Lewis to Give $101 Million Toward Arts at Princeton

Peter B. Lewis, a 1955 graduate and trustee of Princeton, will contribute $101 million to support a major new initiative to enhance the role of the creative and performing arts in the life of the University and its community. The gift was announced following Jan. 20 meetings of the Board of Trustees.

With this gift, Lewis’ total contributions to the University, both for unrestricted support through Annual Giving and for a range of designated purposes, now exceed $220 million and establish him as the University’s most generous donor in the modern era.

“Peter’s extraordinary gift launches a new era in Princeton’s commitment to the arts, and firmly establishes him as one of the most significant benefactors in all of Princeton’s history,” President Shirley M. Tilghman said. “His gift is a visionary investment in ever-greater levels of academic excellence and leadership that will catalyze change in learning, teaching and the overall quality of daily life for everyone at Princeton. We aspire to create a distinctive educational model that seamlessly integrates the creative and performing arts into an undergraduate liberal arts program that is second to none. Peter’s confidence in Princeton will make this goal attainable.”

Lewis’ gift will fund a significant portion of an ambitious new initiative that Tilghman outlined for the trustees. That initiative—based on an intensive year-long assessment of Princeton’s strengths and aspirations in the arts—will include an expansion of programs in these fields, a significant increase in the number of artists teaching and collaborating on research at Princeton, and the creation of a new physical complex with improved and expanded facilities for the study and presentation of the creative and performing arts.

The initiative will include the creation of a new Center for the Creative and Performing Arts that would oversee, coordinate and encourage exchange among the University’s curricular programs in creative writing, theater and dance, and the visual arts; serve as a focal point for scholarship, teaching and practice in the arts; and provide both “strong leadership and persistent advocacy” for the arts.

“Peter’s generosity will greatly increase the impact and prominence of our relatively small but extremely distinguished academic programs in creative writing, theater and dance, visual arts and music performance, and it will enhance campus exhibition space and our stellar Art Museum,” Tilghman said.

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Music scholar Simon Morrison led a project at Princeton last year to re-create Russian composer Sergei Prokofiev’s “Le Pas d’Acier” (“The Steel Step”), one of the great lost ballets of the 20th century. The ballet featured 30 dancers and 60 musicians, all Princeton students.

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Peter B. Lewis ’55
Students Earn Major Scholarships and Awards

Princeton undergraduates recently were awarded numerous scholarships and prizes in honor of their outstanding achievements.

Rhodes Scholarship

Jeffrey Miller ’06, who aspires to become a novelist and English professor, has been awarded a Rhodes Scholarship for graduate study at the University of Oxford in England.

An English major from Plano, Texas, Miller was one of 32 American students chosen for the Rhodes Scholarship, which provides funding for two or three years of study at Oxford. He will spend his first year pursuing a master’s degree in English literature from 1550 to 1780—focusing on the work of John Milton and other writers of the Restoration period—and then hopes to begin working toward a doctorate in English.

Marshall Scholarships

Allison Bishop ’06, a mathematics major, and Yusufi Vali ’05, who is currently studying in Syria, have been awarded 2006 Marshall Scholarships for graduate study in England. Bishop and Vali were among 43 students from U.S. colleges and universities to win the awards, which cover the cost of living and studying at a British university of the recipient’s choice for two or three years. Bishop will pursue a certificate of advanced study in mathematics and begin doctoral studies at the University of Cambridge. Vali will attend the School of Oriental and African Studies in London, where he will pursue a master’s degree in Islamic studies.

Undergraduate Prizes

Four undergraduate prizes were awarded at the beginning of the school year to outstanding students.

Amirali Shanechi ’08 of Toronto received the Freshman First Honor Prize, awarded each year to a sophomore in recognition of exceptional achievement during the freshman year. He is majoring in electrical engineering and pursuing certificates in engineering physics, applied and computational mathematics, and applications of computing.

Tamara Broderick ’07 of Parma, Ohio, was awarded the George B. Wood Legacy Sophomore Prize, given to a member of the junior class in recognition of exceptional academic achievement during the sophomore year. Broderick is a mathematics major and plans to complete a certificate in applications of computing.

Joshua Brodie ’06 and Jessica Gasiorak ’06 shared the George B. Wood Legacy Junior Prize, presented each year to a member of the senior class in recognition of exceptional academic achievement during the junior year. Brodie, who is from New York City, is majoring in mathematics and completing certificates in finance and in applied and computational mathematics. Gasiorak, of Palo Alto, Calif., is majoring in French and Italian.

