Creating Positive Change with Leadership Oxford

Are leaders born or made? It’s a chicken-or-egg question that the Leadership Oxford team doesn’t spend any time debating, because they believe that both are true. Honi Migdol, director of student involvement and leadership, says, “Leadership Oxford dispels the thought that only certain people can be leaders. It brings out the inner strengths that are already there inside each person.”

That has been the philosophy behind Leadership Oxford (LO) since its founding in 1988 by then-Chaplain Sammy Clark. LO prepares freshmen for leadership roles in their sophomore year. During one week in spring semester, they attend evening sessions to learn more about types of leadership, assess their own leadership profiles and personalities, and interact with each other and LO coordinators. These events are capped with a weekend retreat in the north Georgia mountains, where they learn more about teamwork as well as themselves and each other. LO is a joint initiative of Dean Joe Moon’s Office for Campus Life and Chaplain Lyn Pace’s Office of Religious and Spiritual Life. Migdol oversees LO as well as other Oxford leadership programs.

Clark says the impetus for Leadership Oxford came when he realized that most of the student leaders he was working with were largely inexperienced. “Sophomores had had little preparation to assume their responsibilities.” Clark discussed the idea of student leadership development with a few students who agreed to help him spread the word. He decided to limit the program to fifty participants. “It took me three days to get fifty,” he says, “but we got some great people.” By happenstance Clark had recently met someone from Executive Adventure, a firm that specializes in teambuilding and experiential learning exercises, and he enlisted their help. News about the experience spread quickly. “The next year it wasn’t difficult to get our fifty participants,” says Clark, “because of the great enthusiasm from the first year.” When it came time to sign up, students began lining up early—earlier and earlier each year; so early, in fact, that he and Dean Moon decided that a lottery would be a more fair way to choose participants. Lottery is still the selection method, though the field has been increased slightly to fifty-one, with a few students selected as alternates. Ten sophomores from the prior year’s LO class are selected to return as stu-
Penny wise:
Now more than ever, financial literacy is needed, says alumnus

When he was growing up in Timmonsville, South Carolina, Samuel Jackson 98OX 00C worked at his family’s Laundromat—starting with counting out quarters when he was five or so, and working his way up to closing up shop for the evening when he was in middle school. “I learned responsibility with money from a young age,” says Jackson, president and CEO of the nonprofit Economic Empowerment Initiative (EEI), a financial literacy organization that works with youth and families to help them better manage their financial resources. “I wanted to position stu-
dents to be more financially aware, to reduce their debt load. When I graduated, students’ average debt was $15,000. Ten years later, it’s almost doubled. And that’s not counting students who go on to grad school, law school, medical school.” The tight job market and high unemployment is compounded for young people and recent college graduates, he says. “Of 2009 graduates, 85 to 90 percent moved back in with their parents,” he says. “And the unemployment rate for sixteen- to thirty-year-olds is 18 to 23 percent, much higher than the national average.” To be successful, he says, students must become more financially savvy from the start, gaining a broad education while building specific job skills along the way.

Jackson graduated from Oxford in 1998, where he received the Virgil Lady Sophomore Service Award, and from Emory in 2000, with a degree in economics. “I started taking economics classes as a sophomore, and Dr. Frank Maddox helped to shape me,” he says. “Being thrown into a leadership position early on at Oxford created a foundation—you learn to take action when you see a need, and not be afraid to take risks.”

Jackson started EEI in 2001 to help high school and college students and their families learn how to budget, use credit cards wisely, manage debt, save and invest, and become successful entrepreneurs. “I believe that our focus, for the recovery of our economy, must be on entrepreneurial success. We have to build a pipeline of sustainable jobs,” says Jackson, who was able to share his thoughts on this matter with President Barack Obama when he visited Atlanta this fall.

Using an innovative “peer-to-peer” approach, EEI provides financial literacy programs to K–12 schools, community-based organizations, religious groups, and college campuses across the country. The free seminar topics include Understanding Student Loans, Homeownership, and Understanding Employee Benefits. The organization also has an online virtual classroom (www.eei-inc.org). Recently, EEI won $50,000 in the Pepsi Refresh Project, which the organization will use to expand their seminars on college and high school campuses in metro Atlanta, Jackson says. The EEI, which has a staff of twenty-two and offices in Charlotte, Baltimore, and the D.C. area, receives sup-
port from dozens of businesses and organizations, and has an annual CEO roundtable discussion and awards ceremony that attracts such luminaries as Bernie Marcus, Lou Dobbs, Kathy Ireland, and Hank Aaron.

