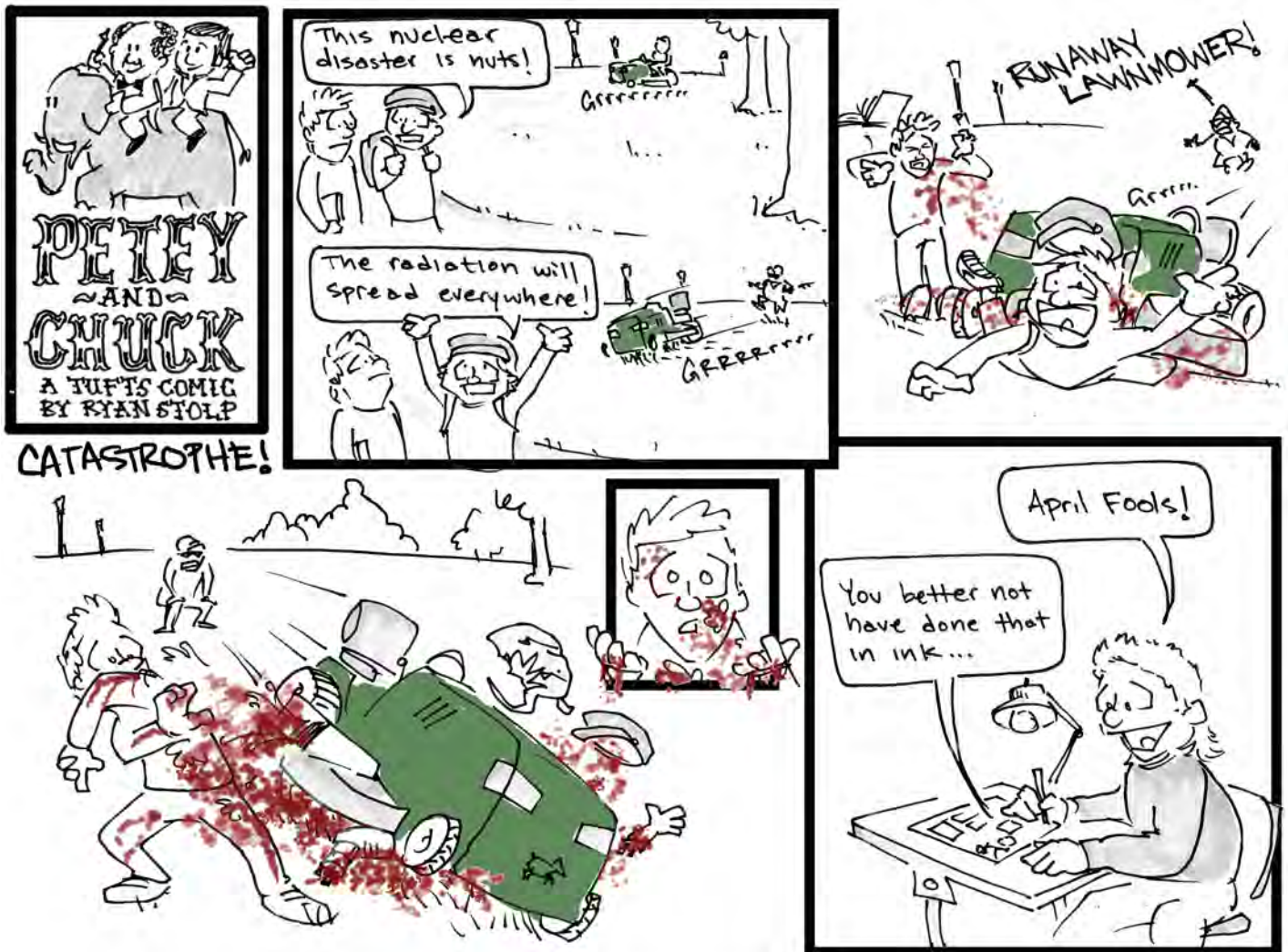
Alternatively, they could have involved passersby in an educational discussion about violence against women. They could have told me that domestic abuse is spread equally across socio-economic statuses. They could have explained how and why objectifying language dehumanizes women and leads to sexual violence, like acquaintance rape. Instead of pressuring themselves to "score" signatures, they could have challenged the cultural pressure to "score" with women. They should have listened to survivors and attempted to understand how harassment feels and