Catherine Kunkel ’06 received the Class of 1939 Princeton Scholar Award, given to the undergraduate who, at the end of the junior year, has achieved the highest academic standing for all preceding college work at the University. Kunkel, who lives in Woodstock, Md., is a physics major.

Lewis Gift

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“These programs increasingly attract excellent students, but Peter’s gift will give us an opportunity to establish Princeton more fully as a national and international destination for the very best students with talents and interests in the arts. This is also an opportunity to ensure that we offer students pursuing concentrations outside the arts the kind of meaningful artistic and cultural resources and experiences considered essential elements of an exceptional undergraduate education,” she said.

Lewis, an internationally acclaimed business leader and philanthropist, is chairman of the board of the Progressive Corp., the nation’s third largest auto insurer.

Tilghman’s report to the trustees was based on the work of a faculty committee chaired by Dean of the School of Architecture Stan Allen, as well as consultations with faculty, students, alumni, practicing artists and others and travels to other leading institutions around the country.

Tilghman notes in her report that Princeton “fully embraces the creative and performing arts as an essential part of its educational mission” and recognizes that “universities have increasingly become important patrons of the arts… where new ideas and forms of expression can flourish.”

The full report can be found at www.princeton.edu/pr/reports/arts.

Online Book Club Offered to Parents

Tiger Tomes, a new online book club sponsored by the Alumni Association, brings together alumni, parents and friends of the University to read books written by Princeton alumni and faculty. To find out how to join Tiger Tomes, visit tigernet.princeton.edu/Education/TigerTomes05-06.asp.

Princeton parents also can take advantage of other educational opportunities offered by the Alumni Association. For more information, visit tigernet.princeton.edu/education or contact Kaitlin Lutz at (609)258-0014 or klutz@princeton.edu.
Planning for the New Residential College System

As anyone who has visited the campus recently knows, Whitman College is rising, literally on a daily basis. What will be less obvious to the casual observer is the planning process that will carry us from the current system of five two-year residential colleges to the new system of six colleges, which will make its debut with the opening of Whitman and the conversion of Mathey to a four-year college in the fall of 2007–08, and will come to full fruition when the reconstructed Butler College becomes a four-year college in 2009–10.

I will begin by explaining briefly why and how we are changing the college system, and I will then introduce you to the planning process that is currently under way.

The story begins with the decision by the trustees in 2000 to expand the undergraduate student body by 500 students, from 4,700 to 5,200, an expansion that began modestly this year and will be completed by 2011. With 250 more freshmen and sophomores coming, we knew that we needed an additional residential college. The questions addressed by successive planning committees of faculty, students and administrators were, first, how that new college should be configured and, second, what possibilities the advent of a new college offered for the broader improvement of undergraduate education and residential life. Building a full-scale college offered the opportunity to include some number of juniors and seniors in the college system, thus increasing the residential options available to upperclass students. We knew from anecdotal evidence, as well as from a survey of undergraduate students, that a significant number of juniors and seniors would welcome the opportunity to remain in residential colleges. The multi-constituency planning committees recommended, and the president and the trustees agreed, that we should have juniors and seniors in residence in three of the eventual six colleges (100 juniors and seniors in each of those three colleges, together with 400 freshmen and sophomores), and that each of those four-year colleges should be paired with a neighboring two-year college. The committees recommended, further, that all juniors and seniors remain affiliated with their colleges of origin (or, if they move to a four-year college as upperclass students, college of residence) for a variety of purposes, to include non-departmental academic advising (currently the responsibility of a junior class dean and a senior class dean in my office), other academic programming, a couple of meals a week and informal social, cultural and recreational activity. Each college will continue to have a faculty master and a senior class dean in my office), other academic advising (currently the responsibility of a junior class dean and a senior class dean in my office), other academic programming, a couple of meals a week and informal social, cultural and recreational activity. Each college will continue to have a faculty master and a dean and director of studies to handle academic and non-academic advising.

The college staff will be expanded to include a director of residential life, who will be responsible for discipline, coordination and oversight of the undergraduate residential college advisers, and residential education programming. As well, there will be 10 graduate students in residence in each of the six colleges, each of whom will have a specific responsibility for some programming or activity.

