WELL-BEING
Balancing Strengths and Perspectives

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:
- 20 YEARS OF NEW MEDIA
- "CENTERED" IN WELL-BEING
- MASON’S FIRST COUPLE
- CELEBRATED POETS BERROA AND HABILA
The College of Humanities and Social Sciences at George Mason University is committed to providing a challenging education to undergraduate and graduate students, expanding the frontiers of knowledge through research, and contributing intellectual leadership to the community. The college values the rich scholarly traditions of the past while embracing evolving disciplinary and interdisciplinary innovations. It believes that a liberal arts education is the best preparation for a lifetime of careers. Visit chss.gmu.edu to learn more.

CORNERSTONE

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George Mason University is an equal opportunity employer that encourages diversity.
Dear Alumni,

At the end of December 2013, George Mason University’s Board of Visitors approved a 10-year Strategic Plan for the university, setting forth 12 university-wide goals and laying out the steps to achieve those goals. These goals include aspirations for Mason’s students, for the surrounding community, for our faculty and staff “family,” and for the world at large. One in particular has taken root at Mason with vitality and great enthusiasm: the charge that Mason become a model well-being university that allows each of its members to thrive.

The university’s commitment to well-being is indisputable. Mason is home to the Center for the Advancement of Well-Being, housed within the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. The center’s goal is to help students, faculty, and staff build a life of vitality, purpose, resilience, and engagement. The senior scholars and research fellows in the center are devoted to developing knowledge about what practices contribute to well-being for individuals, communities, and society at large and disseminating what they, and others, have learned. You will read in these pages about some of the center’s programs and activities that are designed to sow the seeds of positive well-being throughout the Mason community. The college is proud to be the home of this vibrant center.

Although the center is at the core of the well-being initiative envisioned in the university’s Strategic Plan, many of the college’s disciplines lend themselves to the study and practice of well-being. We are honored to introduce a few of them in these pages.

You will meet Daniel Temple, a faculty member in Mason’s Department of Sociology and Anthropology, whose research on teeth, in both modern-day and ancient societies, sheds light on the often long-term effects of poor nutrition. And you will learn about how that same department took part in a sociological review of a program designed to alleviate nutritional disparities in the District of Columbia.

You will learn about the diverse ways in which faculty and students in New Century College are contributing to the well-being of their students and the world around them.

You will meet two Mason students, Elizabeth Charity and Alan Williams, both of whom have already put their initiative and energy to work to improve the well-being of people here in our neighborhoods and around the world.

And you will get to know two Mason alumni, Helen and Thomas Foster, whose experiences at Mason enriched their lives in unexpected ways.

The college is glad to play a part in the well-being that Mason seeks to cultivate within our community of students, alumni, faculty, and staff. We thank you for being part of our college, and hope that you enjoy reading more about our college’s well-being. As always, I am very grateful to you for your support of Mason in general and the college in particular—with your partnership we are able to make a tremendous impact on the well-being of so many. I hope that you will continue to invest in our shared future so that together we can continue to make Mason the greatest university for the world.

Yours in Patriot Pride,

Deborah A. Boehm-Davis

New Program in Human Development and Family Science ............... 2
Accelerated Master’s Programs .......... 3
The Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media at 20 .......... 4
Student Profiles .................. 8
Well-Being “Centered” at Mason ....... 10
Well-Being in New Century College ....... 12
Alumni Profile: Mason’s First Couple .... 16
Faculty Profile: Rei Berroa ............ 18
Faculty Research: Daniel Temple ....... 22
Farmer’s Market on Wheels .......... 25
Honor Roll ..................... 28
Poetry of Helon Habila ................ 32

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New BA and Minor Draw from Expertise of College of Education and Human Development

By Robert Matz, Senior Associate Dean, College of Humanities and Social Sciences

When we think about well-being, we often reflect on how we as individuals strive to improve our physical and emotional health—perhaps by exercising more or eating better. A new major and minor, created jointly by the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS) and the College of Education and Human Development (CEHD), seeks to enrich the idea of well-being by studying family systems and the ways in which individuals connect with and relate to each other in their family and larger community contexts. Professor Bethany Letiecq, faculty member in CEHD and coordinator of the new Human Development and Family Science Program, says the program is built on the premise that “individual well-being must be understood in the context of one’s family, culture, and socioeconomic environments.” Thus, the Human Development and Family Science major and minor rely upon an interdisciplinary approach and bring together academic disciplines in both colleges to provide students with the range of expertise needed to support not only individual well-being, but family well-being.