what it means to be threatened by rape every day. If they create the "cool male culture," why don't they use that position to create a new "cool" masculinity, which does not thrive on the dehumanization of other groups? Why didn't any of them stop the coach when he decided to bully someone? Isn't that exactly what they are asking ME to do? One can hope they did these things with people who stopped to talk, but alas, all that I got was harassment to sign the paper.

Even so, it's not only the athletes and fraternities who fall victim to misguided activism. Let us not forget the President's Lawn tree protesters in 2009. They showed up in droves to stand around the tree, while forgetting to discuss alternatives with the administration, which would have told

them that the tree was not going to be cut down at all. Their valiant dedication to the "cause" blinded them to thinking about the cause, probably in the same way as the athletes who heckled me were oblivious to the dissonance of their behavior.

Ultimately there's no easy way to measure how committed someone is to preventing intolerance. Signing a paper is a superficial gesture at best, when real prevention must happen elsewhere: in the dark, under the influence, and behind closed doors. If you see abusive or dehumanizing behavior, challenge it and help that person think about their actions. But hey, that was last week. Who cares about it now that there are new tables with new causes to get behind. ©





# A Sexophone Manifesto

by Daniel Heller

Don't read this article until you have opened up your web browser and are on this site:  
<http://koti.phnet.fi/santamik/sexophone.swf>

Being the URL in my friends Facebook status, I had no idea July 25, 2010 would be the day that my life changed forever. The moment I clicked the link and the new window popped up, I knew. I had been introduced to Sexophone. And nothing would ever be the same.

What is Sexophone? On the most basic level, Sexophone is a 12 second loop from a saxophone solo in the song "Run Away," as performed in the Eurovision Song Contest 2010 by Sun Stroke Project & Olia Tira. That literal definition does not come close to encapsulating the true Sexophone. On a metaphysical level, Sexophone, as it lives on the Internet, is something entirely new, an entity free of time or space.

You can't call Sexophone a song, as songs have beginnings and endings. Sexophone is a simple sax solo with a constant, thumping, synthesized drum seamlessly looped into infinity. The music is accompanied by a similarly un-ending video loop of the Sexophonist himself, front and center playing his instrument while rhythmically thrusting his pelvis. In his bright blue pants, sleeveless striped vest, and white Ray Bans, he exudes cool. Next to him are two open-shirted male dancers, an ostrich-like woman clad in shiny silver with teal accents, and two men with bleached blond hair and matching tight white pants. Their dance moves are foreign to our MTV sensibilities, but remain strangely alluring. The whole video is framed by a stroboscopic purple border. All of which is to say, Sexophone is nothing if not sexy.

The visuals are mesmerizing, but the music is transcendent. At first your toes tap and your head nods. Then you start to

relax and let it wash over you. You feel your mind going blank. You realize that Sexophone does not need the video at all. You open up a new tab on your browser and simply go about your normal routine. You write a paper, eat a snack, Skype your parents. All the while, Sexophone continues to play its endless loop. There is never an appropriate time to turn off Sexophone. It is looped over and over and over, forever. The transition from Sexophone to non-Sexophone is jarring. Suddenly entering a world without the music in the background simply feels like a life de-saturated of color and emotion, because it is. You have become one with Sexophone.

Sexophone is a virus. It travels from Facebook status to Facebook status, dorm room to dorm room, infecting the Tufts campus and the world. You might know it as "Epic Sax" guy, or you might have seen one of the countless parodies or remixes on YouTube, but at some point, you will run into the real deal.

