

The Observer

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THE OBERLIN COLLEGE FACULTY AND STAFF NEWSPAPER



Norman Craig cheers on Ruth Spindel, one of six Hall family members attending the landmark event, as she opens the ceremonies by ringing the chemistry department's aluminum gong.

Hall and His Discovery Honored by American Chemical Society

If Charles Martin Hall, Class of 1885, were alive today, suggests his great-great-nephew Charles Hall Acton, Jr., he would be inventing a safe and inexpensive battery to power aluminum-body automobiles—and writing to his sister Julia about it.

Acton's fantasy was one of many remembrances and speculations peppering the presentations last Wednesday, September 17, when the College and the Cleveland Section of the American Chemical Society (ACS) held a public ceremony and reception to commemorate Hall's work and name his work site a National Historic Chemical Landmark. About 250 people, including about 50 out-of-town members of the ACS, joined to celebrate Hall's discovery of an economical way to extract aluminum from its ore.

In her remarks President Nancy Dye emphasized the collaboration between Hall and his faculty mentor, Frank Jewett, and drew a parallel to current faculty-student collaboration, including that between chemist Norman Craig, Biggs Professor in the Natural Sciences, and his students.

As master of ceremony for the event Craig introduced the other speakers: James Burrington, chair of the ACS Cleveland Section; Acton, supervisor of the Mission and Science Analysis Software Group of the Navigation and Flight Mechanics Section at the California Institute of Technology Jet Propulsion Laboratory; Frank Lederman, vice president for technology at Alcoa; Bernard Guest, grandson of Paul Héroult, Hall's French counterpart in-

ventor; Paul Anderson, ACS president; and Dye.

Anderson presented to Dye an aluminum commemorative plaque that will be mounted on the wall in back of the statue of Hall in the Kettering building.

In the Root Room of the Carnegie Building, besides the presentations, were showings of a short video produced by the Office of College Relations, *Charles Martin Hall and the Development of Aluminum*, and of *Unfinished Rainbows*, a 1941 industrial film (starring Alan Ladd) about Hall and his discovery. On display in the room were several related posters and artifacts and a model of the proposed new science facility.

The Jewett House, at 73 South Professor Street, now the property of the Oberlin Historical Improvement Organization (O.H.I.O.), was open to the public during the early afternoon. On view was an exhibition focusing on Hall, the Jewetts, the discovery of aluminum, and the founding of Alcoa by Hall and Alfred Hunt as well as a simulation of the woodshed laboratory in which Hall did his early work. The O.H.I.O. distributed a publication, *Traces of Charles M. Hall in Oberlin: Walking (Plus) Tour Map and Guide* for the occasion; retired Prospect School teacher Ann Craig created the tour and leaflet.

Oberlin resident Lewis McCarty '41 played "a major role in setting up the materials for the displays and in writing the award nomination and the

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Open-Enrollment Options Include Dental Insurance

By Carol Ganzel

October is decision month for choosing 1998 flexible benefits, and dental insurance is among the choices this year. It will help pay for check-ups, fillings, and dental surgery—coverage that is broader than that of the plan offered several years ago, says Benefits Manager Judith Maloney.

Employees and College retirees choosing this insurance will pay its full price. For employees the payments, like payments for other College-sponsored health insurance, may be made on a pre-tax basis through payroll reductions. The plan is sponsored by MetLife, and insured employees who use dentists within MetLife's network will have smaller copayments than those using other dentists.

By itself, Oberlin College is not a large

enough employer to enroll in MetLife's plan, Maloney says. The College can offer the dental plan because it has joined the Health Action Council of Northeast Ohio, which includes American Greetings, Lubrizol, and other large companies with a combined pool of 44,000 employees.

The open-enrollment period for flexible benefits runs from October 1 to 31. It is earlier this year than in the past partly because Human Resources, the first College office to change its administrative computing to OPUS (Oberlin Project for Unified Systems—see the February 28 and August 29, 1997 *Observers*), will need the extra time to be sure all paycheck adjustments are correct and in place by January 1998.

Human Resources has sent to each

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Play-ing with Mathematics

By Cynthia Nickoloff

"Tom Stoppard is better at explaining very complicated mathematical concepts than anyone," Michael Henle, professor of mathematics, told the students and faculty who gathered last week for the first of this year's Math Lunches.