Professor Adam Winsler, a faculty member in CHSS’s Psychology Department and one of the creators of the new program, says the program is built on the premise that “individual well-being must be understood in the context of one’s family, culture, and socioeconomic environments.” Thus, the Human Development and Family Science major and minor rely upon an interdisciplinary approach and bring together academic disciplines in both colleges to provide students with the range of expertise needed to support not only individual well-being, but family well-being.

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“WinSLER thinks some of the most pressing challenges students in HDFS will learn to address come at the end of the life cycle; with regard to the end of our lives, we are “learning so much about late life human development” and how families evolve and adapt as people live longer than ever before.

“Learning how to tackle emergent family challenges across the lifespan and develop culturally- and family-centered strategies to promote well-being are essential skills for these graduates, and will give them a competitive advantage in a labor market noted for growth in the family services fields. As Winsler notes, the human-services sectors are “experiencing huge needs for skilled individuals” able to work in family and community settings and consider the family impacts of programs and policies. Reflecting the changes in families and the demand for both child and aging services, the major offers two tracks, one in Early Childhood Development and Services, and another in Adult Development and Aging.

“Whichever of these tracks students choose, they will learn not only through the interdisciplinary focus of the program—departments involved include Psychology, Sociology, New Century College, Communication, and the Women and Gender Studies program in the college, and Early Childhood Education, Education, Counseling and Development, and Health in CEHD—but also through a required 6-credit internship in which they integrate their research and classroom experience with fieldwork. The program is currently working to build partnerships with organizations that serve families across the lifespan, including Mason’s own Child Development Center—which cares for children from 2 to 5 years old—to give students the opportunity to complete their internships. Other George Mason or Mason-community affiliations are also being considered, including one with a Sunrise Assisted Living Center located just across the street from Mason’s Fairfax Campus, and with Inova Fairfax Hospital, where students can work with child life specialists in a hospital setting.

“In addition to the bachelor’s degree in Human Development and Family Science, students can choose to earn a 15-credit minor to complement their major area of study.
"An investment in knowledge pays the best interest." This observation from Benjamin Franklin’s 1758 *The Way to Wealth* holds true today.

In February 2015, From Hard Times to Better Times, a report of the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, demonstrated the soundness of Franklin’s counsel, at least with regard to graduate degrees. The report found that holders of graduate degrees not only enjoy a wage premium over holders of bachelor’s degrees, but their rate of unemployment, even through the recent Great Recession, has been consistently low. This finding holds across all fields of study, regardless of the disparity between the earnings potential for different degrees.¹

The College of Humanities and Social Sciences is making it easier to reach this academic achievement by offering a wide variety of accelerated master’s degree programs. These degrees allow students to earn both a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree by completing between 144 and 150 credits, depending on the program, which may be accomplished within five years. Students in the program complete 12 hours of graduate-level course work during their undergraduate years.

The programs’ requirements vary by major and generally have stringent grade requirements (a minimum GPA of 3.00 or 3.50, depending on the program). “For students who already know they want to go to graduate school, it’s a really good thing because they can plan accordingly,” says Jamie Cooper, the college’s associate dean for academic affairs. “By their senior year, they’re already doing graduate course work.”

While the accelerated master’s programs are not an early entry into the graduate program, Cooper notes that there are two clear benefits to the program. “One is financial,” Cooper says. “Students can complete up to 12 hours of graduate course work while they are still an undergraduate, and it’s at the undergraduate tuition rate. So if it’s a 30-hour program, 12 credits—40 percent of the degree—are at the undergraduate rate.”

Moreover, the accelerated pathway allows students to overlap the BA and MA programs with some classes. “When you work on an undergraduate and a graduate degree with the accelerated pathway, 6 credits apply to both degrees, and another 6 will be held in reserve, so they will apply to the master’s degree only,” says Cooper.

The program “appeals to higher achieving students because they get to be in courses with graduate students, so they are challenged and do research. We promote it to freshmen, and they’re usually very interested in it.”

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This year, the Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media (RRCHNM) celebrated 20 years of focusing on the past in a radically new way. Through digital technology, the center has worked to bring the public into the experience of history, allowing people to not only learn, research, and organize the stories of the past, but to contribute their own voices to how those stories will be told into the future.

The key, explains center director Stephen Robertson, is that from the start, the emphasis has always been on public history. “The center came from Roy’s recognition that the Internet provided a way to get history into more people’s hands, giving more people the opportunity to make their own history,” he says.

“Roy” is Roy Rosenzweig, the first director of RRCHNM (the center was named for him in 2011). When he founded it in 1994, the concepts of “online” and “the Internet” were brand new, and the academic world, like the world at large, was busily loading information onto the new online infrastructure and looking for audiences to receive it.