Sexophone is a polarizing entity. It is both a stupid Internet meme not worthy of your time, and also a fascinating philosophical thought and the basis of a 609-word analysis. It is a catchy distraction and a nauseating tune. Sexophone is all of these things because it is nothing more than a context-less 12 second loop of a saxophone from a Eurovision awards show. From this moment until forever, Sexophone will be playing. Our interactions with it may be transient—even I do not have Sexophone open on my computer at all times—however, the saxophone solo, the dancers, the flashing purple border, will always be *there*, wherever *there* is. They are all stuck in the perpetual present. There is no past or future. There is only Sexophone. ☺



# NEVER QUIT RUNNING

BY ERIC ARCHIBALD

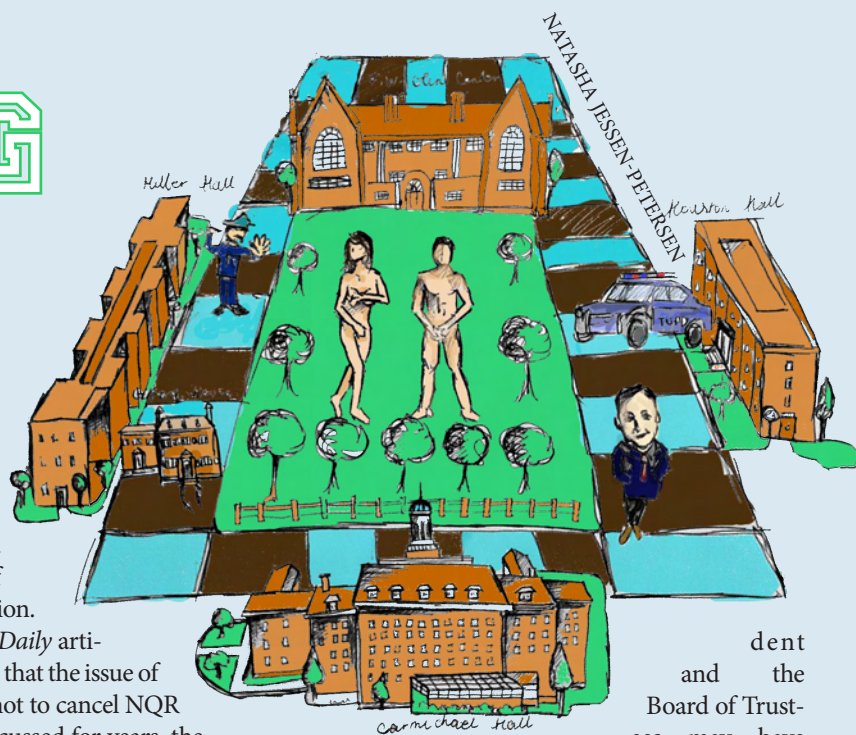
Jumbos, lend me your pants—or just stash them in the bushes next to West. On Monday, March 14, 2011, the *Tufts Daily* reported that Tufts University President Larry Bacow had made the decision to discontinue the school's sanctioning of NQR (what the administration calls Nighttime Quad Reception, but what everyone who's anyone calls Naked Quad Run). The decision was a complex one, and it is not up to me to question President Bacow's rationale for canceling the event. The *Daily* article cited Bacow's concerns regarding student safety as the impetus for the event's cancellation, and anyone who was present, either running or spectating, at the last NQR will have a hard time arguing for the run's safeness. Bacow cited student alcohol abuse as a major concern, and the article also briefly mentioned Spring Fling as another concerning event on the minds of the administration and the Board of Trustees.

This article, while in agreement with President Bacow's concern for student health and safety, is a call to arms. NQR must not die, because along with it will die students' power to determine our own fate, to determine for ourselves what is safe; what is responsible; what is 'fun.' We must not be preoccupied with feelings of anger or distrust at the school's decision to cancel what has become a tradition of exercising freedom (as well as a good source of cardio), a somewhat rare instance of school spirit and a much-needed expulsion of a semester's worth of stress. Rather, we must continue to fight for NQR's recurrence—with or without the administration's approval. I know that the (second) most memorable part of my NQRing experiences has been (after being really cold) the wave of camaraderie and relief that washes over me as I'm running 'round the Rez quad. It is nights like NQR that we push our impending finals to the back of our minds, truly enjoy one another's company, and celebrate what has been another wonderful semester at Tufts. NQR is catharsis, it is a culmination, a finale.