We are confident that the interaction among underclass and upperclass students, and between undergraduates and graduate students, will enrich undergraduate life and learning. We believe that the new college system will bring a richer array of programs and activities that will enhance the undergraduate experience. We believe that the new system will afford even greater opportunities for effective student leadership. We believe that continuity of advising will benefit juniors and seniors. And we believe that the new dining arrangements will result in both better food and more conducive settings in which to enjoy meals. It’s important to emphasize, by the way, that the new college system will expand options available to undergraduates at Princeton. It will not limit in any way the opportunities juniors and seniors currently have to join eating clubs or declare themselves independent for purposes of dining and social life.

Whitman is currently under construction; architect’s drawings for the new Butler College are nearly complete (the new construction will replace the Butler dormitories in the “New New Quad,” which will be torn down after Whitman is completed in the summer of 2007); Mathey is currently being renovated; and planning is in full swing for the array of changes that will make the new college system everything that we hope it will be.

For the fullest account of our planning process and our progress, I encourage you to visit a new Web site, “Residential

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Results of New Grading Policy Reported

A n effort launched in the 2004–05 academic year has already made significant progress in establishing a common grading standard across the University.

Dean of the College Nancy Malkiel announced the initial results of the implementation of Princeton’s new grading policy at the Sept. 19 faculty meeting. The policy sets an institution-wide expectation for the percentage of grades in the A range and provides clear guidelines on the meaning of letter grades.

In 2004–05, the first year under the new policy, A’s (A+, A, A-) accounted for 40.9 percent of grades in undergraduate courses, down from 46.0 percent in 2003–04 and 47.9 percent in 2002–03.

In a message issued following the meeting, members of the Faculty Committee on Grading said they were impressed with the faculty’s commitment to controlling grades and encouraged by the progress thus far. “Departments that were giving very high percentages of A grades are making real strides toward bringing their grades down; departments that were already grading according to the new expectations are continuing to hold the line,” they said.

“After so many years of steady grade inflation, we have actually been able to move the needle in the other direction, in a remarkably short period of time,” they added.

In humanities departments, A’s accounted for 45.5 percent of the grades in undergraduate courses in 2004–05, down from 56.2 percent in 2003–04. In the social sciences, there were 38.4 percent A grades in 2004–05, down from 42.5 percent in the previous year. The natural sciences, at 36.4 percent A’s, essentially held steady. In engineering, the figures were 43.2 percent A’s in 2004–05, down from 48.0 percent in the previous year.

“If each division succeeds in making as much progress this coming year as it did last year, we will have achieved our goal,” the committee members said.

For junior independent work, the percentage of A grades in all departments in 2004–05 was 57.9 percent, down from 59.5 percent in 2003–04 and 66.4 percent in 2002–03. For senior theses and independent work, the figures are 58.6 percent A grades in 2004–05, compared with 60.2 percent in 2003–04 and 63.0 percent in 2002–03.

Under the new grading policy, adopted by the faculty in April 2004, A’s are to account for less than 35 percent of the grades for undergraduate courses and less than 55 percent of grades for junior and senior independent work. The standard by which the grading record of each department or program will be evaluated is the percentage of A’s given over the previous three years.

“Many departments are at or very close to the desired standards,” Malkiel said in the committee’s message. “In others, while there is more work to be done, the progress made in a very short time has been nothing short of remarkable. Culture change is hard to achieve, and we always imagined that it would take several years to implement the new grading expectations. We are clearly on our way.”

The committee’s message is available online at www.princeton.edu/main/news/archive/S12/71/58E12. ■

control of college programming and college social budgets. All of these are objectives already on our planning agenda, and we are confident that we can arrive at arrangements that respond effectively to student desires.

In early February, at the invitation of the freshman class president, the master-designate of Whitman College, the master of Mathey College and I will meet with members of 2009 to discuss residential college planning and answer questions about the new college system. Thereafter, we expect to constitute student advisory committees to work with us on planning for Mathey and Whitman. The Mathey committee will consist of freshmen and sophomores currently living in Mathey and Rockefeller Colleges (the students who will have first priority to live in Mathey as juniors and seniors in 2007–08). The Whitman committee will consist of freshmen and sophomores currently living in Butler, Forbes and Wilson, all of whom will have first priority to live in Whitman as juniors and seniors in 2007–08.

Do visit our Web site from time to time. I will report again on our progress next year as we look forward to the advent of the new residential college system the following fall. ■
New Centers Focus on Key Issues Across Disciplines

In addition to the new Center for the Creative and Performing Arts (see page 1), Princeton has announced the creation of several new research centers that will focus on key initiatives across a number of disciplines.

Neuroscience

Princeton is expanding its teaching and research capabilities in neuroscience—considered by many the next field ripe for significant scientific breakthroughs—by launching an institute that will bridge many disciplines and take a new approach to studying the brain and nervous system.