“I see this as social entrepreneur-
ship, to make a difference in the lives of so many young people,” Jackson says. “Students need to understand that their credit score might ultimately be more important than their GPA.”

—Mary Loftus

As Oxford Outlook went to press, President Obama announced the appointment of Jackson to his President’s Advisory Council on Financial Capability, where Jackson will work to improve financial literacy and promote services that will benefit consumers.

Class of 2012 Settles in at Oxford

On August 18 the Oxford Class of 2012 arrived on campus from thirty-eight states and twenty nations. With an enrollment of nearly 550 students, it is the largest freshman class in Oxford history, and it is also the most academically competitive, boasting the highest SAT and ACT scores in college history.

Joyce (Yunwah) Juang 11OX and Amy Beth Willis 11OX (left) greet families as they arrive on campus. Quincy Cherry 12OX (right) unpacks and gets organized in his residence hall.
Record Enrollment at Oxford:
Celebrating what is new, appreciating what is tried and true

If you have ever given a party, you know a little of what it is like to be a college administrator during the admissions season. You decide about how large you would like the party to be, you make out a guest list, and send out invitations. You know that not everyone on the list can come, so the number of those invited is greater than the number of attendees you hope for. Then you wait for the RSVPs to come in so you know how to plan for your big day.

This is not unlike what Oxford and most other institutions of higher education do in selecting their admitted students. The difference, however, is that the admissions process is far more objective than party planning. Multiple variables are considered, formulas are computed, and professional admissions experts are consulted, and most of the time this leads to our achieving our yield targets. In the world of admissions, “yield” is the number of accepted students who actually enroll, indicating their intent by making a deposit by the May 1 deadline. Given the current economic climate, our consultants told us in late winter that we should expect our yield to decline by about 15 percent from the previous year.

To compensate for this expected decline they advised that we increase our acceptance pool accordingly, in order to reach our target of a total enrollment of 775. Well, as many of you have heard, the experts were wrong: Oxford’s yield not only did not decline by 15 percent, it actually increased by 23 percent, for a total enrollment of more than nine hundred.

Being Oxford College, we allowed ourselves to look like the proverbial deer in the headlights for only about five minutes. Shock was replaced first by the proud realization that we would be welcoming the most highly credentialed freshman class in Oxford’s history. But after a brief celebration it was time to get to work. Branham and East needed to be renovated, space needed to be increased in classrooms, and adjunct and retired faculty who had taught for us before needed to be hired to support the greater number of students and class sections. And we made it happen; everything was ready and in place to receive the new freshmen in mid-August.

That is good news, but the even better news is how smoothly the transition has gone and how even more enlivened our campus is. Through careful planning and forward thinking, the anticipated traffic jams in the dining hall, library, and other spaces have just not occurred. And having more students has made some new things possible. For instance, the Chess Club now has enough members to have a tournament. The Oxford String Ensemble has more musicians than ever, including two very skilled cellists. The Oxford Chorale has enough male voices for the first time in a decade. The energy of simply having almost 150 more people on campus is palpable. We have learned that our campus is capable of supporting 900 students, an enrollment goal that we thought we would not achieve for at least three more years.

We have also learned from the testimony of our new students that they are here for reasons that are familiar: for Oxford’s small-campus experience, academic challenge, sense of community, and opportunities for service and leadership. So while we celebrate what is new at Oxford, we also appreciate what is tried and true, the enduring qualities of Oxford that do not change.

Stephen H. Bowen
stephen.bowen@emory.edu

Oxford Hosts Alumni Awards Banquet


The Oxford Board of Counselors R. Carl Chandler Award for a Lifetime of Leadership through Service to Oxford College.
Hugh M. Tarbutton Sr. 52OX 55B

The Oxford College Alumni Association’s Honorary Alumnus/a Award is given to a person who did not graduate from Oxford College but who has shown exceptional dedication in his or her service to Oxford.

Honorary Alumnus Award
James W. Wagner

The Oxford College Alumni Association’s Outstanding Teaching Award is given to an Oxford College faculty member, past or present, who has imbued a love of learning, a mastery of the work, and a sense of community in the course of teaching at Oxford.