While I applaud Bacow's concern for the student body's general health, I regret the timing and manner of his decision. Though the *Daily* article mentions that the issue of whether or not to cancel NQR has been discussed for years, the fact the Bacow has chosen this semester, his last at Tufts, to make such a controversial decision seems, to me, to show rare hints of cowardice. One could argue that Bacow has made this choice in order to make things easier for his successor, Anthony Monaco, so that Monaco wouldn't have to make such an unpopular decision in his first years in office. I, however, would argue that if anything, this decision has put Monaco in a worse situation than before. The last day of classes next winter will inevitably be tension-filled, and I think Monaco should have had a chance to deal with the event on his own instead of being forced to face the aftermath of a sudden prohibition by his predecessor.

I would be the first to admit that Larry Bacow is regarded as a Tuftonian hero, a legend, an exception to the typically inaccessible and authoritarian university president. My first thoughts at the announcement of his resignation were of grief and disappointment that I would not get a chance to eat a senior dinner at Gifford House with him or receive his speech at graduation. It pains me to say that the cancellation of NQR shows President Bacow in a different light. Instead of dealing with the safety concerns in a way that enables students to continue a time-honored tradition, he is merely outlawing it and, in essence, walking away.

Fortunately, my last comment is my most hopeful. The administration, the presi-



dent and the Board of Trustees may have condemned our naked run, but it was never these people who made NQR the wonderful event it is. Though I always appreciate the hot chocolate and doughnuts provided, I can bring my own snacks. The fences and hay bales helped me demarcate the running path, but after two nights of running naked around the quad (and almost two years of walking next to, around, and across it), I think I can manage to properly navigate a rectangle. Finally, while TUPD managed to provide us with obstacles (multi-color ghosts to our naked Pac men and women), I somehow think NQR would go even more smoothly without the requisite police brutality.

What I'm saying is this: Never Quit Running. NQR is about us. It's about throwing our academic and personal issues—and clothing—to the wind in a maenadic ritual and running freely, if only for one night, before sinking back to the drudgery of finals. I'm saying run with me next winter. Clothing optional, responsibility mandatory: prove to the administration that NQR can be safe and incident free. Bring your friends, your friends' friends, your professor if you want. Don't bring townies—it's always weird. We'll run with or without the administration's help or approval in a statement that says: we respect your authority but this is about us; about our expression. We can do this alone. We will Never Quit Running. ☺





# Can't Beet It: We Dig Local Food



BY LUKE PYENSON

## Beet and Blood Orange Salad

Serves 4

Inspired by *Torrisi Italian Specialties, NY*

3 medium Chioggia beets  
2 medium red beets  
1/4 cup toasted hazelnuts, crushed  
2 blood oranges, peeled and sectioned  
handful of mint, torn  
Between 1/16 and 1/8 of a cup of good olive oil\*  
A dash of red wine vinegar  
A little salt

NOTE: This salad would be great with crumbled soft goat cheese, feta, or ricotta salata, but I prefer it simple and without any cheese.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Individually wrap the beets in tinfoil, and roast in oven for between an hour and an hour and a half, or until fork tender. Peel the beets (either with a peeler or by rubbing between paper towels), and set in the fridge to chill for at least an hour. Cut beets into little chunks and combine in a mixing bowl with the olive oil, vinegar, salt, and blood oranges. Garnish each serving with a healthy pinch of toasted hazelnuts and several torn-up mint leaves.

\*It's tough to give an exact amount for olive oil; start with a drizzle, and try to just barely coat them.

I like to live my life post-ironically by the mantra “Don’t just talk about it, be about it.” Over the past few years, the nationwide trend of eating organic and using buzzwords like ‘sustainable’ and ‘local’ has proliferated to the point of becoming omnipresent. Lots of people talk about it, but not everyone *is* about it. After freshman year, I spent two and a half weeks volunteering on an organic dairy farm in Italy. Through this experience, I was able to transcend just talking about this food moment and can now say that I *am* about it.