“Neuroscience is one of the most exciting frontiers of human understanding right now,” said President Shirley M. Tilghman. “We’re seeing path-breaking results already in this field that are changing the way we understand the human brain and human decision-making. There’s a deep sense that some of the most important discoveries of the next few decades will come in this field.”

Jonathan Cohen (left) and David Tank will lead the Princeton Institute in Neuroscience.

“We already have great strengths in neuroscience in both our molecular biology and our psychology departments, and we want to be able to build on those strengths,” added Provost Christopher Eisgruber, noting that faculty in mathematics, physics, computer science and economics also are conducting research with applications in neuroscience.

Under the working title of the Princeton Institute in Neuroscience, the entity was created in embryonic form last spring under the leadership of psychologist Jonathan Cohen and molecular biologist David Tank, who has a joint appointment in physics.

Cohen and Tank view the enterprise as a stimulus for teaching and research in neuroscience and related fields, as well as an impetus for collaboration and education in disciplines as wide ranging as economics and philosophy. For more information: www.princeton.edu/pr/pwb/05/1121/1a.shtml.

Information Technology Policy

Forging ties between technologists and public policy experts, Princeton is creating a research center to address societal issues, such as privacy and security, that arise from advances in computer technology.

The Center for Information Technology Policy will bring leading computer scientists and engineers together with economists, sociologists, lawyers and lawmakers to issue recommendations on topics ranging from ensuring the privacy of medical records to creating fair regulations for Internet phone services.

Computer scientist Edward Felten will oversee planning for the center and serve as its first director. Felten, an authority in the area of computer privacy and security, is highly regarded among policy experts for his insights into the broader impacts of computer technology, particularly concerning copyright law. He holds a joint appointment in the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs.

The stakes for how society deals with the regulation of technology are high, said Felten. “Just as technology has pervaded every aspect of our lives, the laws and regulations we pass concerning technology will have major effects on society for decades to come.” For more information: www.princeton.edu/pr/pwb/05/1205/1a.shtml.

Engineering Education

Responding to a national need to rethink the teaching of engineering, Princeton has launched the Center for Innovation in Engineering Education, an initiative to better prepare all students—both engineers and non-engineers—to be leaders in an increasingly complex, technology-driven society.

The center is creating new courses and strengthening existing ones that go beyond purely technical subjects to provide students a broader understanding of the global economic, environmental and cultural forces that shape and are shaped by technology. At the same time, it is improving students’ technical education by exposing them to real engineering projects throughout their four years, through internships, entrepreneurial opportunities and multidisciplinary courses.

“Our plan is to set a new standard for engineering education,” said electrical engineer H. Vincent Poor, director of the center. “We want to inject more engineering into the liberal arts and inject more of the liberal arts into engineering.”

The creation of the center is one of the key initiatives to emerge from the engineering school’s strategic plan, “Engineering for a Better World: The Princeton Vision.” For more information: www.princeton.edu/pr/pwb/05/1017.

Theoretical Physics

The University has established a new center to promote the exploration of frontiers in the theoretical natural sciences. Beginning in fall 2006, the Princeton Center for Theoretical Physics will bring together faculty, postdoctoral fellows and students from science departments across campus to study topics ranging from the Big Bang to quantum computing to evolution.

“This is an exciting venture for the University that we believe will be immediately recognized as a site where some of the most important theoretical work around the world is being done,” said President Tilghman. “The center’s unique framework will enable our distinguished scientists to collaborate on key problems intersecting many disciplines. We also expect it to serve as a magnet for some of the brightest and most creative young minds seeking innovative paths for their careers.”

The center will be housed within the physics department and led by director Curtis Callan and associate director Paul Steinhardt, two of the University’s leading theorists.

Callan noted that Princeton “is a leader in theoretical physics and it has an unusual number of faculty in other departments—including chemistry, engineering, molecular biology and genomics—who are trained in theoretical physics. The purpose of the center is to create a framework in which these people can work together to expand the boundaries of theoretical science.”

For more information: www.princeton.edu/pr/pwb/05/1212/1a.shtml.
Humanities Majors Gain Scientific Savvy in Popular Biology Course

Freshman Emily Miller never thought fulfilling her science requirement would be so much fun: Imagine getting to clone some of your own DNA, replicating part of a Nobel Prize-winning experiment or actually staying awake—and understanding!—when your professor starts talking about things like “cell differentiation” and “genome codes.”

