ALUMNI NOTES

We had such a tremendous response from alumni this year that we are devoting the majority of the issue to e-mails!

I graduated in 1940 with Mary Emily Sinclair as my major advisor. I owe much of my job success and success in life to that wonderful lady. She was my teacher, my mentor, and my inspiration. The principles instilled in me in her mathematics classes and personal conferences have stayed with me.

Although I did not teach mathematics, per se, I did use mathematics in my teaching of Electronics Engineering Technology, and Electronics Engineering. And the principles of organization and logic were helpful in my years as a college president.

Although retired now, I am treasurer of an organization, and the math background helps me with keeping the books in order.

-- Jim Russell ’40

After teaching 3 years at the University of Vermont, 13 at Ohio University, and 21 at Earlham I retired in 1987 although continuing to teach part time through 1994. I try to stay semi active by doing some journal and survey article reading, but frankly things are moving so fast that math is seeming more and more like a different world. Having seen all the triumphs I have, I only hope that someone will knock off the zeta hypothesis while I'm still alive!

-- Bill Fishback ’43

I graduated in 1954 with a BA and a major in mathematics. I have had a wonderful career as an actuary, working the first 30 years inside insurance companies, the most recent 20 as a consultant. I found the work to have great variety, interest and challenge. The hardest part was passing the self-study exams, which are more difficult than anything I had at Oberlin.

My final residence in Tucson, AZ gives me the opportunity to pursue my non-actuarial interests of Native Americans and Western Art. Anyone interested in an actuarial career should check www.soa.org for more information.

-- George Harding ’54

Presently I am in my third and final year as Associate Chair for Undergraduate Studies in the Mathematics Department at the University of Maryland. In addition to serving on statewide committees whose goal is to raise the level of mathematics teaching K-12, I am a co-chair of an initiative to have a University of Maryland exchange program with Sichuan University, which is a very large and important university in southwest China.

-- Denny Gulick ’58

After a brief stint in the Coast Guard and working at my father’s storage battery factory, I returned to mathematics in 1960 at Indiana University. My thesis adviser, Ernst Snapper, moved to Dartmouth in 1963. In that year I won an NSF fellowship, graduating with a Ph.D. from IU in 1964. I taught two years as CLE Moore Instructor at MIT, then four years as Assistant Professor at LSU. One of my Ph.D. students, Samuel H. Cox, became an actuary (because the job market for academic mathematicians was so tight in the 1970s) and is now at Georgia State University. Another student, Dolores Spikes, had started her Ph.D. dissertation under my direction. She has been president of several universities. I’m very proud of both of them.

In 1970 I moved to Whittier College, where I was Chairman. But I grew discouraged with
academia and attended law school at Loyola Marymount in Los Angeles. I was admitted to the state and federal bars in 1977, and went into private practice. Although a good law student, I was a poor businessman, and I left the practice of law in 1980. I spent one year on active duty with the Coast Guard (I had stayed with the Reserves throughout) and then found a position at the Naval Weapons Center in China Lake, California. I became a military operations research analyst, and retired in 1999.

My wife (Elsa Walther '58) and I sold our house in the desert, moved briefly to Texas, and then became full-time travelers, with an interest in family history. Our travels have been in the U.S., Canada, and Europe, but we may be slowing down now. Our two sons live in California, and we have four grandchildren and one great-granddaughter. Contact us at bobandelsa@earthlink.net.

-- Bob Pendleton, '58

I am president of the Linguistic Society of America for 2006 and will be keynoting the annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of Taiwan in July (and that of the LSA next January). As some of you may know, many linguists started off in mathematics, and mathematical constructs and ways of thinking figure in much linguistic work. My own research has drawn on my mathematical background--especially in logic and set theory--and I'm currently working on how formal semantic systems interact with context in determining meanings of natural language expressions in use. I plan to retire from Cornell University at the end of AY 2006-2007 but will continue working in linguistics (as well as traveling as much as possible).

I am on leave this semester and spending 8 weeks in London with my husband, philosopher Carl Ginet. We balance writing and going to the theatre, interspersed w/ walks on Hampstead Heath, which is close to where we are living. My Oak Park, Illinois-based 13-yr-old grandson, Chris Ginet (son of our daughter, Lisa Ginet, and her husband, Bob Spatz), was on the winning 8th-grade math team in the state of Illinois for some competition or other at the end of Feb. The highest scorer in the state was one of his female teammates--she and the other 3 highest Ill scorers will be off to the nationals. They call them "matheletes"!