Outstanding Teaching Award
Kent B. Linville

The Oxford College Alumni Association’s Outstanding Alumnus/a Award is given to an Oxford College alumus/a who has shown exceptional dedication, loyalty, and innovation in his or her service to Oxford.

Outstanding Alumnus Award
Joe L. Bartenfeld 64OX 66C

Mary H. Barnes

The Oxford College Alumni Association’s Outstanding Staff Award is given to an Oxford College staff member, past or present, who has shown exceptional dedication, loyalty, and service in his or her service to Oxford. They also appreciate the sense of community that Oxford offers.

Outstanding Staff Award
Mary H. Barnes
Working with Mother Nature to Protect the Earth

Brooke Traynham 01OX 03C never set out to work in the nuclear industry, nor did it ever cross her mind as a possible career. Yet today she works for the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission as a nuclear engineer. “I work with a group that is charged with protecting the public and environment from exposure to these radioactive materials,” she says. “In instances where there has already been contamination from a radioactive source, we help to mitigate the risk and impacts.”

How did Traynham get from Oxford classrooms to national labs where radioactive waste has been produced and buried? After majoring in earth and environmental science and sociology at Emory, Traynham attended Vanderbilt, where she earned a PhD environmental engineering. There she became interested in designing a better way to contain nuclear waste. “For decades, we have been burying radioactive waste in the ground in systems carefully designed by engineers. However, the power of Mother Nature’s ability to drive the system towards equilibrium with the surrounding natural system has been underestimated, or in some cases, not considered in the design process,” she says. “My interest in nuclear systems was born out of my desire to understand how we can design these containment systems to work with natural processes, while still isolating radioactivity and protecting human and natural systems—seeing Mother Nature as an ally instead of an enemy.”

Traynham discovered the first steps along this career path when she took her first geology, environmental science, and sociology courses at Oxford. “Steve Henderson became an early mentor for me. At the time, I had no intention of taking my love of geology and ecology so seriously, nor did I imagine I would be able to integrate this background into an industry that has a long reputation for secrecy, top-secret security, and rigid regulations,” she says. “The gift that Oxford gave me academically was the experience of going out in the field, through a large range of courses where we were able to visit the systems we studied. Mike McQuaide and Steve Henderson’s class, which took us to Ecuador, had an enormous impact on my perspective through our immersion in a very complex cultural and ecological system,” she says.

“Looking back, I now recognize that in school I learned two equally important things: problem-solving skills and perspective, which guide the way you think about problems,” she says. “The projects I work on now require the same type of interdisciplinary thinking that Oxford encouraged in its field experience classes.” These are two important lessons, which will guide Traynham in the future as well. “My only long-term goal is to continue to be challenged and grow from each new experience,” she says.

Las Pozas
Researching a Surrealist Masterpiece

My current research began with a fortuitous discovery that has led me to investigate two previously unrecognized geniuses of the surrealist art movement: Edward James and Plutarco Gastelum. My husband and I have what we refer to as “let’s go here moments.” Digging through dusty old travel guides in a used bookstore, we came upon a grainy photo of bizarre concrete scenes seemingly growing out of the jungles of Mexico. This “let’s go here moment” led to a discovery that has become the focus of our research into the surrealist masterpiece Las Pozas and its creators, James and Gastelum. We had to see it for ourselves, so in 2005 we mounted an expedition to the charming Mexican town of Xilitla and the beginning of an incredible journey of discovery.

Hidden in the remote heights of the Sierra Madre Oriental in a jungle paradise that is difficult to access even today, eccentric British millionaire James spent thirty years creating a sculpture garden of unsurpassed beauty and weirdness called Las Pozas. With his artistic partner and friend, Gastelum, he created towering spires, staircases to nowhere, giant orchids, and other monumental sculpture integrated into an eighty-acre site surrounding a magnificent waterfall. Because of its remote location and because neither James nor Gastelum cared for recognition by the art world, Las Pozas has remained a curiosity, the jungle folly of a rich fool and a Yaqui Indian.

James is known to history as an early patron of the surrealist movement, so we also conducted research at the Dali Museum archives and the Pierpont Morgan Library. In 2009, we traveled to James’s ancestral estate in West Dean, Sussex, where we sifted through twenty-four boxes of his correspondence. In June of this year, we once again to journeyed to Las Pozas. Thanks to the Gregory/Rackley Career Development Award for Oxford faculty established by Eugene Rackley III 55OX 58B, we were able to photograph the site, document the current conservation efforts, and meet daily with descendants of the Gastelum family. Our research focused upon tracing the etymology of the surreal imagery, understanding the creative processes practiced by James and Gastelum, and documenting the evolution of their shared aesthetic philosophy.

