



CROWNING ACHIEVEMENTS



Students in the Renée Crown University Honors Program put learning into practice as they push the boundaries of undergraduate education in Capstone Projects

By David Marc

ON A SINGLE DAY IN MAY, more than 100 of Syracuse University's most highly motivated, articulate, and accomplished students made their way to the Tolley Humanities Center. Carrying paper binders, lab notebooks, DVDs, CDs, costume changes, and oversize portfolios, they came to present their Capstone Projects, the final—and for many, most demanding—requirement of the rigorous Renée Crown University Honors Program. Collectively, they had traveled across the country, around the world, up the street, and deep into virtual space to conduct research, examine rare phenomena, participate in community service projects, and become familiar with people they no longer think of as “others.” “Each fall, we have an informational meeting for juniors interested in doing a Capstone Project,” says

Eric Holzwarth, deputy director of the Crown program. “I explain it to them this way: ‘Imagine you had two years to learn anything you wanted to learn in order to build, design, write, or create anything you want, and that you had the resources of a major university and the guidance of a faculty member to help you. What would it be?’”

Students representing 43 majors and all SU schools and colleges offering undergraduate degrees responded to that challenge by presenting Capstone Projects this year. Bertille Gaigbe-Togbe '10, a biology major from Benin, in West Africa, took the opportunity to shed new light on “The Role of Estrogen Receptor Expression in Estrogen-Induced Modulation of Immunity and Autoimmunity.” Alec Sim '10, a Whitman

School student from Ohio who plays tuba and piano, visited opera houses in Berlin, Munich, and Milan to explore productions dominated by personal—often quirky—interpretations of directors in “Regie-theater Opera in the 21st Century.” According to Holzwarth, the number of students attempting capstones has nearly doubled since 2007, and the increase is reflected in an expanding range of subject matter. “Our students have started up campus magazines, such as *Zipped* and *What the Health*, they've gone to the Serengeti in Africa to tag elephants and lions, and we even have a few groups of students working on joint projects,” Holzwarth says. “There's no such thing as a typical Capstone Project.” Nonetheless, here are four that caught our eye.



Chad Cable '10

DUAL MAJOR: Computer art, College of Visual and Performing Arts
Computer science, L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science

HOMETOWN: Pittsburgh

JUST A FACT: Cable served as co-president of the SU chapter of Campus Baptist Ministries in 2009.

CAPSTONE PROJECT: "The Great Teakon, A 3-D Video Game"
Using off-the-shelf software, Cable created a fully functional, three-dimensional video game.

Jen Hoi Ling Ha '10

MAJOR: Architecture (fifth year), School of Architecture

HOMETOWN: Boston

JUST A FACT: Ha received the Crown program's Wise-Marcus 50-Year Friendship Award, which enabled her to conduct research firsthand in China.

CAPSTONE PROJECT: "Urban Stitch: Reinventing Housing in the Globalized Realm for Chinese Migrant Workers"
Ha wrote a thesis concerning the explosive growth of Shenzhen, a rural fishing village that became a city of eight million in less than 30 years.

Arielle Lever '10

MAJOR: Acting, College of Visual and Performing Arts

HOMETOWN: Baltimore

JUST A FACT: Lever played the title role in Syracuse Stage's 2009 production of *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

CAPSTONE PROJECT: "Teaching Drama in South Africa: The Port St. Johns Theater Project"
Lever taught theater as a means of expression at the Sisonke School (ages 4-12) and the Eluxoweni Boys Home, an orphanage (ages 12-17), in Port St. Johns, a rural community in South Africa's Eastern Cape region.

Elizabeth Goss '10

MAJOR: Illustration, College of Visual and Performing Arts, with a minor in English

HOMETOWN: Rutland, Vermont

JUST A FACT: Goss spent summer 2008 in New York City as an intern at Illustration House, the nation's foremost gallery and auction house devoted to American illustration.

CAPSTONE PROJECT: "A Field Guide to the Irish Fantastic: A Study in Concept Art"
Goss created a series of visual artworks inspired by Irish folklore, and used them to create a book and a gallery exhibition.

CHAD Cable '10

CAPSTONE PROJECT:

"The Great Teakon, A 3-D Video Game"

Using off-the-shelf software, Cable created a fully functional, three-dimensional video game, which he has made available for the public to play at chadcable.net.

Why a video game?

The Capstone Project is supposed to be a culmination of our studies, a practical outcome of everything we've learned. Some students write research papers; I studied computer art and computer science, so I did a project that requires knowing something about both—a video game.

How does it work?