-- Sally McConnell-Ginet '59

I am still doing research on digital side of printing & graphics industries, with new study on impact of digital alternatives on printers... Also giving up on NE winters, as we just found place to be snow birds in Tucson... so when December comes, we will depart! Will be in Vermilion again this summer with all kids & grandkids to enjoy August Ohio & Lake Erie warmth... hope to ride my bike over to Obie & see all the changes! Also back to Ohio for 50th high school reunion, with the rest of the "gang"...

-- Neil Richards '60

I taught math at Case Western Reserve University from 1965 until 1999. Jane (OC '60) and I moved to Oberlin in 1990. I have worked in category theory and theoretical computer science, and you can see some of what I have done on my website <www.cwru.edu/artsci/math/wells/home.html>

Lately I have been working on a website for math majors that I hope will be available on the internet soon after you read this. You can take a peek at its currently chaotic and daily changing state at <http://www.abstractmath.org>.

-- Charles Wells '62

I have been at RAND since I finished my dissertation here in the late 60s. RAND's Math Dept, which had pioneered dynamic programming, linear programming and game theory, was another casualty of the Vietnam war, and I switched to work in health insurance and improving medical care. Three years ago, I was on an NAS committee to study the use of the polygraph to screen government workers to see if they were spies. Because the polygraph is not perfect, and the incidence of spies is so low, Bayes theorem shows this is not a good idea (see <www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2843/is_1_27/ai_95501841>)

-- Emmett Keeler '62

I'm continuing to try to wind down my actuarial consulting practice. The practice flourished too much last year so the winding down wound up. That combined with prostate cancer surgery (with promising results) for quite a year.

Mathematically, I dusted off my stochastic calculus to tune up my financial strategy.
My wife Cindy and I continue to enjoy traveling -- highlight in 2005 was the Alaska Inside Passage cruise. I also led a church mission team to Chicuque Rural Hospital in Mozambique, a powerful experience.

-- Tom Mitchell '63

I am Professor Emeritus, Northwestern University, Learning Sciences Program, School of Education and Social Policy. For 12 years I have been doing research in schools developing a new kind of kindergarten through Grade 5 math program with funding from the National Science Foundation and many other funding sources. This new program just came out last fall. It is published by Houghton Mifflin and is called Math Expressions. It provides a coherent ambitious but supportive approach to teaching and learning mathematics based on how children think and talk about math. It supports conceptual understanding and explanation of one's math thinking but also helps students develop fluency. Among other supportive approaches I identified several accessible algorithms that are clearer to students than the present common algorithms and that support understanding and fluency. I am hoping that this program will end the math wars that falsely pit understanding against fluency. We need both.

-- Karen Connors Fuson, '65

I graduated near, perhaps at, the bottom of my class in mathematics. However, as I went on to get a PhD in Operations Research, I was pleasantly surprised to find that I was in fact well-prepared for the challenges of linear, nonlinear, and combinatorial optimization, as well as stochastic processes. Something must have registered in my gray matter that was not reflected in my class standing. Perhaps it was just that I was surrounded by very talented people.

During my teaching years I of course had occasion to apply my mathematical training to the problems at hand. When I started working as a consultant, the need for exercising mathematical proofs and derivations has only occurred in intervals of 5 years or longer, while of course the need to think rigorously was always there.

My late father (who had a PhD in mathematics) told me when I was finishing Oberlin, “I have forgotten more than you have learned.” At the time I thought it a rather critical remark, referring to the little I had learned as opposed to the large amount he’d forgotten, but now I think I know what he meant. If you don’t use it, you do lose it; and faster than you’d think. Fortunately, it is not possible to forget more than one has learned, so I have that as a somewhat comforting lower bound. The mathematics may slip away, but who could forget such motivating characters as professors Wong, Stoll, Vance, Andrews, and Goldberg. I remember less and less of what they taught me, but I’ll always remember them teaching it to me.

My advice to mathematics students today is, stick with it into graduate studies, even though specialized areas may seem more promising to gain a first job. If you have the basic skills, there is always a way to work them into a job, sometimes even a career. The thing about a mathematical theorem is that if it’s true today, it will be true tomorrow. With the world changing so fast, there are not many areas of study where that is true.