Our investigation to date has made it clear that Las Pozas was not realized as a single, cataclysmic event but, rather, was the culmination of an evolutionary process that spanned nearly five decades.

In his early days, James championed surrealism for its celebration of personal exploration, freedom of expression, and individual genius. The surrealist movement, which celebrated the illogical inspiration of the unconscious and embraced biomorphism as recognition of the continual state of change occurring in all life forms, was, for James, more than merely an artistic “manifesto.” Together, Gastelum and James found a visual vehicle for expressing their search for freedom and personal redemption through the creative process. Although he had severed his ties with the surrealists by the time the masterpiece of Las Pozas was under construction, James, in collaboration with Gastelum, accomplished a biomorphic merging of nature with sculpture, art with architecture, and landscape with the landscape of the mind, which stands as perhaps the most complete realization of surrealism’s ideals.

—Camille Cottrell, associate professor of art history

Camille Cottrell and her husband, George Kennedy, traveled to the jungles of Mexico to learn more about Las Pozas.

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Creating Positive Change
continued from page 1

dent leaders, and they have a large role in planning and managing the LO experience. The beauty of the lottery system, says Migdol, is the unexpected. LO participants are not necessarily high-profile students or those who have expressed an interest in leadership before. "We believe in training from the inside out, not the top down," she says. "You don’t have to be an organization president to be a leader."

The effects are profound. Sophomore Jade Ah-Lou’s 110X comments are representative: “Not only did I learn more about myself, I learned what my personal strengths are and what I can provide to a team. I know how to take my passion and strengths and put [them] towards a team effort.”

Since 1988, roughly one thousand students have experienced LO. And at least one, Julie Nelson 95OX 96C, an Atlanta retail executive, returns each year as a volunteer—or rather works tirelessly throughout the year to make LO happen, says Migdol. Nelson explains that LO was revelatory for her, and it is her joy to help give the experience to others. “I remember that someone whispered in my ear, ‘Speak up. You have a good idea.’ That encouragement was huge.” Besides discovering their individual strengths, students break down barriers among the group, she says. “They learn that while their individual skills are different, they are not unequal.”

On her wall at home Nelson keeps a 3 x 5 card. The card used to hang in Sammy Clark’s office; when he retired from Oxford, he passed it on to her. On it is a quote from Saul Alinsky: “You can get people to change only by creating opportunities in which they will have experiences that challenge previously held beliefs.”

Along with other Oxford leadership opportunities, such as the ExCEL program for sophomores, Leadership Oxford is creating that kind of positive change in its own students, and through their influence, to the world beyond.

—Cathy Wooten

Emeriti Professors Honored

McKibben Receives Distinguished Emeritus Award
William P. McKibben, emeritus professor of mathematics, has been selected as one of four recipients of Emory’s Distinguished Emeritus Award for 2010.

McKibben, who retired in 2000, joined Oxford’s faculty in 1974 and served as professor, chair of mathematics, and associate dean of the college. McKibben introduced astronomy to the Oxford curriculum in 1992 and taught the course beyond his retirement.

McKibben is active in Emory’s emeritus college and is a strong advocate for Oxford’s emeritus professors. He serves on the planning committee for Oxford’s new science and mathematics facility, consulting on the needs for the astronomy program. McKibben will return to Oxford this fall as a visiting professor in mathematics.

A ceremony on September 2 formally recognized the 2010 designees.

Morris Receives Heilbrun Fellowship
Matthew Morris, Oxford emeritus professor of French, has been selected to receive Emory University’s prestigious Heilbrun Fellowship for 2010. The fellowship is awarded yearly to two faculty members emeritus in the arts and sciences and is funded by a contribution from the family of Alfred B. Heilbrun Jr., Emory emeritus professor of psychology.

Morris will use the funds from the fellowship in his ongoing research of Mélusine, legendary fairy of Lusignan and a figure of grave influence on political events of Medieval Europe and the Middle East of the Crusades.

A December 2 ceremony will honor Morris and the other 2010 fellowship recipient, Herbert Benario, emeritus professor of classics.

Matthew Morris is pictured in front of the ruins of the Chateau de Lusignan, the place of origin of the Mélusine legend.