Spending time on an actual organic farm, I encountered what it truly means to eat and live organically, sustainably, and locally. Really locally. On my first night I was served raw veal that had been grazing in the adjacent pasture just days earlier. Instead of buying eggs, the guy who ran my farm would barter his delicious sheep and goat’s milk cheese for eggs from a friend of his, who raises chickens. I didn’t see any actual money the entire time I was there. It had no significance in this system.

Another important thing I learned is just how *hard* it is to work on a farm. I hadn’t really done any manual labor in my life prior to this trip. So on the first day, when Mario gave me a scythe (think grim reaper) and sent me out into a field of stinging nettles, I had a reality check. My next reality check came five minutes later, when I was called insignificant in Italian. I honestly

almost cried (read: I actually cried, but not in front of him).

Of course, the days progressed, and Mario and I grew closer as he began to understand my motives for being there and my utter lack of experience. And I began to understand the true meaning of all those buzzwords I mentioned before. I’m not trying to say that, in order to understand this enormous phenomenon behind the way many Americans eat, you have to go work on a farm—though I do recommend it. But I *am* saying that it’s good to shop at farmer’s markets as often as possible. And Somerville is one of the few places in Massachusetts that actually has one during the winter, indoors.

The Somerville farmer’s market is held at the Center for Arts at the Armory, located at 191 Highland Ave. about a five-minute drive or a worthwhile 15-20-minute walk from Davis. I try to go most weekends, not necessarily to do *all* my grocery shopping (that would be impossible both from a financial and from a ‘they don’t have Raisin Bran there’ perspective), just to pick up a few special things. I buy honey from a local beekeeper (Boston Honey Company). I think about talking to the cute girl-fishmonger I’ve ever seen at Jordan Bros. Seafood. Last week, I bought a pound of ground pork for \$9 from Stillman’s Farm and used it to make homemade chorizo.

The stand that is always the busiest, though, is Winter Moon Farm’s, which sells pretty much the only produce that’s in season right now—root vegetables. Beautiful, beautiful root vegetables. Carrots—both purple and orange—turnips, watermelon, daikon radishes, parsnips, and my favorite: beets. Recently, at a restaurant called Torrisi Italian Specialties in New York City, I ate the *best* beets I have ever eaten in my life, roasted and served cold as a salad with olive oil, orange zest, and hazelnuts. So simple, but honestly so unbelievable. This recipe is an adaptation of what I ate there. I’m not sure exactly what they did, but I tried my best to recreate it, using both Winter Moon Farm’s red beets and Chioggia beets, an heirloom variety which is possibly the most aesthetically stunning vegetable on the planet.

If you want to come to the farmer’s market, send an email to [luke.pyenson@tufts.edu](mailto:luke.pyenson@tufts.edu). I go most Saturday mornings and I have a station wagon. Be about it. ☺



# In Pursuit

**“LOCALS DON'T MIND THE TUFTS STUDENTS...  
THEY AREN'T OBNOXIOUS AND THEY'RE  
REALLY SMART.”**

The 2010 financial reports revealed that which restaurant chain had surpassed McDonald's as the largest restaurant chain in terms of units? In lieu of an autograph, which pop singer recently drew a homemade money sign tattoo on a fan's ankle, using a needle and a pen? For most people, the answers to these questions (Subway and Ke\$ha, respectively) are both unknown and unimportant; however, to a growing following at a local pub, these frivolous answers are all part of a new trend sweeping the bar scene: trivia night.

Every Tuesday night, Tufts students and Somerville locals converge at P.J. Ryan's for drinks, laughs, and, above all, trivia. The Irish pub, located in Teele Square, is only one of the countless bars hopping aboard the trivia contest bandwagon, combining society's love of friendly competition and random facts. The appeal of these contests is easy to understand. Participants enjoy the opportunity to spice up a regular bar night and owners embrace the contests as a way to increase their sales and number of customers. Either way, trivia is quickly establishing its place in American bar culture.