-- John Barrer '68

I was a math major at Oberlin in the class of 1969. I am now CEO of an online publisher of encyclopedias, dictionaries, atlases--all the books which in the print world are so valuable that they are locked up at night and even during the day are never allowed out of the 'reference room' where graduate trained experts are there to help guide you in their use. Well, more and more of these books are available on-line and we take the unique view that they are more valuable to the user if they are integrated into one grand encyclopedia where the user can go seamlessly from work to work, subject to subject, to explore these reference works.

Our company is not a search engine company, but like many online information publishers we use search engines (open source, in our case) and everyone is familiar with entering a term or phrase into Google, MSN, Yahoo, AskJeeves, Jaystore, etc. and having their phrase submitted to the underlying search engine which applies a 'ranking function' to the hundreds, thousands, and even millions of 'hits' which include the term or phrase entered. Almost no one looks at more than one or two pages of these results. And often none of them really catch our fancy.

In point of fact no user in any sense fully specifies what they are looking for, so the idea that a single ranking function can actually know what would really delight you is simply not possible. You might enter "civil war", but who's to know if you meant 1860's? or 1670's? Systems
I have just returned to the actuarial field after a 17-year hiatus. I'm a valuation actuary at WellPoint in Chicago. My husband Jim and I still live in Evanston, IL. Our son Andrew is a math major at Yale. Our son David, who is Deaf, is a gregarious high school junior who is on his school's debate team. My e-mail address is BKUzzell@aol.com.

-- Betsy Uzzell '72

I was a dual-degree candidate in Mathematics and Music composition. In the past, events concerning each of those degrees dovetailed. I thought I had put that behind me, but music has once again come to the fore.

In the mathematics end, my consulting company, Plainwrap Solutions, has just completed version one of an innovative identity theft recovery system for Truston Corp. It will have launched by the time the new newsletter goes to press at <www.mytruston.com>. The process involved in recovery is extensive, complicated, and multi-threaded, and I have developed what I feel is an innovative architecture that distills the various tasks into a manageable, linear set of tasks.

Music has come to the forefront as well, which was quite unexpected. My wife, Carrie Diamond, started a new ballet company in town, appropriately named Ballet Santa Barbara. I was pressed into service as music director and performed on the debut season, March 11 and 12. I played Mazurkas by Chopin and a piano work of mine, written several years before. The company Web site, developed also by Plainwrap Solutions, can be viewed at <www.balletsantabarbara.org>. Be sure to visit the gallery page to view Brutos, our newest family member.

-- Eric Valinsky '73

I'm still working at Rho, Inc., working on clinical trials data for pharmaceutical clients large and small. A long-time member of the American Statistical Association (ASA), I have been active in both the Boston Chapter and the Biopharmaceutical Section for about 10-15 years. Now I am serving on the Board of Directors of the ASA, having been elected as a Representative from the Council of Chapters. On the home front, my son's are doing great: older son Dan (who has a degree as electrical engineer and certification as an EMT and a fire fighter) has moved back to Boston where he is working for a lighting supply company; Chris is in Tucson, working for Raytheon and starting a MS in mechanical engineering. That's the update!

-- Katherine Monti '71

I'm a professor in the Department of Psychology at Washington University. In the past several years I've been involved in developing mathematical (connectionist) models of how humans learn concepts about functional relations, and what representations are formed. I have a comprehensive paper out on evaluating two models last spring and am working on a new paper regarding further comparisons of our model with a newer approach.

-- Mark McDaniel '74
Three years ago I started my own company, Survey Design and Analysis (SurveyDNA.com), doing Market Research and Customer Satisfaction surveys. However, a more interesting story is my sister, Ann Halteman, also an Obie Math alum, who left a six-figure corporate job to teach junior high math teachers in Massachusetts. Even with the drastic cut in pay she is loving it. You can reach her at a.halteman@verizon.net if she isn't already on your list.