“In general, science topics do not interest me, but I love this class,” said Miller, who this fall enrolled in “Molecular Biology 101: From DNA to Human Complexity,” an introductory course for non-majors that takes a new approach to teaching the basics. “Rather than simply lecturing about the minute details of molecular biology, the professors show us how it applies to real life.”

MOL101 was developed four years ago by three renowned Princeton professors to help address a disturbing national problem: Too many Americans are intimidated by and ignorant of science in an era when a basic understanding of molecular biology, in particular, has never been more important.

“We felt as a faculty that we were not doing our job as educators because we did not have a modern class for non-majors,” said one of the course’s leaders, Bonnie Bassler, a professor of molecular biology, and a 2002 MacArthur “genius grant” winner. “We really believe that you cannot get through this life without knowing biology. It is the science of the century. You need to know about biology to think about your health care, to decide on what food you’re going to eat. You need it to understand how cells work to be able to vote on issues like stem cell research. You need it to understand DNA forensics, so you can serve on a jury.”

Each year Bassler teams up with 1995 Nobel Prize winner Eric Wieschaus, the Squibb Professor in Molecular Biology, and geneticist Heather Thieringer, a lecturer in the department, to teach humanities majors the fundamentals of molecular biology. Lectures address topics currently of public interest, including cloning, stem cell therapies, genetically modified foods, drug-resistant bacteria, and how DNA fingerprinting is used in criminal cases and why some people are obese or aggressive.

Though many students said they were taking MOL101 to fulfill the lab science courses required for graduation from Princeton, they give the class high marks for being unexpectedly interesting.

“The professors are fun and so passionate about what they teach; they bring enthusiasm to every lecture and it is contagious,” said freshman Samantha O’Hara.

“The 50 minutes fly by.”

The professors say they strive to teach the subject matter in a way that is informative, entertaining and not intimidating. “People are so scared of science,” Bassler observed. “We try to teach them that they don’t need to be afraid, that they can sit down and read the science section of The New York Times or those articles in Scientific American. They just have to learn some of the lingo.”

Web vs. Print: Your Opinion?

It has been suggested that the Parents Handbook for the class of 2010 be released as a Web-only publication. Parents of incoming freshmen would be notified when the new handbook was available online and would be advised, if they preferred, how to request a print copy.

As a new Princeton parent, would the Web version of the Parents Handbook have met your needs? Or would you preferred to receive a print copy in the mail?

Please send advice and comments to Chris McKinley at mckinley@princeton.edu or c/o Office of the Dean of the College, 307 West College, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ 08544-5264.

The Parents Fund: An Update

Parents Fund Hits $1.3 Million

The Princeton Parents Fund is off to a strong start for the second semester of the 2005–06 year. As of late January, the fund had reached $1.3 million toward its goal of $2 million, with contributions from 25.3 percent of parents. This is a 10 percent increase over this time last year, representing a substantial contribution to Princeton’s Annual Giving campaign. Annual Giving raises unrestricted funds for the University’s immediate use.

“We are delighted by the success of the Parents Fund so far this year, and we are grateful to all the Parents Committee volunteers and donors who have played an important part in this year’s campaign,” said Nancy Elghanayan P’96, ’00, ’08, co-chair of the Parents Committee. “Over the coming months, we will be focused on increasing participation by all Princeton parents as well as reaching our dollar goal. We hope to have 50 percent participation by the end of the campaign on June 30. This is the time when every single gift—both large and small—makes a difference for the University.”

Parent volunteers will be taking part in phonathons around the country to talk to parents about supporting the Parents Fund. Phonathons will be held in Boston on Sunday, March 26; in Princeton on Sunday, May 21; and in New York City on Tuesday, May 2, and Thursday, June 15.

If you would like to volunteer for any of these phonathons or arrange an evening of calling in your area, please contact Linda Mahler, director of the Parents Fund, at (609) 258-5303 or mahler@princeton.edu.
As part of their introduction to Princeton, freshmen this fall performed in a laptop computer orchestra, examined the growing presence of Hispanics in America and found the holy in everyday life through contemporary fiction.

All of these topics—and 69 others—are being covered in the Freshman Seminar Program this year. The seminars are intended to provide the individual attention and introduction to inquiry that is so crucial for new students. Here is a look at three of the fall freshman seminars.

New Ways to Make Music

From the basement rehearsal space in Woolworth, one could hear electronic raindrops, a fast-forward reading of Dr. Seuss or a deep moaning that seems to emanate from the bottom of the ocean—maybe even something recognizable as music, like a rockabilly jazz melody.