Oxford Receives Leadership Grant
A new grant will benefit student leadership at Oxford College and community engagement in Newton County.

The Pierce Institute for Leadership and Community Engagement received a grant from Emory’s Office of University Community Partnerships to establish a new program, the Ethics and Servant Leadership Forum, which started this fall.

The three-year grant will expand Oxford’s already wide array of opportunities for student leadership, community engagement, ethics, and faculty development. The program will include a two-hour academic course and community partnerships that focus on areas of need within Newton County.

“The EASL Forum will enable us to strengthen our commitment to developing our students’ capacity for leadership and community engagement,” said David Cowler, Pierce Professor of Religion at Oxford and director of the Pierce Institute.

Why Do You Give to the Annual Fund?

Reid Mallard 84OX 86C
Decatur, Georgia

We asked Reid Mallard 84OX 86C, who, along with his wife, Alison 89C, gives to the Oxford Annual Fund every year, about why he supports the college.

“Certainly many reasons: I want to give back for all that Oxford has meant to me—I am grateful for the opportunity to have gone to Oxford; I am grateful for the education and experiences I gained there; I am grateful for the professors and staff who were so attentive, clearly cared, and went the extra mile to make a difference to me. I am so grateful for the lifelong friends I made there.

I genuinely feel that Oxford is a singularly unique and special place. It’s a school that fully honors the student first and offers terrific opportunities to a special niche of very promising kids. Oxford deserves my support, and I want to see it thrive.”
P R I O R  T O  1 9 7 0

T. Penn McWhorter 53OX 55C was inducted into Winder-Barrow Sports Hall of Fame as ‘Voice of the Bulldogs.’ As the voice of the public announcer for thirty-four years.

Lawrence Bryant 63OX 65C has published a collection of his articles entitled Ritual, Ceremony and the Changing Monarchy in France, 1330-1789. He resides in Chico, California.

Eileen Douglas Woodward 67OX retired after a thirty-year career as an educator. She taught history at the high school and college level and was a speaker on contemporary Issues in American Samoa. She resides in Charlotte, North Carolina.

1 9 7 0 – 1 9 7 9

Emma Rebecca Carlson 71OX 76OX is president of the Georgia Board of Dentistry. She was appointed to the board in 2009 by Governor Sonny Perdue. She is a general dentist in Albany, Georgia. She and her husband Dan serve as cochairs on the Emory Parent Council.

Debbie Nickels Torshub 72OX 76C retired after twenty-five years as an educator. She taught history at the high school and college levels in Montrivades, Uruguay.

Marketed: Jennifer Johnson 96OX and William Ramp on July 31, 2010. The couple resides in Orange, California.

Born to: Amie Marcus Rosenfeld 96OX 98C and her husband, Scott Rosenfeld 98B, a daughter, Charlotte Avery, on December 30, 2009. Amie is a supervisor in the Department of Management at Nova Southeastern University.

Samuel T. Jackson 98OX 00C, Economic Empowerment Initiative founder, chairperson, and CEO, was appointed by President Barack Obama to the President’s Advisory Council on Financial Capability, where Jackson will work to improve financial literacy and promote services that will benefit consumers.

Daret Brent Morris 98OX 01C 02G 13M accepted a tenure track position as an assistant professor at St. Mary’s College of Maryland. He will be teaching educational psychology, and he is convinced his experience at Oxford helped him get the job at a small liberal arts college.

Born to: Andy Woodworth 99OX 01C 07T in Athens, Georgia, on August 26, 2010. The family resides in Aragon, Georgia.

Jackson will work to improve financial literacy and promote services that will benefit consumers.

To support Campaign Oxford, visit www.oxford.emory.edu.

Academic Commons.

For more information, contact the Development and Alumni Relations Office at 770-784-8414 or visit www.oxford.emory.edu.

Class Notes

November marks the beginning of a new program for Oxford alumni and friends. Sponsored by the Office of Development and Alumni Relations, Classroom in the Living Room brings your favorite professors to alumni living rooms across the Southeast, where they give lectures on topics including Oxford’s travel programs and liberal arts programs. For more information, contact the Development and Alumni Relations Office at 770-784-8414 or visit www.oxford.emory.edu.

Look for Classroom in the Living Room near you!

Classroom in the Living Room Series 2010–2011

G R O U P  M E M B E R S

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