-- Ed Halteman '75

I've been one of the organizers of the special year on Imaging at the IMA that's running for the '05-'06 year. I helped kick off the year with a series of tutorial lectures on radar imaging; the presentation materials and streaming video of the lectures are available online at <www.ima.umn.edu/2005-2006/T9.19-23.05/> (Click on "Lecture abstracts and talk materials", and scroll down to the radar part.) I've also been asked to give a plenary talk at the International Congress on Industrial & Applied Mathematics in Zurich during the summer of 2007. And I'm currently the national champion in my age group in 1-meter diving! (See <www.mastersdiving.com/MastersHistory/history.html>, 2005 Outdoor.)

-- Margaret Cheney '76

I have been spending the 2005-2006 academic year on sabbatical in Tübingen, Germany. I have been working with an interdisciplinary group modeling disease transmission and trying to analyze intervention strategies (think bird flu). It is very interesting and I have learned a lot from the biologists, epidemiologists, and statisticians in my office. It makes me wish I had paid more attention when Mr. Goldberg and Mr. Devore were trying to convince me to take more statistics. Ah, the errors of our youth...

-- Chris Leary '79

I graduated from Oberlin in 1980, and after going through several computer-related careers, have settled down as a market maker in index options on the American Stock Exchange here in New York. I was not a stellar math student while at Oberlin, but do remember that number theory was the course I enjoyed the most. So it's funny that I ended up at a job where the essence of my work is the challenge of keeping in my head the basic relationship between one underlying quantity and about 500 related options values as well as the different kinds of curves different subsets draw. I know there are people out there who do very advanced math in my work area, but for me, it's sufficient to just enjoy the numbers!

-- Ralph Buchalter '80

I am a Mathematical Statistician working in the Biometric Research Branch of the National Cancer Institute. I collaborate with medical investigators and do methodological research in the areas of longitudinal data analysis and diagnostic accuracy. In 2005, I was elected as a Fellow of the American Statistical Association.

-- Paul S. Albert '81

I returned to Oberlin in Nov. 2004 for the first time since graduating in 1982 to give a lecture (at the kind invitation of Michael Henle). It was a very enjoyable experience: meeting old/new faculty members and taking endless walks about the campus. My lecture appeared as an article "Lost in a Forest" (co-authored with Jack Wetzel) in the Amer. Math. Monthly, vol. 11, pp. 645-654. The paper later won a 2005 Ford Award for expository excellence from the Math. Assoc. of Amer. Given this stroke of good fortune, perhaps I should return to Oberlin more often!
My website is at <pauillac.inria.fr/algo/bsolve/>, featuring information about my Cambridge Univ. Press Book "Mathematical Constants" and my original CD "An Apple Gathering" of classical vocal/choral music. I make a living as statistical programmer at the Boston Univ. School of Public Health, but would someday love to return to teaching. Best wishes, -- Steve Finch '82

After nearly twenty years of very little mathematical activity other than the occasional tutoring of friends' children, I found myself going back to school for teacher certification in high school math. This was prompted by the recent bankruptcy of the San Antonio Symphony, where I have been a violinist since 1988. I took the required courses and passed both state certification exams, one in pedagogy and one in math content (side note: it is frightening how little math one actually needs to know in order to be certified to teach it in Texas), and then to my great relief the San Antonio Symphony came back to life. I am now back in place as principal second violinist but take some comfort in the idea that if the symphony should ever go under again, I am employable. The education courses and required observations were an eye-opening experience, and I am glad for it. Much has changed in math instruction since I was in high school in the 1970s, and with three children in the public schools, it is useful to be better informed about what they are likely to encounter in the future. My husband David is a high school teacher but his fields are English and German. We have three children: Will is in fifth grade, Matthew is in third grade, and Margaret will start kindergarten next fall. Both boys are mathematically inclined and I have hopes for Margaret as well.

-- Mary Ellen Spencer Goree '82

Since graduating Oberlin, I started my own business, Sound On Sound Recording, Inc., a full service recording studio in New York City back in 1987. I have been to Oberlin several times since to help share some wisdom (and other anecdotes) for aspiring musicians wondering about life about college. At about the same time period, I also met my wife Deborah. We are now married almost 18 years and have two wonderful kids and live in NJ. I wish I could share a fun mathematical story other than the mundane economics of business, but it does involve some math (as well as much accounting).

-- David Amlen, '83

At the time I attended Oberlin, the very first computer science classes were being offered by the Math department, and I took most of them. I work in the field of digital mapping and GIS, and I have found many of the principles from those Oberlin courses continue to be relevant, despite the tremendous changes in computer hardware and software over the years.