“The first generation was really about the web and the ability to put things on the web, make them accessible to people on the web,” says Robertson. But beyond this, the center recognized the potential to not only make material available, but to enhance the experience of the users of that information.

“If you didn’t live in Washington, D.C.,” he explains, “you couldn’t go and visit the Library of Congress, and even if you did live in Washington, D.C., you couldn’t practically go down and do it. Suddenly the Library of Congress digitizes its collections, so anywhere you are in the world, you have access to tens of thousands of, say, 1930s photographs. So that was the first digital history, and building on that is what we did.”

A natural outgrowth of the new information resource was to bring it to educators at the K–12 level, and this is precisely where the center was able to focus for many years. With sites such as TeachingHistory.org and History Matters, the center continues to bring history alive for students and teachers alike.

History Matters (historymatters.gmu.edu) was the first teaching project that the center undertook. It serves
as a gateway to primary materials online—such as oral history and maps—as well as a guide to more than 850 U.S. history websites and information on using online primary resources. It still receives more than a million visitors each year, and is an excellent first stop for exploring American history online.

The teachinghistory.org site, the National History Education Clearinghouse, is a central online source of tools that support vibrant K–12 history education. Providing history content, teaching materials, and best practices, it equips teachers to provide the best history education possible. The site was funded by the U.S. Department of Education as part of its Teaching American History grant program and was launched in 2007; it has consistently reached more than 2 million visitors each year.

According to Robertson, education projects like these defined the center for that first decade. The center’s interest in getting material out into the hands of K–12 teachers, plus the support from the government for such projects, made this work a good fit. The funding for these projects, however, was predominantly from National Endowment for the Humanities Division of Education Programs’ Teaching and Learning Resources and Curriculum Development grants, and the U.S. Department of Education’s Teaching American History Program. These programs no longer exist. Thus, despite its expertise and the success it has had in translating digital history into educational tools, the center has been faced with the challenge of finding new sources of support for its projects.

**BROADENING THE EDUCATIONAL FOCUS**

With funding cuts to its primary sources of support, RRCHNM is finding new avenues to use its own resources and the skills of its team. One promising strategy is to bring digital history to a new set of educators.

In the spring semester of 2015, the center launched, in collaboration with the Smithsonian Associates, a fully online program for a graduate certificate in digital public humanities. The program comprises 15 credits. Nine of these are earned through three classes:

- **HIST 680**: Introduction to Digital Humanities
- **HIST 694**: Digital Public History
- **HIST 689**: Teaching and Learning History in the Digital Age

The classes are available asynchronously; class materials are online for students to access at the time and location most convenient to them. At the conclusion of the coursework, each student completes the required credits by participating in a 6-credit internship in applied history. The internship is a virtual one, designed to allow students to gain experience in applying their newly attained tools and skills to digital projects with the Smithsonian Institution.

Robertson explains that the online medium is a perfect one for the subject matter. “Digital history is really taught in a hands-on, project-focused way,” he says. “It’s a chance to build something, a course that reflects what we know about teaching online and what we know about the technology, and then try to exploit the possibilities of teaching digital stuff online. You’re studying things that are already online, you’re doing digital work . . . so it’s closer to what we do. There should be some ways to take advantage of that, that don’t necessarily apply to some other kinds of content.”

The center is also bringing history (and digital history) to graduate students and to teachers through a new course, Teaching Hidden History, which will debut in summer 2015.

The course is funded by the 4-VA program, an initiative of George Mason University, James Madison University, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), and the University of Virginia (since late 2014, Old Dominion University has joined the original four). The goal of 4-VA is to use online learning to foster inter-university collaborations for educational opportunities to students throughout the commonwealth.

Teaching Hidden History is a hybrid course that combines online content with face-to-face interaction. The face-to-face component will use the special 4-VA telepresence rooms on the Mason and Virginia Tech campuses. These facilities have been used successfully for science, math, and technology initiatives; this course will serve as a model for expanding online education for humanities fields.

Kelly Schrum, faculty member in Mason’s higher education program and director of educational projects at RRCHNM, is developing the project along with doctoral students Nate Sleeter and Celeste Tương Vy Sharpe. “This is a medium that is particularly well suited to the subject matter of the class,” says Schrum. “The heart of the course is the notion that even one object can unpack a larger story. We will provide an opportunity for history and education students to strengthen their research and historical thinking skills while utilizing digital tools and exploring and creating history in an online environment.”