The monthly noon-time discussions usually revolve around what Henle calls "math tidbits" presented by math majors or faculty members. This time, however, the group discussed morsels presented by Stoppard in his play *Arcadia*, which, under the direction of Jane Armitage, associate professor of theater, will open the theater department's fall offerings this weekend.

Student actors cast in four of the major roles performed two short scenes, giving the mathematicians a taste of the savory whole. His characters—two mathematicians and a mathematical prodigy among them—try to integrate reason and logic with the emotion and

passion that inject unpredictability into their lives. Stoppard's deft use of chaos theory, fractal geometry, and other math concepts propels the action.

Henle finds *Arcadia's* interweaving of mathematical and human themes intriguing. An amateur actor who has appeared in several community-theater productions, Henle is no stranger to the stage—nor to Stoppard. Last year he and Dewey Ganzel, now emeritus professor of English, escorted Oberlin-in-London students to a professional-theater production of *Arcadia*.

Henle urged the luncheon group to attend the play more than once, not because the math is difficult—Stoppard's elegant prose makes it accessible even to nonmathematicians—but to better enjoy the intricate and nuanced, not to mention uproariously funny, story.

Cynthia Nickoloff is publications editor in the Office of College Relations.



Henle and the math lunchers explore the themes of Stoppard's *Arcadia*.

Faculty and Staff Notes

Phillip Chan, visiting assistant professor of art in 1984-85, is one of the two artists featured in *Transforming Visions*, a painting and sculpture show at the Firelands Association for the Visual Arts that opens today and lasts through October 23. Phillip has been assistant professor of art at Youngstown State University since 1992. "For the past 10 years I have been painting images of 'fallen angels,' caught between earth and sky, living a life of fundamental suffering. These are my prayers," he says, "for humanity." •



Gerald Crawford, professor of singing, codirected with **Daune Mahy** the 10th annual session of the Oberlin Vocal Academy for High School Students in July. Thirty-eight students attended. • At the first National String Teacher's Symposium in October

Joanne Erwin, assistant professor of music education, will assess the National Association of Schools of Music's requirements for string-teacher preparation. Later in the month she will present demonstration materials she developed for her preparatory program in Kodaly-based string instruction at the Ohio String Teachers Mini-Conference in Columbus. In November Joanne will conduct the Atlanta high-school honors orchestra. • **Taras Gabora**, professor



of violin, was a jury member of the Sarasate International Violin Competition in Pamplona, Spain, this month. This summer, with **Andor Toth**, pro-



fessor of violoncello and **Judith Layng**, emerita professor of opera theater, he took 53 students to Italy for the first program called Oberlin in Casalmaggiore. The students—pianists, violinists, violists, cellists, and vocalists from nine countries (including 11 Oberlin students)—performed 29 concerts during the three-week program. For two weeks in May Taras gave master classes in Seoul, Korea. •

Herbert Henke '53, professor of eurhythmics, was a faculty member at Carnegie Mellon University July 7 through 11 for the first International Dalcroze Conference held in the United States. He was a eurhythmics clinician with the University of Dayton choirs September 12. • **Jeffrey Irvine**,



professor of viola, taught viola and coached chamber music recently at the Quartet Program at Bucknell University. Junior violist Ollie Glatzer joined him there. Also recently,

Jeffrey played in two concerts at the Park City International Music Festival and for two weeks taught on the viola faculty of the Chautauqua Institute, where sophomore violist Lisa Fernandez studied this summer. In June he gave a lecture-demonstration, "Pain-free Viola Playing," at the 25th International Viola Congress, held at the University of Texas at Austin. •

Catherine Jarjisian, professor of music education, has joined the board of the Robert Page Singers of Cleveland. She will continue to sing with them, performing this fall in the Four Cantors Concert at Severance Hall on November 2 and nine performances of *Carmina Burana* with the Cleveland Ballet at the State Theater. •



Jody Kerchner, assistant professor

of music education, and **Catherine Jarjisian** copresented a session, Beyond Cooperation: Music Methods Teacher Collaboration, in May at the Mountain Lake

General Music Colloquium in Mountain Lake, Virginia. In July Jody presented workshops as part of Villanova University's annual Music Teacher Continuing Education Summer Workshops. Her sessions focused on creative music listening in the elementary and middle-school music classroom. Also during the summer she sang in a benefit concert for the Robert Page Singers. Jody has been invited to develop music-education curriculum materials for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Education Department's 1997-98 Youth Concert series. • The contributions to the teaching of African