According to an article in the Boston Globe, there are more than 1,700 separate trivia competitions in the United States

each week; almost three times as many as there were five years ago. For local trivia enthusiasts, Boston is an ideal location to prove your talents. The city ranks in the top five in terms of number of weekly competitions. Popular trivia hotspots include Inman Square's Druid, an Irish bar and the 2008 Best in Boston Trivia Night winner; Harvard Square's Tommy Doyle's; and Allston's White Horse Tavern, which hosts trivia contests three nights per week.

In the area surrounding the Tufts campus, students and locals have a variety of trivia contests they can attend. Johnny D's in Davis Square offers trivia and free pizza on Monday nights, while Joshua Tree and P.J. Ryan's compete for the Tuesday night crowd. But according to a few who have sampled the different contests, P.J. Ryan's is the place to go for original and fun trivia. "We used to go to Orleans [in Davis Square], but it was more tailored toward 30-year-olds, so the questions weren't very interesting," says Alex Lach, a new P.J. Ryan's competitor. "This place [P.J. Ryan's] has the best atmosphere and way more Tufts people," he adds.

Each pub's quiz format is unique, with different rules and questions that greatly alter the game's appeal. P.J. Ryan's pub quiz allows for teams of up to six

people, with groups recording their answers on a score sheet that is tallied after each round. Each question has a category, ranging from the traditional, such as geography, literature, or science; to the more obscure, such as last week's "Batshit Crazy People who aren't Charlie Sheen."

After each round, the MC reads aloud the answers, and teams cheer or boo to indicate their success during that round. Although the questions become increasingly more difficult as the game progresses, the diversity of categories usually limits the ability for one team to dominate, and most weeks the competition is tight. "I often know answers to random questions, but then can't name important landmarks or events," said one regular who wished to remain anonymous. "One week I accurately named the original members of Destiny's Child. I was the only one who cheered when he read the answer and the entire bar stared at me. That was embarrassing."

At the helm of the pub's weekly contest is Quizmaster Bob, a burly guy in his mid-30s with a bushy beard and a newsboy cap permanently on his head. An accountant at a law firm by day, on Tuesday nights the jolly Bob moonlights as a trivia master, turning the P.J. Ryan's pub quiz into a popular weekly event. "It used to be



# of Pub Trivia

**White Horse Tavern:** Wednesday, Thursday, Sunday at 8 PM, no buy in  
**P. J. Ryan's:** Tuesdays at 9, 21 +, \$5 buy in  
**Druid:** Wednesdays at 8, \$5 buy in  
**Tommy Doyle's:** Tuesdays at 7, no buy in

hit or miss,” says the bar’s waitress Bridget Mann of the trivia contests. “But we are now seeing a consistently good crowd,” she adds, praising Quizmaster Bob as a reason for the new popularity of the P.J. Ryan’s trivia night. To regulars, Quizmaster Bob is an icon for the bar’s quizzes. “I have tried other trivia contests in the area,” said David Morrison, a Somerville resident and regular at P.J. Ryan’s. “But it is hard to beat Bob,” Morrison added. “His questions are original and he is just such a good guy.”

To come up with interesting questions week after week, Quizmaster Bob relies on a variety of sources for inspiration. “I look everywhere,” he says. “Old trivia books, websites, even random shit on Wikipedia.” The recent popularity of the pub’s trivia contest among Tufts students provides a “new challenge” for the quizmaster, who says he now tailors questions to appeal to a younger population. He adds that he has to find harder questions to challenge the brainy Tufts population. “You kids can actually answer my math and science questions,” he adds with a laugh.

Although the definition of trivia implies meaningless or unimportant information, do not let the name fool you—pub trivia devotees see the competitions

as much more than irrelevant knowledge. For some, the motivation is financial; many bars give the winning team a cash prize or gift certificate. At P.J. Ryan’s, each team pays \$5 to compete and the winning team splits half of the total money. Not wanting to discourage the less successful teams, the bar hands out free shots to the event’s losers at the end of the night.