Students will interact through telepresence and blogs, and be able to take advantage of the asynchronous portions of the course to complete assignments at times and places convenient to them. “It is a great balance of community and flexibility,” adds Schrum.

The course is intended for graduate students and for teachers seeking recertification. “We’re really drawing a lot on the experience of Kelly and the education division who have been teaching online professional development courses for teachers for a number of years, experimenting
with what works and what doesn’t work in those kinds of environments,” says Robertson.

The center is also working longer term to incorporate digital learning into the basic curriculum of history education. For the second year in a row, it has received a grant from the Getty Foundation to organize and present a summer institute in digital art history.

“Art history has gotten quite excited about the digital in the past few years, and Getty is trying to expand that by funding a whole series,” says Robertson.

Last summer, the center used a Getty Foundation grant to conduct an institute for art history faculty, librarians, and museum professionals. Using digital humanities methods and tools, the Rebuilding the Portfolio program encouraged participants to consider digital techniques to help them analyze sources and teach in new ways, as well as to find new audiences for their work. This year, the center has received a Getty Foundation grant to design and conduct a summer institute geared to art history graduate students, to teach digital tools and methods that they can take with them throughout their careers.

Robertson says that the earlier digital methods become part of a scholar’s life, the better. “Oddly,” he says, “we often get as much resistance from our students as we do from other faculty to taking on these new kinds of things. A lot of our students arrive at university already set in the way that they do things from high school. So part of the imperative to get this stuff into high schools would be to get it where they form a sense of what they’re comfortable with.”

HONING TOOLS FOR TELLING STORIES
Boosting comfort with digital tools—among the academic community as well as among the public—is one of the most important ways that the center will keep growing in the future.

The center stepped into the field of software development with the introduction of Zotero in 2006, an open source (i.e., free) research tool that a user downloads and adds to a web browser. As the user conducts research online, Zotero recognizes and catalogues the source of the content being examined. These references can then be organized, shared, and analyzed.

This tool was a new direction for the center. “It’s one thing to build websites,” says Robertson. “It’s another thing entirely to build software. So that was a fundamental transformation in what the center was doing. It brought money from [the Andrew M.] Mellon [Foundation], amongst other people, so it got the center on the radar. This was an enormous success, he says, which “spawned all sorts of developments and efforts to use Zotero to do different kinds of things and different sorts of projects.”

Zotero has been widely adopted by historians and non-historians alike, and it paved the way for another significant software project: Omeka.

Omeka is a web publishing platform that allows individuals and institutions to manage content and create interactive online exhibits, which can be easily customized with plug-ins and themes to improve the work experience as well as the finished product.

Robertson enthusiastically embraces the center’s branching into software as a natural extension of its original work. “We built Omeka originally because we were building exhibits for people, and every time we’d build an exhibit we’d build another software package from scratch, and it became rapidly clear that that made no sense.”

They decided to build a platform, initially for their own use, that they could then make available to everyone else. “It’s an entry-level tool. It allows [users] to build collections of material online and build exhibits about them,” he explains. “One of the interesting things about Omeka is that it was designed for libraries and archives and museums, but it is increasingly being used like I do, in classrooms. In fact, an online exhibit presents a really interesting alternative to essay writing—you can have the students do a lot of the same research, and technical analysis, and writing, but also explore what those things look like in a digital setting, and end up with something that’s outward facing. It’s not just something that’s handed in to a teacher and filed away in a drawer forever. This project really goes out there in the world and has a second kind of life.”

He also sees software as a source of potential funding into the future. “It’s not a single grant, it’s a grant that begets other grants and other spin-offs,” he says, adding that it’s “one idea that births all sorts of new possibilities, so you don’t get just this kind of blip, and you’re thinking of timelines. It’s this thing that’s going to run in various forms across various grants for 10 years. And that’s why the center is still around, because it didn’t just have a couple of good ideas and finish them. It actually had these ideas that opened up all sorts of new possibilities, and that’s what Omeka is doing now.”

CONTINUING TO MOVE FORWARD
The changes in the center’s activities, while undertaken in part by the availability of funding sources, reflect the ways in which the online landscape has shifted since the center’s founding in 1994. But its original mission remains unchanged. “A lot of this is about being responsive to a changing environment and a change in the tools that are out there as well,” says Robertson. “The second generation of digital humanities has been increasingly about building tools to analyze all this material that’s now online.
“You don’t do digital for the sake of doing digital,” he continues. “You do digital because it offers you the ability to do something you wouldn’t be able to do without it... what kind of questions do you want to ask, and what kind of ways do you want to answer them, and what can you do that gives you a different sort of perspective on that?”