It was hard to predict just what the Princeton Laptop Orchestra (PLOrk for short) would play next, and that was exactly the point according to computer music mavericks Perry Cook and Dan Trueman, who assembled the orchestra as a freshman seminar this fall.

The orchestra was the first of its kind—an experimental group that performs on laptop “instruments” invented specifically for the class. Students played their laptops with a new music language—known as ChucK—written by Princeton computer science doctoral student Ge Wang.

During one class, the 15 freshmen broke into ensembles and, seated on red, mauve or brown pillows, performed pieces they had composed themselves.

The first group played a tune with a Euro-pop beat that could have served as part of the soundtrack for the film “Ocean’s 11.” The next was a surreal piece called “The Inner Workings of Anna’s Mind,” which featured the voice of freshman Anna Wittstruck being twisted and contorted beyond recognition. During the final performance, a stocking-footed Bixiao “Brian” Zhao danced his ensemble’s bass line on footpad sensors.

Trueman, an assistant professor of music, and Cook, an associate professor with joint appointments in computer science and music, saw the class as a way to introduce students to the rich field of electronic music and let them explore musical ideas that would not be possible with even the most sophisticated commercially available software. In the end, they hoped that students saw both music and computer science in a new light.

Hispanics’ Role in American Society

At the start of the fall semester, sociologist Marta Tienda asked students in her freshman seminar on “Hispanics and the American Future” to identify their own racial backgrounds. Among the dozen students in the course, responses included: Hispanic, White/Caucasian, Mexican-American/Chicano, Dominican, Black, Latina/Hispanic, and Anglo-Saxon.

These varying degrees of self-identification illustrate the difficulty of trying to fit people of diverse heritage into neat categories, Tienda said in revealing the results to the class several weeks later.

Building on that challenge, Tienda and her students investigated the multifaceted nature of the U.S. Hispanic population and its changing role in American society.

Hispanics have surpassed African Americans as the country’s largest minority group, and current demographic trends indicate that nearly one in five U.S. residents will be Hispanic by 2025. Reflecting this shift, the seminar examined anticipated changes in the country’s economic, social, cultural and political landscape as the white population ages and the growing Hispanic population becomes more geographically dispersed.

“I deliberately mixed reading materials from political interest groups, academic publications and various types of journalism to make the point about the need to require standards of evidence to support claims,” Tienda said.

Vanessa Rodriguez, a freshman from San Antonio, Texas, said the seminar addressed “things I’ve never learned in history books. I have been able to see how America was settled from the Hispanic point of view, which has been amazing.”

Surrounded by fellow students representing many backgrounds, Rodriguez said the seminar was eye-opening. “I think I come from a very sheltered area, where I look around and see a lot of Hispanics,” she said. “Now I’m coming to where I realize that there are other cultures and nationalities that care about the Hispanic situation, too, because the effects are going to be universal. To hear different perspectives is so refreshing.”

Finding the Holy Through Literature

Professor Albert Raboteau designed his seminar, “Holy Ordinary: Religious Dimensions in Contemporary Fiction,” to focus on texts that deal with moral and religious values. This, he hoped, would resonate with students “concretely and personally.”

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Explaining that the appearance of the divine “often is described as a spectacular and miraculous inbreak into this world from another,” Raboteau offered another perspective by using contemporary texts that present the holy in everyday life.

“I’ve been struck in reading contemporary fiction at how the emergence of the holy is described as occurring within the ordinary events of daily life,” he said. “So it occurred to me that a course in which students could read and discuss some of this literature would be an interesting window on the contemporary vision of experiencing the sacred.”

To get to the heart of such vast and ethereal matters, Raboteau encouraged the freshmen to use as their foundation the very intertextuality of literature, which he said is “filled with allusions and direct references to other texts.”

To reflect this, the wide-ranging reading included several important works of 20th-century and current authors, such as James Baldwin’s “Go Tell It on the Mountain,” William Faulkner’s “The Bear,” Walker Percy’s “Love in the Ruins” and Georges Bernanos’ “The Diary of a Country Priest.”

For freshman Tara Hueston, the books were a major attraction to choosing the seminar. “I love to read, and this seminar gave me a good reason to appreciate many interesting and famous books,” she said. “I have always found the discussion of books fascinating.”

Lisa Bendele also was drawn to the reading list, but she said she was particularly eager to take a freshman seminar that was an “experiment”—which, for her, is studying fiction using religious perspectives.