For other contestants, the friendly competition is enough motivation to participate. “When I get an answer correct, I like to rub it in everyone else’s face,” said Abby Fuller, a frequent P.J. Ryan’s competitor. “One time, I knew the correct name of the Taco Bell Chihuahua and my group didn’t believe me. We lost six points because of that question. They will never live that down.”

Bar-goers are not the only ones embracing this new phenomenon. To a pub owner, weekly trivia competitions, especially those held during the week, are a fun way to lure people to the bar. Once inside, the fun atmosphere and lengthy games (P.J. Ryan’s competitions generally last two hours) encourage patrons to keep drinking. David O’Malley, the bar’s bouncer, says that Tuesday nights are P.J. Ryan’s most popular weeknight, with the pub quiz bringing in roughly the same number of people as a Friday or Saturday

night. However, Mann says that the bar is just seeing an increase in drink sales, while the dinner sales remain the same.

Both of the P.J. Ryan’s employees noted a shift in the demographics of the trivia night contestants. “Over the past year, we have seen a shift from mostly locals to more college students,” says O’Malley. He estimates the trivia crowd is now “60% Tufts, 40% locals,” with fluctuations from week to week. When asked how the bar and its regulars were adjusting to the recent influx of Tufts students, both O’Malley and Mann agreed that the college students offer a lively change of pace. “Locals don’t mind the Tufts students,” remarked O’Malley. “They aren’t obnoxious and they’re really smart,” he adds. Mann agreed, commenting that the college students are strong competitors. “They can answer questions I don’t even understand,” she says with a self-deprecating laugh.

If last night’s standing-room only pub quiz is any indication, trivia nights are the new trend among college students, combining their diverse knowledge with their fresh energy. Whether hoping to win some money, have some fun, or just get a free round of shots, bar-goers and college students alike are enthusiastically embracing the friendly pursuit of trivia. ☺



SAFIYA BOBB

# Keep Doing We It Until We Are Dead

By Tim Hanger

Do not drink if seal is broken or if bottle shows evidence of tampering.

I drank it anyway, the store-bought orange juice. Then I offered you some.

What do I want? Will it be much better if you die too?

Yes, I suppose it will be.

Then we can high-five at small victories in the ICU and compete for the nurse's affections. It's well known that a nurse's affections wither if not stoked often and ardently by opposing flames. Perhaps you will drop something, a pencil or a catheter accessory, from your bedside and the nurse will have to bend over to pick it up, and when you look over at me, I will be grinning lewdly or making a feeble humping motion beneath my blankets, and you will smile wanly and think about how the feeble humping motion is both triumphant and sad considering my condition. Then I will patiently wait for up to a minute before accidentally dropping something from my bedside and the nurse will bend halfway down, not suspecting a thing, until she catches a glimpse of you painfully winding up for a hump from the corner of her eye and she will bolt back up in a blush of realization. Then she will have both hands on her hips and an amused-in-spite-of-herself expression that seems to say, "You boys are incorrigible," and we will all laugh, but then the air in the room will darken and constrict, and our happy/horny laughter will fall off into a sort of hollow/melancholy laughter because we will all remember that we are really going to die from our incurable disease and there's nothing the young nurse or her accommodating butt can do about it, even though she secretly wishes that her bending over and showing her butt could help us to survive and that's why she will silently vow to keep doing it until we are dead.

After you drank it, the orange juice, maybe tainted with hobo spit or a new kind of anthrax, you said thank you. I said you're welcome. I threw the rest away.



I can't help  
but remember  
the minnows,  
fractions of fish,  
slivers of slippery self,  
fighting between  
the slats in the dock.

They weren't dead and dried,  
like the crab legs reaching  
from the aged wood  
for some forgotten promise.

They were live, wriggling, forced  
between the boards  
by our fleshybrown fingers.

They flapped, hitting  
each slab of wood  
with a gutsy staccato  
"save me" beat.

Some faced the sea, bottoms up,  
waving their silver flag tails  
in the name of freedom.