In the end, he concludes, “It’s still part of that public history, working to put information into people’s hands and reaching for a wider audience. And it’s that cross-section that’s really the calling card that I kind of drop on people. Other universities have much more narrowly defined audiences than we do, and always have. Roy was always interested in working with teachers, always interested in working with museums, and archives, and libraries, and he was always interested in working with scholars. So we do all three, and we have a kind of unrivaled expertise in dealing with an audience that others don’t.”

While the focus on teaching and the move to software offerings form the spine of the center, a number of highly successful stand-alone projects have helped define the center’s history.

**SEPTEMBER 11 DIGITAL ARCHIVE** *(911digitalarchive.org)*: At the time of the September 11, 2001 attacks in New York, Virginia, and Pennsylvania, there had been no other effort to collect electronically created artifacts. The archive contains more than 150,000 first-hand accounts, emails, and electronic communications, along with digital photographs and artwork. Originally funded by a major grant from the Alfred P. Sloane Foundation, the archive was a collaboration between the center and the American Social History Project/Center for Media and Learning at the City University of New York Graduate Center. In 2003, the Library of Congress formally accepted the archive as part of its holdings; it was the library’s first major digital acquisition. In 2011, a Saving America’s Treasures Grant from the National Park Service and the National Endowment for the Humanities allowed the center to migrate the archive to Omeka software, a more stable platform.

**HISTORIES OF THE NATIONAL MALL** *(mallhistory.org)*: On this mobile-friendly site, users’ electronic devices can overlay a visit to the National Mall with the perspective of its history. It is the definition of Robertson’s concept of public history: “working to put information into people’s hands and reaching for a wider audience.” The site, developed by the center with the support of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities, was recently awarded the 2015 Outstanding Public History Award from the National Council on Public History, for contributing to a broader public refection and apprecia- 
tion of the past.

**SEA OF LIBERTY** *(seaofliberty.org)*: This interactive online tool allows users to explore and share the power of Thomas Jefferson’s ideas on liberty, freedom, and self-governance. Created with the generous support of the Coca-Cola Foundation, the sponsor of Monticello’s Liberty Today initiative, the site expands upon a Monticello exhibit dedicated to the ongo- 
ing influence of the third president’s notions about liberty, particularly those that shaped the Declaration of Independence.
Liz Charity fills a room. With bounteous energy and enthusiasm, she is a positive force whose passion for life is infectious.

This enthusiasm illuminates her face as she tells the story of Youth Outreach Services, an organization that helps prepare young offenders to reenter society in a positive way. The service has grown from a project she started 20 years ago in her hometown of Richmond, Virginia.

“It gives them an alternative, so that when they come out, they can go back to school or get a job,” says Charity. “It gives them a direction.

“I found that these young people were very, very intelligent and had a lot of energy, but they were putting that energy in the wrong direction. So I decided to redirect that energy into something positive and something that they liked.”

The Youth Outreach Services program is a 12-week course. The first weeks focus on self-assessment. Charity explains that the students are asked to take a hard look at themselves and ask “why you got in trouble in the first place, what is hindering you, what can you do to become part of the solution instead of part of the problem, what are some of your goals, and can we turn some of those goals—some of those hobbies—into a way for you to make money?”

The remaining weeks turn to employability and personal accountability. Students gain the basic tools for finding a job. They take an assessment to direct them to jobs that match their interests, learn how to fill out employment applications, write résumés, and take part in mock interviews. They learn how to manage their personal finances, including checking accounts, savings accounts, and investments, and they gain a positive introduction to the legal system through meetings with law enforcement officers, judges, and attorneys.

Charity’s efforts in Richmond proved successful, with many of the students in the program leaving the detention center to get jobs or go back to school. Many of them continued to college.

In the early 2000s, Charity moved to Northern Virginia and worked to start a similar program. Her oldest son, Antoine, BS Health, Fitness, and Recreational Resources ’01, had recently graduated from Mason and inspired Charity to earn a bachelor’s degree.

“At the time, I was going to Strayer University for an associate degree in business administration,” she says. “That was good, but I wanted to do more for the youth in the detention center. Everyone I met with wasn’t getting it. I needed someone who believed the way I did. That’s when I decided to come to George Mason.”

Charity met with Mark Sistek, academic advisor and advising director for the Bachelor of Individualized Study Program, and showed him her portfolio on Youth Outreach Services. Sistek suggested that she use her experience to work toward a bachelor of individualized study degree with a concentration in social entrepreneurship. He explained that her project was a perfect match for the spirit of innovation at Mason. She knew she would fit right in.