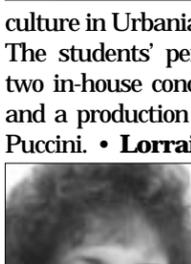


music by **Roderic Knight**, professor of ethnomusicology, were noted recently by John Chernoff in a review of Paul Berliner's book *The Soul of Mbira*. In the review, published in the journal *African Music*, Chernoff writes that Berliner's analysis of mbira music "... along with Roderic Knight's discussions of Mande kora music ... are used by everyone who teaches African music." • **Daune Mahy**, pro-

fessor of singing, and **Marlene** and **Michael Rosen**, associate professor of singing and professor of percussion, respectively, took 33 students to study Italian language and

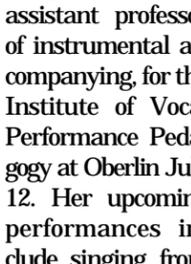


culture in Urbana, Italy, this summer. The students' performances included two in-house concerts, a gala concert, and a production of *Suor Angelica* by Puccini. • **Lorraine Manz**, assistant



professor of singing, was mezzo-soprano soloist with the Cleveland Orchestra at the Blossom Festival July 19. She performed on an all-Beethoven concert that included the

Choral Fantasy and movements from the Mass in C. She also performed the opening recital, a Concert of American Song, with pianist **James Howsmon**,



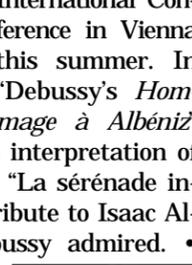
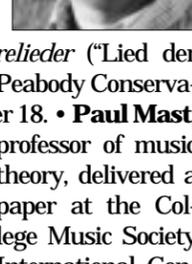
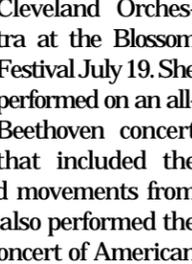
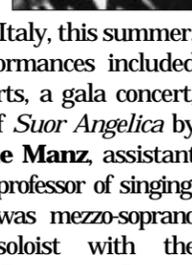
assistant professor of instrumental accompanying, for the Institute of Vocal Performance Pedagogy at Oberlin July 12. Her upcoming performances include singing from Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder* ("Lied der Waldtaube") at the Peabody Conservatory of Music October 18. • **Paul Mast**,



professor of music theory, delivered a paper at the College Music Society International Conference in Vienna this summer. In "Debussy's *Hommage à Albéniz*"

Paul advanced an interpretation of Debussy's *prélude* "La sérénade interrompue" as a tribute to Isaac Albéniz, whom Debussy admired. •

The summer activities of **Marilyn McDonald**, professor of violin, included teaching and performing at the Colorado College Festival and Oberlin's Baroque Perfor-



mance Institute. She also taught and appeared as soloist with the orchestra of the Alaska-Fairbanks Festival and was soloist and concertmaster at the Peninsula Music Festival. • This summer



Paul Polivnick, music director of the conservatory orchestras, debuted as guest conductor of the Philharmonic Orchestra of Luxembourg. He also completed his fifth

season as music director for the New Hampshire Music Festival, conducting five of the six programs, including two world premiers written for his Festival Orchestra. On October 1 he will conduct a concert of tonal Austrian music at the Brahms Hall of the Musikverein in Vienna. He will debut conducting the Kiev Camerata at the Kiev International Music Festival October 4 and the next day will make a recording of the Blechinger Bassoon Concerto. •

Richard Povall, associate professor of computer music and new media, has published a paper, "Realtime Control of Audio and Video through Physical Motion:

STEIM's BigEye" in the *Journées d'Informatique Musicale*, and presented his research at the Center for Networked Virtual Reality at the University of Plymouth, England, where he holds a position as visiting researcher. He recently published a CD, *Impossible Rags*, with Frog Peak Music, which shortly will release his *mouthplace*. The latter work is included in *Incomplete Dislocations*, a September and October exhibition of digital art in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Richard and *mouthplace*

co-author Jools Gilson-Ellis will give a workshop as part of a residency this October at Firkin Crane, a new dance center in Cork, Ireland. They have been invited to apply for an artists' residency at the Banff Centre for the Arts in western Canada in 1998. Richard will be on the Organizing Committee of the 1999 Dance and Technology III Conference, to be held at Arizona State University.