Players take control of Charles Teakon, a rising silent-movie star, as he films his next great blockbuster. The game lets you play through the movie, performing stunts until Charles breaks his leg. The game picks up 30 years later. Charles had to retire after the injury and he's pretty depressed. When some old film buddies stop by to encourage him, Charles decides to remake his unfinished film and restore his name to fame. There are no winners or losers. It's linear. It's about the experience of being the character—role-playing—rather than about finishing first or winning a level or getting high score. It's all from the perspective of the actor. It's immersive. There are no "Game Over" screens

or big bosses to face.

Instead, players participate in Charlie's life and live the silent film era through the game. Players are even affected by Charles's age. At the beginning of the game, Charles is an athletic young man, able to run on walls and sprint far distances. After his 30-year retirement, Charles is much less capable. The player's control over the character changes according to Charles's age.

Where did you get the idea for the narrative?

It grew out of research I did on the silent film era. I had previously seen only a few clips or montages of silent films, and I was pretty astounded by the things they were able to do without computer-generated images or any special effects at all. The latter part of the game, when Charlie becomes depressed and socially isolated, also reflects the research I did. When sound movies started coming in at the end of the 1920s, a lot of silent film actors got displaced and their lives were changed.

What do you hope players will gain from the game?

The most important part of my project is giving people a new kind of video game. Most video games are in color; this one is black and white. Most are set in the future or prehistoric past; this one is set in early 1900s America. The game embraces film history and period architecture to create an engrossing experience. Video games have a reputation for being overly violent, but this game does not give the player any way of inflicting damage on others or on the surrounding environment. Many games feature superheroes or monsters. There are very few games that feature a washed-up, depressed 50-year-old. This one explores character to create an absorbing narrative. It uses the medium to express concepts and engage players on an intellectually critical level, while providing a fun experience. I hope people will judge for themselves; the game is playable online. Give it a try.





Jennifer Hoi Ling Ha '10

CAPSTONE PROJECT: "Urban Stitch: Reinventing Housing in the Globalized Realm for Chinese Migrant Workers"

Ha wrote a thesis concerning the explosive growth of Shenzhen, a rural fishing village that became a city of eight million in less than 30 years.

Why did you choose to study Shenzhen?

China will have 200 "new cities" by 2015. Shenzhen was among the first of these cities. It was chosen for rapid urbanization in 1985, and tremendous foreign investment transformed it into an international port. The original farmers were some of the first people in China allowed to own land. They redeveloped their houses into tall apartment blocks for the migrant workers drawn to Shenzhen by new factory jobs. The buildings are narrow (about 30 feet by 30 feet) and densely packed (maybe four or five feet apart). It really looks like a slum. Researching the relationship of architecture to surrounding social conditions epitomizes my educational interests. Picking Shenzhen for the study was also a personal thing. I'm from Boston, but my parents are from Hong Kong, which is near Shenzhen, and my grandfather lives in Shenzhen.

How did you conduct your study?

I started by researching and understanding migrant housing types in relation to socioeconomic and political trends. After documenting

logistics—building-unit sizes, demographic backgrounds of tenants, etc.—I conducted interviews with inhabitants and with other architects in the area to further understand the situation and needs of the city and its people. I have an interest in responding to social issues—for example, there are many parents and children who move into this city and live in these apartments, but the children are not allowed to attend the city schools because of their migrant status. I found that these people are pretty incredible at coming up with solutions to their cultural needs: school facilities, centers for the elderly, ancestral temples, and so on. The concrete apartment blocks may not have legal light and air or adequate plumbing, but compared to where most of the migrants have come from, this is definitely better. The government is considering tearing these apartment blocks down now because they give Shenzhen a bad city image—and that's the problem I responded to most directly in my thesis. The urban village community needs to be revitalized as part of Shenzhen's unique cultural character.

What did you conclude?

During the past quarter century, globalization and rapid urbanization have prematurely transformed China's domestic architecture, replacing much of it with new market-oriented housing types. Migrant workers live in what I call eight-story urban villages, where they have maintained community networks and kinship ties to an amazing degree. The upper class lives in luxury high-rise towers, which are like vertical gated communities. The two housing types stand side-by-side, but they are segregated, resonating with tension between rich and poor. This is not the image of Chinese society the government wants. There are plans to build a new city image by demolishing the migrant worker apartments. If this is done, the city will further dislocate the migrant workers, inspiring discontent and provoking social and political disorder. China needs a housing policy favoring an integrated social fabric through creation of common residential, retail, and cultural space.