Since coming to Mason, Charity has enlisted students from the Psychology, Sociology and Anthropology, and Criminology, Law and Society Departments to serve as mentors and role models for the Youth Outreach Services students.

Her advisor, Paul Rogers, associate professor and associate chair in the Department of English, is impressed with what she has accomplished as a member of the Mason community.

“From the beginning I have enjoyed working with Liz and have been deeply impressed by the way she has integrated her academics with her powerful vision for impacting youth,” he says. “She has been relentless in bringing this idea to life and building win-win partnerships along the way.”

Set to graduate in May with a BIS, Charity views this event as only a step along her path. She continues to build a partnership between the Juvenile Detention Center in Fairfax, Mason, and the Chamber of Commerce, with the goal of building a positive future for youth offenders.

“I want the college students, the ex-juvenile offenders, and the businesses to be the ones who help put this all together,” she says. “We’re bringing people from all walks of life, all through the community. That’s what I want.”
Alan Williams came to George Mason University and ended up studying abroad in Sana’a, Yemen. He’ll graduate this year with a major award from the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, among his other accomplishments.

Williams came to George Mason from New Haven, Connecticut, intent on studying global affairs. In fact, it was the university’s Global Affairs Program that appealed to him. “I looked for programs like it when I was doing my college search,” he says. “I figured that I would want to be in the D.C. area if I wanted to go into international affairs.”

Having made the decision at his summer orientation session to study Arabic, Williams concentrated on Middle East studies within his global affairs minor. He soon found that he was able to enrich his studies outside the classroom too.

“When I was able to show that I was serious about my studies and my career, opportunities presented themselves,” Williams says. He represented the Global Affairs Program at Mason’s Fall Premier and Spring Preview Open House events for prospective students and took advantage of the global politics fellows program his junior year, where he was able to intern with Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) from Connecticut’s third congressional district, representing New Haven.

Kristin Leonato, program coordinator of the global politics fellows, was impressed with Williams’s drive. “From application to the award ceremony, Alan distinguished himself as the best of the best,” Leonato says. “He not only performs very well in the program courses, his participation in the program actually enhances the experience for his fellow cohort students.”

Williams’s participation in the semester-long fellows program led him to an internship the following semester with Senator Chris Murphy, also from Connecticut, and to his current position as director of congressional affairs for the Shia Rights Watch, a Washington, D.C.-based research and advocacy organization whose mission is to protect the rights of Shia Muslims around the world.

The one drawback to his participation in the fellows program, Williams says, was that he was unable to continue the Arabic language classes he had been taking since his first days at Mason. To get back on track, he pursued summer study in a country in the Middle East. Finding some of the programs offered by the university to be cost prohibitive, Williams researched and embarked on his own study-abroad program at the Yemen College of Middle Eastern Studies in Sana’a, Yemen’s capital.

Williams’s program in Arabic and political science was small, with a class of about 10 students, of whom only four or five were American. He is enthusiastic about the experience of learning Arabic in a Middle Eastern country: “You could study it, learn about it, then walk outside your door and be in the middle of it.”

Yemen was in the news during late summer and fall 2014 largely because of the actions of the Houthi militia, a group that challenged and eventually displaced Yemen’s government. Williams lived in the part of Sana’a where many of the Houthi also resided, on a street that featured signs that read “Death to America.” He insists, though, that he did not feel that he was in danger. “I would say ‘hi’ to them, and they just wouldn’t say anything back,” he says, “or they’d say, ‘Death to America.’ But I really didn’t feel threatened.” Because of the shifting political situation, soon after he finished his course work and moved on to Egypt and Tunisia, all of the American students were pulled from the program.

Williams graduates from Mason in May, with honors in the Global Affairs Program and as a recipient of the college’s Dean’s Challenge Award. He hopes to pursue international relations, possibly moving into a graduate program. He leaves with a fond appreciation for the support he has received at Mason.

“It’s been a great experience to come into an environment where there is the freedom to challenge myself,” Williams says. “I’ve had peers and professors willing to help in any way: books, advice, writing résumés. Here at Mason you can challenge yourself and discover the possibilities to grow as a student.”
The Center for the Advancement of Well-Being

Truly at the “Center” of the University’s Well-Being Energy

By Penny Gilchrist, MFA Creative Writing ’08, Director of Communications, Center for the Advancement of Well-Being, and Communication Officer, University Life

When George Mason University President Ángel Cabrera included a well-being university goal in his 2014–24 Strategic Plan, he asked Nance Lucas, executive director of George Mason’s Center for the Advancement of Well-Being, to lead the charge in helping the university achieve that goal. Lucas, a New Century College professor and former associate dean whose areas of expertise include positive psychology, leadership, and ethics, readily accepted the challenge on behalf of the center, which is housed in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences. The resulting Well-Being University Initiative is a collaborative, university-wide effort to help Mason’s students, faculty, and staff thrive together.