• In June **Peter Rejto**, professor of cello, taught and performed at the Round Top Festival in Texas, and during July and August at the Aspen Music Festival. He made a

special appearance at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara on the distinguished-alumni series in honor of the 50th anniversary of the academy. The school is where Peter's father, the late Hungarian cellist Gabor Rejto taught for more than 30 summers. Also in August Peter appeared at the Barge Music Series in New York, and at the Chestnut Hill Festival in Connecticut. This month he performs at the Grand Canyon Chamber Music Festival. • **George Sakakeeny**, associate professor of bassoon, will perform a new bassoon concerto written for him by Viennese composer Alexander Blechinger in two concerts

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Aluminum . . .

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ACS brochure *Production of Aluminum Metal by Electrochemistry*," says Norman Craig. "He also helped with the new display at the Jewett House. Simply put, without Lew's help this event would not have occurred."

Acton's figment has a historical basis, says Craig. "For about 10 years

(1895-1905) Hall worked very hard to develop an inexpensive fuel cell." Another aspect of Acton's dream—that Hall was collaborating with Héroult on the battery invention—is not entirely far fetched either. The two men, although engaged in litigation until the patent rights were split between the U.S. (Hall) and Europe (Héroult), developed, says Craig, "respect for each other and met more than once in later years."

Benefits . . .

Continued from page 1
employee an open-enrollment packet that includes an events schedule and explains rules for flexible spending accounts that employees may set up during October. With these accounts, employees who anticipate medical expenses not covered by their health plan or child and dependent care expenses may pay for them with pre-tax money, up to limits set by the Internal Revenue Service. October is also the time for employees to authorize pre-tax salary reductions to pay their share of health insurance. Human Resources staff members will offer help with the paperwork in their office and, at certain times, in the conservatory building.

During the open-enrollment period there will be several information sessions on employee benefits, beginning with six this Wednesday, October 2, focusing on the MetLife dental plan. Employees who can't attend one of these will have others to choose from later in the month. Other sessions will provide other benefit information. The College provides different health plans to different employee groups. Administrative assistants, who may choose between the United Health Care HMO and the Preferred Health Plan, may switch from one plan to the other during open enrollment. Most service employees are covered by the United Health HMO; faculty and administrative and professional staff members are enrolled in the Preferred Health Plan.

Preferred Health has recently expanded some of its coverage, increasing the frequency of certain "wellness" examinations and adding licensed independent social workers and other licensed clinical counselors to the list of covered mental-health-service providers. It has also added coverage for prescription oral contraceptives, but only through its mail-order prescription service (after the first 30-day supply). Maloney would like employees to order all their maintenance prescriptions through the mail-order service so that the College can pay wholesale rather than retail prices. "We have to look at every possible way to contain our costs," she says. The College

pays for all employee medical costs covered by its health plans, although most of the checks are issued by the J.P. Farley Corporation of Cleveland, the plans' claims supervisor.

One cost-containment measure in the Preferred Health Plan is precertification, which employees must obtain before checking into a hospital for non-emergency surgery. While patients using United Health Care are precertified by their physicians, those using Preferred Health must get precertification by calling one of the numbers listed in the Preferred Health plan description; failure to make that call costs \$300—the benefit payment will be reduced by that amount. "People get into trouble with extra medical expenses when they don't read the book," Maloney says.

The "book" is the document describing the health plan. Attached to it are several sheets highlighting certain provisions, particularly what the plan will pay when employees use level-one, level-two, or level-three providers and who these providers are. Through the Farley corporation the College has negotiated discounts with level-one providers, and the plan reimburses all of their charges except a \$15 copayment. When a level-one doctor refers a patient to a level-two doctor, the plan generally pays for the second doctor's services at level-one rates. Cleveland Clinic services are an exception, because it offers no discount. Employees who use the Cleveland Clinic, even with a referral, will have to pay extra, Maloney says, adding that Farley "does its best to monitor" the Cleveland Clinic's bills.

Generally, though, Maloney says, "If people use level-one providers, use wellness visits as indicated, and follow precertification procedures, they should have little or no out-of-pocket expenses."

