The Department of Computer Science gears the bulk of its curriculum toward preparing computer science (CS) majors for graduate school or the world of work. But the department recognizes the need for all students to have an understanding of computers from an end user standpoint.

To fulfill this need, it offers courses that introduce students to the basics of computers, including popular software packages, applications, and programming languages. To expand the general curriculum, department chair Rami Helham encourages faculty members to submit proposals for new courses. One such proposal, which was approved last spring and will be available for the first time this fall, addresses advanced Web design. The department also started experimenting with online courses during the summer, so that students can return home and still take classes.

The contributions of the department extend beyond the classroom. Computer science sponsors the Society of Women in Computing (SIW), an educational and social service organization that supports women in pursuit of a computing degree, and it supports a local chapter of the Association for Computing Machinery, an international organization that brings computing professionals and students together. The department also encourages students to participate in a co-op program that allows them to alternate terms between school and work, enabling participants to gain experience, make contacts in the technology field, and earn money while pursuing their degrees. Last but not least, the department provides undergraduate research projects for Arts and Sciences students and also extends support to undergraduate students from other universities who want to work with University of Pittsburgh faculty during the summer months.

In celebration of its 40th anniversary, the Department of Computer Science is planning a special event during its annual CS Day, which takes place every February. Visit the department online at www.cs.pitt.edu for news, events, and updates.
MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN
Welcome and Welcome back
For those who have recently joined the University of Pittsburgh family, welcome. And for those who are returning to us this fall, welcome back.
We introduced the expanded Pitt Pride newsletter last year as a resource for the families of students enrolled in the School of Arts and Sciences. It is our goal that this publication will help you and your student to more easily and successfully navigate our very large community of learners.
Last spring, we conducted a readership survey to gather feedback about how to improve this publication to better meet your needs. To all who responded, thank you. As a result of the feedback we received, we have made a few changes to our format and contents. Please know that we always welcome your thoughts, story ideas, and questions. Contact us at pittpride@pitt.edu to share your input or just to say hello.

The School of Arts and Sciences is a vibrant, dynamic environment, constantly growing and changing to better serve the needs of our students. We are very proud of the ongoing growth and expansion of our academic programs. Each year, we offer new majors, minors, and certificate programs that reflect the expertise of our faculty members and the interests of our students. During the past year, we have launched a Bachelor of Science degree in actuarial mathematics, a minor in mathematics, and an Arts and Sciences program in Bioinformatics. We have added another second major, a minor, or a certificate adds value to an undergraduate degree and offers students opportunities to earn academic credit and invaluable knowledge while working with faculty mentors on their original research. Students who qualify for federal work-study may choose to support research instead of work. All students who participate in Pitt Experiences may credit the courses they take as part of their degree.

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www.pitt.edu/~oel.

Details on these activities and others, visit our website www.pitt.edu/sas.

FACULTY PROFILE
Award-Winning Faculty Set Tone For Excellence

Without dedicated professors, students would be unable to attain the high level of academic achievement expected of them at the School of Arts and Sciences. Each year, the school recognizes excellence in undergraduate teaching with the Tina and David Bellet Arts and Sciences Teaching Excellence Awards. Students and peers nominate and evaluate faculty members. The 2006 winners are Anthony Bledsoe, a lecturer in the Department of Biological Sciences, and Professor Daniel Mossel from the Department of Computer Science.

Bledsoe received his doctorate in biology from Yale University in 1984 and came to the University of Pittsburgh in 1987. He teaches courses in biology and ecology and his research focuses on the evolutionary history of birds. Bledsoe believes that he does not so much teach the course material as facilitate the students’ ability to learn. He says, “I enjoy the material so much that is fun for me and rewarding for me to convey the incredible beauty and interesting, curious nature of biological systems. It’s not only fulfilling, it’s exhilarating to know that students are doing well ... in part because I would like to help them.”

A full professor since 2004, Mossel has been teaching at the University of Pittsburgh for more than a decade. He earned his doctorate in computer science from the University of Maryland at College Park in 1993. Mossel teaches courses on distributed and real-time systems, advanced topics in operating systems, and the social implications of computing technology. His research focuses on distributed systems. Mossel says, “Computer science changes every 10 minutes. So if [students] just memorize one thing and this thing changes next year, they need to get a job next year and they say, ‘Oh, I can’t do this. I don’t know it.’ But if you teach them the principles, and if you teach them how to develop their own answers, then ... they can easily adapt their knowledge to the new computer science field.”

To see these award-winning faculty members in action, and to find out more about the Bellet Teaching Awards, visit www.unc.pitt.edu/060403video.html.