-- Eric B. Pyle '83

Matthew H. Fields (Double-degree '84, <www.umich.edu/~fields> continues to compose classical music, funding this with computer programming for University of Michigan Medical Center.

I am an associate professor of biology at Transylvania University, where I currently act as the biology program director (our equivalent of department chair). I was recently awarded a Bingham Fellowship for excellence in teaching and last year was named Kentucky Professor of the Year by the Carnegie Foundation. I greatly enjoy teaching undergraduate students, although I sometimes miss the math emphasis. Someday, maybe I will teach a calculus course or statistics course along with the biology and interdisciplinary courses I teach. I send my greetings to the fine faculty from Oberlin, who gave me an excellent background in critical thinking.

-- Peggy Shadduck Palombi '84

Last June I was awarded the Harvard Biostatistics Distinguished Alum Award. I’m still working as Professor of Statistical Epidemiology at the Department of Infectious Disease

-- Anne (Bretzfield) Ostroff '82

I’m not doing anything with my math major (I'm a freelance editor), but my 9-year-old, Joshua, is a math whiz: he reads math books in Borders, and for fun, he calculates exponents and multiple-digit equations (a bit more advanced than 3rd grade math). On his birthday, he informed me that he's now 100 years old---in base 3.

-- Anne (Bretzfield) Ostroff '82
Epidemiology, Imperial College London - and I'm looking forward to the arrival of my second child (due at the end of May). My email address is c.donnelly@imperial.ac.uk

-- Christl Donnelly '88

I am in my second year of the PhD program in Applied Mathematics at the University of Arizona. I am primarily interested in dynamical systems. I also got married last year, and my husband and I are expecting our first child in September.

-- Brenna Bailey '92

bbailey@math.arizona.edu

I'm writing to you from the Karachi airport; I'm here to attend the World Social Forum <www.wsf2006karachi.org>, an annual gathering of activists from all over the world to discuss -- well, everything under the sun: war & peace, poverty & prosperity, oppression & liberation, politics, economics, you name it. I'm working for the Center for Economic Justice <www.econjustice.net>, and living in Mumbai, India, where I'm campaigning against the World Bank, whose economic policies make the poor poorer and the rich richer.

The closest I've come to mathematics these days is traffic jams. These are frequent in Mumbai, and leave me a lot of time for idle speculation, while inhaling exhaust fumes. I wrote the following on 14 December:

Traffic here is highly turbulent: it proceeds in fits and starts, sudden jerks and brake-slamming, small vehicles insinuating themselves between larger ones. There is none of the smooth, regimented flow of western highways. Fluid dynamicists should have a field day analyzing why traffic in some places is so laminar and in others so turbulent. Is it the mixed nature of the traffic? Laminar flow is probably easier to maintain among similar types of vehicles. Or is there a cultural dimension as well? Unlike water molecules, inexorably drawn by gravity and low pressure, drivers are (theoretically) thinking atoms. They can choose not to jump lanes for a slight forward gain. Doing so would alter the boundary point between laminar and turbulent flow -- in effect, it would make traffic more viscous. But for drivers to hold back would require them to believe that doing so would lead to laminar flow, and therefore faster traffic over the long term. There would have to be a sufficiently high probability of maintaining laminar flow as to be worth the personal short-term sacrifices. And clearly no one believes that in India.

-- Neil Tangri '92

After I got my Masters in Math at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, I began to work for the visualization group at the National Center for Supercomputing Applications. Our group works on scientific visualizations, especially data driven (i.e. based on scientific simulations), high-quality productions. Some of the recent projects I've contributed to are "The Hunt for the Supertwister", a show about large tornados which aired on PBS NOVA in 2004, "Black Holes", a digital planetarium show which opened earlier this year at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science, and a companion show, "Monster of the Milky Way", which will air on PBS NOVA this September. The group I work with is small, eclectic (artists, astronomers, architects), and we get to work closely with scientists at the forefront of their fields.

On a more domestic front, I was married to Paige Scalf in 2000. She's a classically trained opera singer who later got a PhD in cognitive neuroscience, and is a post-doc now. We live in Urbana with our Very Large Dog, Tesla, and travel frequently. Unfortunately, most of that travel is to Iowa (in-laws, you see), but we have managed to visit Morocco, Hungary, the Netherlands, and a few other non-midwestern locations (and we almost moved to Wales, but that is another story).