Correction: A.G. Miller's Grant is from the Louisville Institute

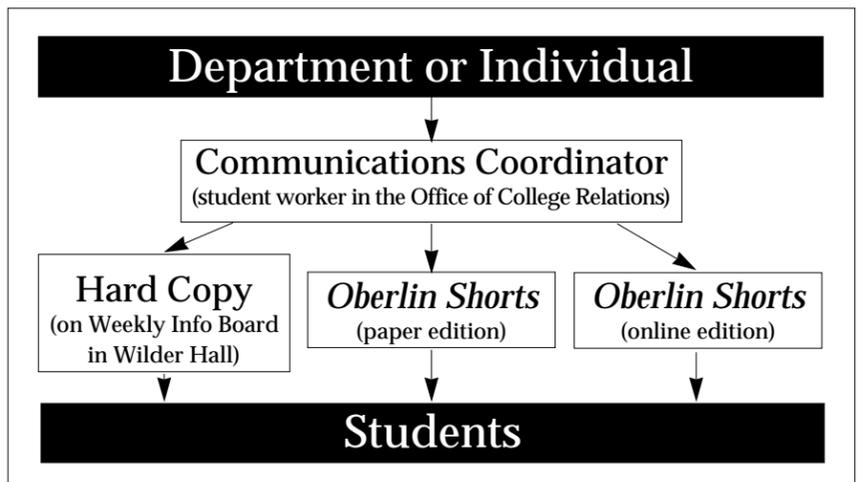
The grant that A.G. Miller has received to research the rise of evangelicalism in the African-American landscape is from the Louisville Institute. The Louisville Institute is an arm of the Lilly Foundation that is concerned with American religion. The granting agency was incorrectly identified in the August 29 issue.

Mandatory in October: Oberlin Shorts, and No More Mass Student Mailings

A student initiative to reduce cost, paper waste, and student-mailroom confusion will become mandatory next month. *Oberlin Shorts*, a new communication scheme staffed by students, is the brainchild of Devin Theriot-Orr '97 and senior Sadhu Johnston. The chart below shows how information will flow from source to students without multiple mass mailings.

Faculty, staff, student organizations, and departments who wish to send a mes-

sage to all students will E-mail or Quick-Mail announcements to *Oberlin Shorts* (Oberlin_Shots@qmgate.cc.oberlin.edu or *Oberlin.Shorts* in the QuickMail Communications directory) or send a disk to the Office of College Relations by 4:00 Tuesday. By Friday summaries will appear in an *Oberlin Shorts* mailing, and the full text will be posted in Wilder Hall. The online version is already accessible at www.oberlin.edu/news/news.html.



Faculty Meeting

Conservatory Faculty Meeting Begins with a Song

The business of the first Conservatory Faculty meeting of the year, September 16, got off to a slightly late start while the Oberlin College Choir sang "Happy Birthday" to Dean Karen Wolff. After applause and cheering the meeting turned to minutes approval and introduction of new faculty. Among the announcements Wolff made was one that President Nancy Dye had given "the nod" to proceed in developing proposals for new Master of Music in Performance programs. A presentation by Michael Frantz, Oberlin College attorney, is slated, Wolff said, for September 30 on the topic of legal issues for college and conservatory councils and educational-policy committees from both divisions.

The Conservatory Faculty Council, among other actions, has recommended Richard Miller, professor of singing, to the Wheeler chair for five years, Wolff reported. Trustees will vote on the appointment at their December meeting. The council is considering the creation of non-tenure-track continuing positions in aural skills and music theory. Currently part-time teachers are hired in those areas each year.

Chair of the Educational Policy Committee Kathryn Stuart, associate dean for conservatory academic affairs,

led the meeting through two matters requiring votes. Both measures passed without audible dissent. The Kaufman Prize may now be awarded to a student only once although students may be nominated for the prizes, in piano and violin performance, more than once. The Wilkins Memorial Prize will favor students with more semesters in residency over those of higher class status.

In his report on the General Faculty Planning Committee (GFPC), which he chairs, David Boe, professor of organ, said the principal task of the committee this year is to follow up on the long-range planning begun last year. The GFPC may reconstitute some of the special groups formed last year, such as the Arts Learning Group, to continue working on their plans, added Wolff, also on the GFPC.

Roderic Knight, professor of ethnomusicology, brought to the attention of the assembled that local musicians are teaching the music of Japan and India in ExCo courses, responding to student interest in nonwestern music. Wolff enforced the notion that music from around the world would continue to grow in importance and that conservatory faculty should be aware of the trend.

Faculty and Staff . . .