NEWS & ANNOUNCEMENTS

Is Your Senior Graduating in April 2007?
April 2007 graduation applications are due in the School of Arts and Sciences Office of Student Records by November 17, 2006. The April graduation applications will be available in 140 Thakker Hall on October 6, 2006 (first day of the spring semester registration). Students must fill out their applications early so that the school’s office can know how many students are eligible. For more information, contact student records at 412-624-6776.

Recognizing Our December Graduates
The School of Arts and Sciences will host a graduate recognition ceremony for the Class of December 2006. An invitation will be mailed in mid-November to those Arts and Sciences undergraduates who have applied for December graduation. For more information, contact the Office of Undergraduate Studies at 412-624-6480.

Dear’s Stars
A $50 University of Pittsburgh Book Center gift certificate will be mailed to undergraduate students in the School of Arts and Sciences who complete the fall term with a minimum of 12 credits and a term GPA of 4.0. The certificate will be mailed in mid-January. If you are in the School of Arts and Sciences and have completed the fall term with a minimum of 12 credits and a term GPA of 4.0, we invite you to apply to be a Dear’s Star. Applications are due in early December. Check the Arts and Sciences Web site this fall for more information, or contact the Office of Experiential Learning at 412-624-5328.

FUTURE LEADERS

If you saw an opportunity to make a positive difference, would you take advantage of it? That is exactly what Tonya Groover did. A senior in the School of Arts and Sciences majoring in computer science and sociology, Groover discovered, through a research project partially funded by the computer science department’s Alfred Moyé Information Technology Leadership Institute Fund, that degrees earned by underrepresented minorities in computer science are declining. In an effort to improve those statistics, she conceived, sought funding for, and launched the Technology Leadership Institute (TLI), a program aimed at engaging high school students from underrepresented groups in activities to promote foundation skills and knowledge in the computer science field.

This past summer, the six-week TLI program, sponsored by the School of Arts and Sciences and by the Department of Computer Science, included workshops and classes in Web design, computer systems, and robotics. Participants in the program also attended talks with industry professionals, went on field trips to Pittsburgh-area technology centers, and received counseling about applying to college.

When asked why she designed the program, Groover said, “It’s strongly related to the African proverb, ‘It takes a village to raise a child.’ It is important that as a community we provide opportunities, exposure, and encouragement for the next generation.”

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT OFFERS JUNIOR FELLOWS OPPORTUNITIES
The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to advancing cooperation between nations and promoting active international engagement by the United States. The Carnegie Endowment’s Junior Fellows Program provides a substantive work experience for students who have a serious career interest in international affairs.
Graduating seniors, as well as those who have graduated within the past academic year and who have completed at least 90 credit hours as a regular student, may apply to be Junior Fellows. Applications are due in early December. Check the Arts and Sciences Web site for this fall for more information, or contact the Office of Experiential Learning at 412-624-5328.

Everyone knows what an A+ means on a grade report, but you may not be quite as certain what a G, an I, or a W means, or what impact these letters can have your student’s grade point average (GPA).

The letter grades indicate what you might expect—an A+ reflects performance above and beyond expectations, while an F shows a lack of adequate performance in a class. Students in the School of Arts and Sciences have other grade designations for courses that are 3 credits or less.

They can choose to take a class pass/fail, in which case they will receive either an S (satisfactory) or a U (unsatisfactory). Students can also choose to audit a class without earning credit for it, in which case they will receive a grade of N (audit).

Calculating a student’s GPA can be a tricky little exercise. Only those classes taken for letter grades while students are enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh are used to calculate GPAs. Each letter grade is assigned a value on a four-point system: the number of credits earned in a class is multiplied by the value for the grade received. The calculated values for all classes are totaled and then divided by the number of credits attempted for the term to determine a student’s GPA for that term. Cumulative GPA is calculated in a similar fashion, except that only letter grades earned while students are enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh are included in the calculations. The Undergraduate Student Handbook (www.pitt.edu/ASUS, Handbook2006/index.html) offers detailed information about grades, GPAs, and record systems.

In addition to end-of-term grade reports, select introductory courses provide first-term freshmen with mid-term progress reports that can gauge their performance. Midterm grades will be H (high), S (satisfactory), or U (unsatisfactory). Exemptions and withdrawals from these courses exempt a student from mid-term progress reports. Students who receive a U grade on midterm progress reports, or those who feel they are struggling with their course work, can get help from their professors and teaching assistants, their freshman orientation course instructors, or their academic advisors, or by visiting the Academic Resource Center in G-1 Gates Student Steel Conference Center.

The University of Pittsburgh no longer sends grade reports in the mail. Students can access their grades, whether for midterm progress or the end of the term, through the Pitt portal (www.pitt.edu). In September 2006, students will be able to view their academic advice transcripts through Pitt portal, by accepting Privacy Settings and following the instructions. Additional self-service options will become available throughout the academic year; watch for announcements on our Web site (www.pitt.edu) and in this newsletter.