-- Matt Hall '94

I have three pieces of news and/or updates. The first, and most important, is that I have a daughter Sophia who is now two years old. I'm pleased to report she can already count to 12. :) The second piece of news is that I will be (finally) finishing my degree at Columbia this summer. The third piece of news that closely relates to this is that I have recently been offered a tenure-track position in the math department at the College of William and Mary, and I will, in all probability, accept their offer. We're finalizing negotiations, but things seem to be progressing smoothly. I am excited at the prospect of working there, and I have thought about Oberlin Math a lot during the interview/negotiation process as there is a similarity between the two departments. Additionally, my Oberlin experience served me
The big news for me is that I've applied to several library science programs. I'm in at quite a few places, but I haven't made a final decision as to where to go yet. Front runner is UNC.

Oh, here's a fun problem I was thinking of: What positive integers are both squares and triangular numbers? The solution set can be found by solving a diophantine equation, but since I know nothing about solving techniques for them, I churned a few out by hand. If memory serves me correctly, the first three numbers I found were 1, 36, and 1225. I'm sure this is an ages-old question, but some folks might have a fun time thinking about how to set up the equation (I found that it wasn't exactly trivial, though I'm out of practice) and practical techniques for finding solutions.

--Andreas Orphanides '99

Currently, I'm happily working at the MITRE Corporation, a non-profit systems engineering firm that advises the government. I work in a lab testing and recommending computer security solutions, which relies on all the logical thinking, scientific writing, and project management skills I learned at Oberlin! I spend my spare time running really far -- 3 marathons down, and training for a 4th! -- and undertaking home improvement projects for my wonderful, little 1-bedroom house next to Arlington National Cemetery, across the Potomac from DC.

--Sarah Brown '00

Laurel Paget-Seekins (class of '01) is in graduate school at Georgia Tech for Transportation Planning and Engineering (duel degree in City Planning and Civil Engineering). Unaccustomed to applied mathematics, Laurel thinks it would be cool to run transportation models on the surface of a Klein bottle.

Joshua Hartshorne '02 married Helen Fu in Seattle on December 29, 2005. They currently live in Nerja, Spain, where they study Spanish and Josh writes freelance articles on travel and culture. He plans to attend graduate school in neuroscience or psychology this fall.

I am teaching math at a small public high school in San Francisco, where I live. It's an awesome charter school with a big focus on social justice and creating access to college for our students, who are predominantly low income people of color, many of whom are the first in their families to go to college. We teach the Interactive Mathematics Program curriculum, which is grounded in student inquiry and group work. Last quarter, my students derived the equation for a circle whose center is not at the origin. Very exciting. I am also studying at the University of San Francisco to get my Master's in Teaching. So I'm extremely busy! But happy too, when I get a chance to stop and catch my breath.

--Laura Veuve '02

Since graduating from Oberlin in 2004, I've traveled about 2500 miles west to sunny San Mateo, California. Last June I graduated from Stanford with a Master's degree in math education and got my secondary teaching credential, and I'm currently about 3/4 of the way through my first year of teaching at a high school in Redwood City. Right now I'm teaching Algebra I as well as an Algebra support class for students who struggle with math, and I can't believe how hard it is -- I've never worked so hard in my life! I'm also helping run an after-school Algebra recovery program for kids who failed the first semester of Algebra I, which has been very rewarding, and coaching track and field on days when I'm not helping with the recovery program. I like teaching, but it's really made me miss *being* a math student and learning new awesome math -- I tried teaching myself some abstract algebra out of a book, but it's just not the same! Hopefully, I'll be able to find a math class to keep me occupied this summer. :-(

--Angie Knotts '03

I am currently attending University of Akron full time to earn a Master of Science in Secondary Education with Licensure to teach mathematics grades 7 – 12. I am doing this while working in the Akron Public Schools as a substitute teacher. In addition, I have a little boy named Jordan who turned 2 years old on March 31.