Others looked at us  
through the planks, bullets  
of pungent surrender.

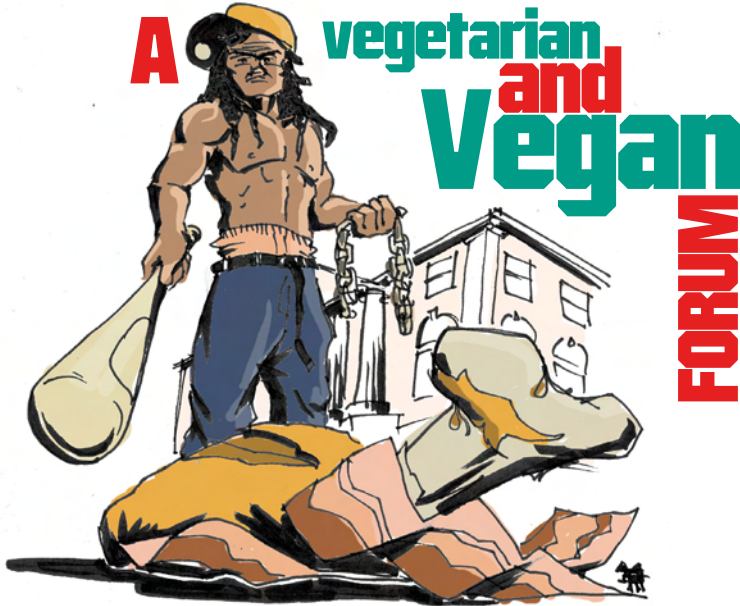
# ANY GIVEN SUNDAY

by emma shakarshy





# POLICE BLOTTER



Thursday, March 17 • 5:00 a.m.

The following incident is reported factually. In the words of Sgt. McCarthy, "Really, I couldn't make this stuff up." [chuckling]

At 5 in the morning on the 17th of March, an officer observed an individual on the central heating tower. The individual was supposedly the reason there was also a horse stuffed animal atop the tower, and a banner posted halfway up the chimney. The poster read "BEAT'N MEAT N' EATON." The individual explained that it was propaganda promoting a vegetarian and vegan forum to be held in Eaton. "I'm glad that's what they meant," McCarthy reflected. If not a vegetarian forum, what other interpretations could there be?

Saturday, March 12 • 12:05 a.m.

In a familiar children's fable, a golden-headed adolescent breaks into a family's home and proceeds to qualify their meals as "too hot!" "way too cold," and "mmm, mmm, good." Tufts has its own version, where a drunken visitor trespasses on various porches on Powder House Boulevard and assesses the quality of their rocking chairs. However here on the hill we have TUPD, who promptly transported the intoxicated blonde to Mass General Hospital.

Also Saturday, March 12 • 12:30 a.m.

Continuing on through the woods after their encounter with Stumbling Drunk Goldilocks, police came across a jovial house filled with partiers from all over the world. Police noticed a handful of fashionistas sporting wristbands, which entitled them to special drinks. The partygoers said they were strictly, and exclusively, available to those who had 21 years or more under their bedazzled belts. "But they must not be that exclusive," TUPD recounted. Like the wolf dressed as a grandmother of another tale, they had found a Stumbling Drunk Riding Hood wearing a wristband, just like someone of 21 years. "Gotchya!" they said, triumphantly.

Wednesday, March 16 • 2:59 a.m.

Energy consumption is one of the great debates of our time. You make a decision to conserve every time you carpool or argue with your roommate about leaving the damn light on when you're trying to sleep. If you were a passionate environmentalist, you might even summon the police, who would probably say something along the lines of, "Turn the lights off, go to sleep everyone." Of course, environmental violence usually spawns from some underlying incident, like the video your roommate took of you, which you are afraid he might put on YouTube. Maybe you could entertain the officer with the video when he shows up, in a desperate attempt to make the trip worth his while.



## Houston Hall has issues, and more than everyone else

—Illustrated and compiled by Ryan Stolp



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Tuesday, April 5, 2011

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