Marc: Crowning Achievements



Arielle Lever '10

CAPSTONE PROJECT: "Teaching Drama in South Africa: The Port St. Johns Theater Project"

Lever taught theater as a means of expression at the Sisonke School (ages 4-12) and the Eluxoweni Boys Home, an orphanage (ages 12-17), in Port St. Johns, a rural community in South Africa's Eastern Cape region.

How did you come up with the idea for your project?

I thought of doing a one-woman show, but I was at a place, artistically, where I wasn't sure if I wanted to do that kind of self-promoting project. I was eligible for funding through the Crown program, and I decided that if I got it, I would do a project involving travel, helping people, and theater outreach. So I started Googling: *volunteer, drama, teaching, developing nation*. This led me to South Africa Volunteers, a grassroots organization in Port St. Johns that helped me organize my project. Prior to leaving home, I learned the Sisonke School was in jeopardy unless it moved to a new location, so I did a month of fund raising and was able to bring a \$3,500 contribution.

How does the project relate to your academic work?

I built a curriculum by drawing on research I had done on Augusto Boal, an Austrian who went to a small Brazilian community in the 1970s and founded the Theater of the Oppressed to give a voice to the residents through theater. I wanted to put Boal's theory into practice by empowering the children with the tools necessary to create theater, using their voices, bodies, imaginations, and the raw materials surrounding them.

How did you conduct classes?

The bulk of the acting work I did with students involved physical theater and performing with masks, which helped minimize language barriers. I brought about 30 masks, donated by their makers, which I gave to the school. The project evolved in its own ways. Students were so taken by the acting exercises that they demanded more, so I added workshops

out of class. I developed a group, The Lunchtime Crew. They dedicated themselves to creating interactive educational skits—*theater pieces for kids, by kids, raising real issues and encouraging problem solving.* The crew's most popular piece was "The Monkey Skit," about the hazards of eating monkey meat. I also taught English, grades 2-3. Behavioral problems, including classroom fights, made that very difficult. Instead of getting frustrated, I used theater as a form of conflict mediation, developing exercises that forced the class to focus on the thoughts and feelings behind aggression. The disciplinary situation improved a lot before I left.

How would you sum up the experience?

I arrived in Port St. Johns with a curriculum, a bag full of masks, and an eagerness to learn. I left a changed person, with a newfound perspective on life, teaching, and theater.



Elizabeth Goss '10

CAPSTONE PROJECT: "A Field Guide to the Irish Fantastic: A Study in Concept Art"

Goss created a series of visual artworks inspired by Irish folklore, and used them to create a book and a gallery exhibition.

What led you to design the project?

A capstone should express something you've learned about something you love. As an illustrator, I wanted to do a creative project, and as a writer, I wanted to produce some kind of book. I've always had a strong interest in folklore and fairy tales. Ireland has an incredibly rich lore—it has always been a favorite—but I didn't think of focusing completely on Ireland until a conversation I had with my advisor. He said, "That's a lovely project, but haven't you always wanted to go to Norway or something?" I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Don't you think the project would be stronger with an element of 'abroad' in it?" So I came back with the Irish proposal, applied for a Crown scholarship, got it, and went to Ireland for two weeks. The opportunity was a pretty fabulous thing. The trip turned out to be very important. In addition to being in Ireland

for the first time, I was able to take my own reference photos, which is always very important to illustrators. If you use online sources, you get in all kinds of trouble with photographers. It's always best to have your own images. It was an essential piece of the project. I used the photos to create a collection of concept sketches, color studies, finished art pieces, and brief stories inspired by Irish folklore. I combined these elements into two products: an illustrated field guide and an art show in the Honors Suite.

What do you mean by "concept art?"

Concept art refers to all of the preliminary artwork that goes into designing entertainment media, like movies, video games, comic books, etc. So if I was working for a movie studio, an animation director might come in and say, "I need a character. He's sort of weak. He's kind of cowardly, but he's very big. He looks really tough, but he runs away from everything." I should be able to

come up with a character that not only fits those needs, but also looks like he belongs with the other characters. In Irish lore, there are different types of fairies. There are the trooping fairies who usually take credit for almost anything that goes wrong in a traditional Irish home—whether a child dying or milk spoiling. Then there are specific stories that revolve around specific fairies, such as leprechauns and banshees. They're different, but they come out of the same place.

What did you gain as an artist in doing the project?

It was a wonderful opportunity to explore a possible profession. I hadn't done much concept work. I hadn't done much work digitally. It was really great for me to experiment with those things in a very structured project. I hope that in some small way my work helps to spread interest and knowledge about the fairy tales of Ireland.