--Sonja Spencer '03

Been on the actuarial track for almost a year and a half now, still liking the dynamics of pension consulting despite death knells predicting
its death (since the birth of ERISA). It's unfortunate that from all the recent media publicity people still don't seem to understand the difference between actuaries and accountants, but we are slowly getting there. My husband Gilbert is graduating from residency in June and recently landed a job in Seattle, so I flew there last Friday for an interview with my company's Seattle office (that's the advantage of a large company, we even have a Shanghai office, just in case I get home sick.) The interview, hiring, and accepting all took place on the same day, so off we go to Seattle June 2006! We will be new to Seattle and definitely looking to explore and getting to know people, so if you are already out there feel free to drop me a line at ellen.chai@gmail.com any time;-)

-- Ellen Chai '04

About a month after commencement in 2005 I made it to India to begin a month tour. And many adventures and ordeals I had there. I often wondered, as I traveled around, how it would be for the people and students who lived here. How would it be for a young person in India interested in mathematics? Where would they go? So I often visited the universities at the cities I came upon, to see what their facilities were like.

I got the best look at the main campus of the public university in New Delhi, the capital. Delhi University is a massive school (~200,000 students) composed of many independent colleges. I stopped first at the Mathematics department, where I was welcomed into the office of Prof. Das, who was happy to chat and invited me to his class on 'Algebraic coding theory.' subject about which I knew nothing. After introducing me as a visitor to the class he spent the first 10 minutes talking about a mathematician (Varshamov) whom he had personally known, as I tried, mostly successfully, to get a handle on his accent. Surprisingly, I was then able to follow his statement and proof of a theorem, which took up the rest of the lecture. The biggest difference in style from what I'm used to was his frequent periods of dictation: after explaining for a while he would indicate for students to start copying word for word, speaking slowly and not writing on the board. I don't think I liked those bits, but perhaps I'm just not used to it. All in all though it was a good lecture. Afterwards he bought me lunch and we joined one of his colleagues for chai and chit-chat (in Hindi, so I just sat there and drank my tea). The next day I attended another math seminar in operator theory, but I had no idea what was going on, both because I didn't understand the math and the students and teacher frequently slipped into Hindi. My overall impression was of a strong, high-level math department, though with its own flavor clearly distinct from what one would encounter in America.

I got back from India on Christmas Eve. Honestly, my overwhelming emotion was joy to be back home. But life rolls on, and I am now in totally different environment: I'm teaching high school. In particular, Algebra I, Intro. Chemistry, Intro. Biology, and Environmental Science. Perhaps every teacher goes through this when they just get started, the sense of weirdness at the sudden inversion. Now I am the teacher, and they are my students. But I definitely like the work so far.

I am still planning on graduate school at UCSB in the fall and have already started the enrollment process. My very best wishes go out to all the folks I know at Oberlin, I definitely miss being there sometimes!

-- Curtis Asplund '05

DEPARTMENT NEWS

• After stints as both Associate Dean and Acting Dean, Jeff Witmer returns to the Department. It’s great having our statistical expert back!

• The mathematical biologist Peter Thomas leaves us this July. Peter has accepted a position at Case Western Reserve University.

• Andries Lenstra, Visiting Assistant Professor, also departs this summer. Andries heads off to Colby College, where he will continue to teach undergraduates statistics from the correct point of view!

• Kevin Woods will be joining the Department in a tenure track position this summer. Currently a Postdoc at UC Berkeley, Kevin received his PhD from Michigan in 2004. Kevin specializes in discrete and computational geometry, with applications to computational biology and theoretical computer science. We are pleased Kevin is joining us.
AWARD WINNERS

• Senior Daniel Herr receives the 2005-06 John D. Baum Mathematics Prize. Daniel, who receives $200 and has his name engraved on our plaque in King 205 listing winners from previous years, was the highest scorer from Oberlin on the 2005-06 Putnam Exam. Congratulations Daniel!

• Senior Noah Streib receives the 2005-06 Rebecca C. Orr Memorial Prize. The Orr Prize, which carries a monetary award of $2000, is given to a mathematics major exhibiting both an exceptional record of achievement and exceptional promise for future professional accomplishment. Noah heads off to the top notch graduate program in Algorithms, Combinatorics and Optimization at Georgia Tech after earning a 4.0 GPA in mathematics here at Oberlin. Congratulations and best wishes to Noah!

COMMENCEMENT

• This year our Commencement Reception is Sunday, May 28 from 2-4 PM in King 205. If you're here for commencement, please come.