“The well-being initiatives we have begun in earnest this academic year are to make sure our students, faculty, and staff are prepared to lead not only satisfying careers, but also satisfying lives,” Cabrera says. “We strive to be the model of a well-being university, a model that other universities can emulate. Our Center for the Advancement of Well-Being is at the forefront of these efforts.”

The center was created in 2009 through a gift from the de Laski Family Foundation. In addition to its work spearheading the Well-Being University Initiative, the center’s programming includes supporting academic courses and a minor in consciousness and transformation, research activities, well-being and leadership coaching, certification programs, a Mindful Living and Learning Community residence hall program for students, an annual Leading to Well-Being Conference sponsored by MasonLeads, and Spring into Well-Being, an awareness campaign highlighting the many programs at the university that promote well-being.

MASON STRENGTHS ACADEMY

In fall 2014, Mason became the first university to offer students, faculty, and staff Gallup’s StrengthsFinder assessment free of charge. Those who participated learned their top five strengths and received suggestions on ways to apply those strengths to their daily lives.

The Strengths Academy project, facilitated by the center, includes customized workshops to help those who have taken the assessment to harness their unique strengths for maximum personal and workplace well-being. Currently, more than 15 students, faculty, and staff have completed Gallup’s Strengths Certification program, equipping them to lead workshops and additional strengths coaching activities.

Lucas is especially excited about Strengths Academy’s potential to positively affect students. “Exposing students to what they do best and providing opportunities to apply their strengths in making choices about academic majors and careers gives them greater agency and self-confidence,” she says. “Too often, they receive messages about how to fix their weaknesses. Our strengths approach shines a light on what’s right about people and organizations, providing strategies for managing non-strengths.”
The Center’s **Top 10 Tips** for Well-Being

The following ideas for increasing your well-being are offered by the team at the Center for the Advancement of Well-Being.

1. **Take at least five minutes daily for some kind of contemplative practice**—a mindfulness session, a period of reflection, listening to music, or whatever helps you connect to your deepest values and cultivate peace of mind. A benefit of practicing mindfulness (moment-to-moment awareness of your environment, body, and mind) is an opening to compassionate behaviors.

2. **Remove the negative label from negative emotions.** Emotions are tools. Anxiety and anger are tools. Learn to appreciate everything in your emotional toolbox. Learn how to use these tools more effectively by understanding what works best in particular situations.

3. **Resist the urge to multitask or check your phone or email when you are working or conversing.** Being more mindful by focusing your attention will boost your effectiveness and improve your relationships.

4. **Create a “Victory Log.”** Write a list of your past successes and pull it out when you have a bad day and need a reminder that you can do it!

5. **Have self-compassion.** Don’t beat yourself up when you mess up. Everyone makes mistakes. Being kind to yourself increases the likelihood that you will achieve your goals. Practicing self-compassion leads to making better choices about your health, too.

6. **Engage in random acts of kindness,** especially those that strengthen social ties with others, and you’ll reap the benefits of increased well-being. And by varying your good deeds (volunteering, holding the door for someone, complimenting someone, hosting a surprise party for a friend), you’ll experience even greater increases in your mood and well-being.

7. **Keep the faith!** Having a sense of hope leads to more productivity in your day and greater resilience in facing challenges. Shine the light on what gives you greater meaning and purpose, and invest heavily in those areas. Even better, surround yourself with the most hopeful people in your life for a boost to your well-being. Hopeful people experience gains in health.

8. **Harness friendships.** Build in time for friends and meaningful relationships (mentors, family members). Find ways to connect with others who are supportive, encouraging, and caring.

9. **Practice gratitude but don’t overdo it.** Trying to identify dozens of things for which you’re most grateful on a daily basis can have detrimental effects to your well-being. Instead, think of one or two things for which you’re grateful each day (or even on a weekly basis).

10. **Seek out experiences that will make you happy,** but resist the pursuit of happiness as an end goal. Even better, inject more novelty and curiosity into those experiences—change up your routines and don’t fear the unknown. Striving for greater happiness as a goal can actually backfire on you. There is no magic formula for happiness.
New Century College (NCC) defines well-being as the “lifelong experience of satisfaction, happiness, and purpose,” and views this as a core competency for all NCC students. NCC seeks to achieve the goals set by its motto, “Connecting the Classroom to the World,” by offering course work, field studies, internships, and volunteer opportunities that encourage its students to find connections between their personal well-being and that of their community.