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in Europe: On October 1 in Vienna at the Musikverein as part of the Harmonia Classica series, and on October 4 in Kiev at the Kiev Music Fest '97. The new work, *Faggott Konzert*, is a 25-minute five-movement concerto. Sakakeeny performed its world premier last summer at the New Hampshire Music Festival. The con-

ductor for the world premier and both European performances is Director of Oberlin Orchestras **Paul Polivnick**. While in the Ukraine capitol Sakakeeny and Polivnick will record the work with the Kiev Camerata. • This summer **Peter Takács**, professor of piano, participated in the Mississippi Piano Showcase and the Alabama Music Teachers' Association. He was a member of two juries: for the Canadian National Competition



and the San Antonio International Piano Competition. He was also a guest artist at the Lanaudière Music Festival in Joliette, Québec, and gave a solo recital at Tulane University. • **Haskell Thomson**, professor of organ, gave a master class on the organ works of Felix Mendelssohn at the Berkshire Regional American Guild of Organists convention in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, in June. Brian Zuro '93, was one of the participants who per-

formed during the class. • *Emma G*, an opera by **Benedict Weisser** '89, visiting instructor of composition, will have its European premiere in Basel, Switzerland, next year.

Benedict is working on a commission from the Galatea Ensemble in New York for a concerto for oboe and orchestra without conductor. The work will be premiered in February. He recently joined the new music group Music under Construction in New York as an affiliate composer.



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Observations

Rewarding Experiences and Reworked Assumptions: Our Two Months in Madurai as Shansi Faculty Fellows

By James and Anne Helm

In fall 1995 Prema Michael, then principal of Lady Doak College (LDC), a women's college in Madurai, India, came to Oberlin to help cement ties between her institution and Oberlin College. During her visit she invited us to spend time at Lady Doak, give some lectures, and generally take part in the life of the college. Attracted by the opportunity and bolstered by an Oberlin Shansi Memorial Association offer to sponsor us as Shansi Faculty Fellows, we agreed to spend two months' leave there.

Even today, Madurai remains in memory a jumble of impressions: streets crowded with chaotic traffic, high heat and humidity, vivid colors, exotic odors (and some odors too familiar), loud sounds in the middle of the night, and people everywhere. But soon the strangeness faded, replaced by friendly greetings, warm hospitality, good food, and reasonably comfortable surroundings.

Class work in India differs from what Oberlin professors expect. Professors there rely more on formal lectures—perhaps necessarily, since frequently there is no textbook and the library collections are spotty and weak. Because of these limitations their professors are not always able to give the kind of independent reading assignments that Oberlin's do, and much of what they assign is cut and dried. Although the social-science faculty wants students to have research experience, they are reluctant to ask students to interact with the outside community because of strong social taboos on women speaking with males outside their own family.

We each were able to demonstrate the benefits of discussion and other kinds of active learning. The students seemed wonderfully attentive to what we had to say and ready to engage in discussion.

Jim lectured on Greek literature for English classes, and on Greek history, society, and philosophy for history classes. Anne spoke to social-science classes about child development and women and the family in the United States. By the end of our stay Anne had also talked to English and history classes, and Jim to social-science and computer-science classes, as well as to several faculty groups on scholarly and curricular topics. Because LDC professors want to increase the elective component of their curricula, the faculty sought Jim's knowledge and experience in an educational system in which student choice plays a major role.

In presentations on infant development Anne encouraged students to think about the opportunities for infants' intellectual development that can result when infants have frequent and systematic interaction with parents and other caregivers. By describing the varied individual lives of women in the U.S. Anne also worked vigorously to counteract the often false stereotypes of the U.S. family and women generated by American TV and Hollywood movies.

Jim tried to supplement the rudimentary knowledge of the roots of western civilization in the ancient Mediterranean world that LDC students get in their curricula. In the English department Greek and Latin literature plays a role in English translation. Many of the translations available there are fairly archaic, and the students have little context for their readings. All students in the history department take required units on Greece and Rome, but what they learn is limited by the few weeks allotted to the periods. So Jim sought to place literature, politics, and philosophy into a broader social context. Faculty told Jim that, given their own limited exposure to western classics, they, too, appreciated the richer framework.



Anne and Jim Helm (left) took a field trip with Lady Doak College social-science students (right) and faculty to mountain-town Kodaikanal.

Anne worked with the children's library at Lady Doak, conducting programs for the children, making culturally sensitive children's books with social-science students, and meeting with the staff and library board to discuss their aims and objectives. Postgraduate women at nearby American College, a group that feels isolated by their culture in the setting of a predominantly male institution, met with her several times.

