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June 2006

## University News

**FIVE RECEIVE HONORARY DEGREES:** Washington University awarded honorary degrees to five prominent individuals during Commencement ceremonies May 19. The honorary degree recipients are: Aaron J. Ciechanover, M.D., D. Sc., a 2004 Nobel Prize winner in chemistry and distinguished research professor at Technion-Israel Institute of Technology in Haifa; Anna Crosslin, president and chief executive officer of St. Louis' International Institute; Steve Fossett, record-setting adventurer and the first person to fly nonstop around the world alone in a balloon; Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Ph.D., the W.E.B. Du Bois Professor of the Humanities and chair of the Department of African and African American Studies at Harvard University; and John F. McDonnell, vice chairman of Washington University's Board of Trustees and retired chairman of the board of McDonnell Douglas Corporation.

**UNIVERSITY COLLEGE CELEBRATES 75 YEARS OF CONTINUING EDUCATION:** Night. A time normally associated with ballgames, social gatherings, and sleep. But University College in Arts & Sciences has been offering people a different evening routine for 75 years. While students first took evening classes at the University in 1854, it wasn't until 1931 that the night school became "University College." Since that first evening program, the college has become one of the most popular — and influential — adult higher-education programs around.

**MEDICAL SCHOOL, HOSPITAL JOIN EFFORT TO REDUCE HOSPITAL-ACQUIRED INFECTIONS:** Infectious disease experts at Washington University School of Medicine and Barnes-Jewish Hospital will participate in a new multicenter research network dedicated to assessing, treating, and preventing hospital-acquired infections. The Centers for Disease Control estimates that each year about 2 million infections are acquired in health-care settings, resulting in about 90,000 deaths and more than \$4.5 billion in excess costs.



Joe Angeles/WUSTL photo

Henry Louis Gates Jr., Ph.D., acknowledges the more than 13,000 guests in Brookings Quadrangle upon his receiving an honorary doctor of humane letters. Gates is the W.E.B. Du Bois Professor of the Humanities and chair of the Department of African and African American Studies at Harvard University; he is considered one of the nation's foremost cultural critics. Flanking Gates are University Trustee Andrew E. Newman (left) and Chancellor Mark S. Wrighton.

## Research

**PROTEIN MAY PREVENT DIABETES:** Researchers have gained an important insight into how the protein mTOR could work to prevent diabetes. Ironically, diabetes researchers hope to promote the capability of mTOR, which oncologists want to shut down. The protein's ability to reproduce cells by dividing into copies can be deadly in tumors, but Michael McDaniel, Ph.D., professor of pathology and immunology, wants to use this ability to make cells divide and maintain enough insulin-making beta cells in the pancreas to prevent diabetes.

**BUSINESS GENIUS:** There are companies that, like people, are smarter than others. Literally. A professor at the John M. Olin School of Business has developed a way to measure a company's IQ based on how effective it is at innovating. Using data from SEC filings, Anne Marie Knott, assistant professor of management, computed the IQs of all the publicly traded U.S. firms that engaged in R&D.



David Kilper/WUSTL Photo

Christine Kirmaier (left) and Dewey Holten make adjustments in their sophisticated laser laboratory in Louderman Hall. The husband-wife team have tricked electrons to choose another path in a bacteria's reaction center protein, the factory for photosynthesis. Their find advances the understanding of photosynthesis.

**CHEMISTS GET ELECTRONS TO 'BREAK ON THROUGH TO THE OTHER SIDE':** In the Robert Frost poem, "The Road Not Taken," the person takes the road less traveled by, and "that has made all the difference." Chemists at Washington University and Stanford University have modified a key protein in a bacterium to move electrons along a pathway not normally traveled by. They achieved this 70 percent of the time, and that yield makes all the difference to understanding operations such as photosynthesis and multi-step electron transfer processes, which could have an impact in solar energy conversions.

## Features

**HIDDEN DANGERS IN HERBS:** Ginsengs, echinaceas, and ephedras, oh my! These herbs sound innocuous enough; however, according to Memory Elvin-Lewis, Ph.D., professor of microbiology and ethnobotany in biomedicine in Arts & Sciences; Americans are unaware of the dangers inherent in these herbal supplements.

**SUSPENDING GAS TAX IS A BAD IDEA:** With voters clamoring for relief from



skyrocketing prices at the gas pump, politicians are floating a wide range of quick-fix solutions, many of which could cause more problems than they solve, suggests Paul Rothstein, Ph.D, associate professor of economics in Arts & Sciences and a specialist in the economics of public spending. Although the proposed federal gas tax "holiday" has been touted as a means of off-setting the rising price of gasoline, Rothstein cautions that there's no way of knowing whether this reduction in fuel costs will be passed along to consumers.

**'COACH' BURMEISTER STEPS DOWN FROM THURTENE IN STYLE:** Even though he retired without having won a single game, this coach definitely went out a champion. Jim Burmeister, executive director of University Relations and Commencement, was honored April 21-22 after stepping down following 35 years as adviser to the Thurtene Junior Honorary and Thurtene Carnival. More than 150 of the 455 students Burmeister has mentored over the years returned to campus — from places as distant as San Francisco, New York, and Seattle — to honor the man known simply as "Coach."



David Kilper/WUSTL Photo

Jim Burmeister, outgoing adviser to Thurtene, receives a jacket from Dan Sarbacker, Thurtene alumni adviser, during a party honoring Burmeister April 22 in Holmes Lounge.

## Heard on Campus

"Do today what your instincts tell you could wait until tomorrow."  
—The Right Honorable Sir John Major during the Commencement address to the graduates of 2006

## Kudos

Roger Follmer, head coach of the Washington University men's tennis team, has been named the Wilson/Intercollegiate Tennis Association National Division III Coach of the Year.

Julie Morris, Ph.D., research associate professor in earth and planetary sciences in Arts & Sciences, has been named the new director of the Ocean Science Division of the National Science Foundation.

The Washington University Academic Team placed third at the College Bowl championship tournament April 21-23 at the University of Hartford.

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