Meanwhile, Jim revised his paper on the genealogy of ethical ideals in Aeschylus, partly in response to discussion it generated when he presented it to the faculty of the Values Education Program at Lady Doak, and he made progress on his structural analysis of Homer's *Odyssey*. He began to flesh out his ideas about the origin of the English alphabet and the text of the Greek New Testament, and presented them to faculty groups there. He also read some classical Indian epic literature that provided useful comparative material for his own study.

We witnessed social-service and educational programs, visiting small villages and places in Madurai to see adult-literacy programming (where literacy means the ability to write your name and read bus numbers), cooperative weaving and sewing ventures for the poor (including battered and widowed women, and orphaned children), after-school tutoring for children of bonded stone-quarry workers, and community credit unions. We also participated in celebrations, awarding wreaths to athletes at the Sports Day, hosting visitors, and cutting the ribbons for a new school library and a Christian-studies center.

The people of India do so much with so little; their intelligence and resourcefulness constantly impressed us. Even in Madurai, a city of more than a million people, most Indians eat with their hands, often from a banana leaf, which they feed to the cows after dinner, saving time, trouble, and resources.

Or take the sari—a relatively simple dress, quickly donned without zippers or buttons. It can be inexpensive but beautiful and serves many functions, such as a swing for a baby.

We saw another example of Indian ingenuity when we visited a small village hospital with only a single, utterly dedicated physician who directed the hospital, cared for all the patients, and was on call 24 hours a day. She had acquired an incubator for infants, but when the electrical unit failed and she couldn't get it fixed, she simply installed a light bulb of an appropriate wattage to maintain the right temperature.

Much is happening in India that is important, not just for (as they like to say) "the world's largest democracy," but beyond. Here are two illustrative projects:

In Madurai we visited the Aravind Eye Hospital,

which does pioneering work in cataract surgery for the masses. The hospital laboratory makes artificial lenses at minimal cost. The hospital charges regular patients a hefty fee, but treats twice as many indigents without charge, while the physicians accept a salary only three times what the sweepers in the wards earn. The World Bank has studied the hospital as a potential model for serving wider communities.

The Henry Martyn Institute in Hyderabad focuses on reconciling people of different faiths, especially Hindus and Muslims. On the border between the Hindu and Muslim sections of town the institute has established integrated schools, where Hindu and Muslim children alternate their seats and learn more than their school lessons.

Time in another culture necessarily exposes one's own presuppositions—and in some ways this was the greatest benefit of the stay: our presenting the ancient Mediterranean and modern American cultures to nonwestern students made us rethink our most fundamental assumptions about what is important to say about familiar cultures and about what is important in human life.

In the United States we take for granted what the rest of the world considers extreme individualism: we have greater concern for ourselves than for the community and increasingly lack the will to work together to solve common problems. This is not, we learned, an inevitable condition. At the same time, we began to appreciate the relative integrity of our political institutions; our system of universal public education that, despite its shortcomings, is envied across the world; and the improving status of women and minorities here.

Both of us had to reevaluate our ideas about what it means to be human, about what is essential and what is accidental. We returned home resolved to put more emphasis on personal relations and friendship, and to improve our own practice of hospitality.

Our farewell send-off was touching, giving the impression that our stay had had a positive impact. At a gathering of the faculty, representatives of each department for which we had lectured stood and thanked us warmly, detailing what they had learned from our visit. They gave us each several carefully chosen gifts as reminders of their gratitude. Then we ate! All these gestures underscored for us the importance of expressing appreciation more openly than is the custom in the U.S. or at Oberlin.

Potential hazards of our stay never materialized. Our health remained remarkably good, with only minor intestinal problems and no malaria. We felt safe throughout our time there, especially in Madurai. We never felt a threat of loneliness in a strange land. We never even opened the board game Jim's sister gave us to while away our idle evenings.

James Helm is professor of classics. Anne Helm is director of collaborative development for the Oberlin Intergency Council. The Helms were in Madurai January 6 through February 28. Before leaving India they did sightseeing in other areas of the country, including the Chattisgarh district of Madhya Pradesh, where their uncles and aunts had done missionary work over a 40-year period earlier in the century. They found that people who remembered their relatives "still appreciated what they did in the local health, educational, and religious institutions," and they were pleased about the "positive reception the relatives had received from those whom they served, and the enduring impact of their work."