NCC’s associate dean for academic affairs, Kelly Dunne, explains, “NCC’s Integrative Studies program encompasses the whole student—not just what he or she learns in class, but what happens out of class, at a job, at a volunteer opportunity, or at an internship.

“At NCC, we see personal well-being as one component. While students look inside themselves to care for their own well-being, there should be an expectation that they will be just as concerned with the well-being of others, our community, and our environment. Ultimately, this complements the portrait of the ideal Mason graduate: an engaged citizen prepared to act.”

This action occurs through many avenues at NCC. Through classes on environmental sustainability, legal studies, early childhood development, social justice, and human rights, NCC students assess and look for opportunities to promote well-being in a wide variety of arenas.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONNECTION
Professor Andrew Wingfield teaches courses in environmental sustainability and directs the Sustainability Living and Learning Community (LLC) on campus. As part of NCLC 210 Sustainable World, he requires all students to perform 25 hours of service learning, where they work directly to improve the environment on or off campus. This hands-on work tackles environmental problems and helps students connect with their surroundings.

Wingfield says that this effort also helps students understand the difference they can make. “My class is

Well-Being at the Heart of New Century College’s Learning Experience

By Carrie Drummond, Director of Communication and Outreach, New Century College
full of bad news,” he says. There’s a lot of negativity in the content, and it’s easy for students to feel paralyzed. If they are energized and feel empowered to engage and do something... they feel like they are making a tangible difference. The service learning is a high-impact teaching and learning experience.”

Students can often feel overwhelmed and stressed by school and work. “Given this,” Wingfield explains, “it’s important that the well-being you want to see in the world outside has to be mirrored inside you. If students want to work for a sustainable world, they need to work toward personal sustainability.”

COMMUNITY CONNECTION
Patty Mathison, NCC’s associate director for Social Action and Integrative Learning, directs programs that connect Mason students with service-learning opportunities on and off campus. These opportunities range from single-day volunteer activities to semester-long internships to alternative break trips hosted domestically and internationally. With each program planned, Mathison and her team work with Mason students to connect each program or volunteer experience with participants’ lives.

“Our students have these powerful experiences, but it’s not so much about the experience as it is to relate it to your everyday life,” says Mathison. “Through all these programs, we try to give students the opportunity to personally interact... and humanize a social issue.”

In his social justice and human rights courses, Professor Al Fuertes approaches well-being from two angles. First, he asks his students to create their own classroom guidelines for participation and engagement. Second, he and his students consider the concept of well-being as it applies to those who have survived traumatic experiences.

“I approach well-being in two ways: through the course content and the classroom atmosphere,” Fuertes says. “I emphasize that these [people we discuss and meet] are real people, and we need to consider where we go from here. What are the best practices in reaching out to survivors of trauma and violence?”

Fuertes creates different learning opportunities for students to witness and experience the challenges others face. “I want to give students the opportunity to get in the shoes of a person who has suffered,” he says.

To do this, Fuertes offers students windows into the lives of the vulnerable. For one class, he may invite survivors of human trafficking to tell their stories. In another, his students take part in a “displacement day” during which they must build their own shelter out of found materials. Fuertes also asks his students to perform 15 hours of service, working firsthand with those who are vulnerable. His students volunteer at nursing homes, day laborer facilities, early childhood education programs, homeless shelters, and organizations that provide services for those in need.

Students participate in Alternative Break Program in Treasure Beach, Jamaica.
“The courses I teach,” Fuertes explains, “encourage students to ask, ‘How can we be proactive? Where can victims go after experiencing trauma and stress?’ That’s where well-being comes in and students must find ways to improve circumstances for others. Specifically, we look at protection, reintegration, and rehabilitation.”

Fuertes and Mathison encourage students to reflect on their experiences and draw parallels from within their own lives. Using the social change model that connects the individual with the community, Mathison helps students link personal well-being with that of the community. Personal well-being empowers an individual to support community well-being. The well-being of a community, in turn, improves well-being for all its members.

IMPACT ON THE INDIVIDUAL

The roots of well-being run deep in each individual and can have lifelong, lasting effects. Professor Pamela Garner researches emotional regulation—a person’s ability to manage stress and emotional arousal—in young children. She says, “This involves skill in controlling your internal state and your external state—what you feel and how you express it.”

Garner used the example of the typical two-year-old’s tantrum. If denied something she or he finds appealing, a toddler may scream, cry, or become visibly upset. Garner notes that society accepts this response among young children, but not among older children and adults.

Garner says that the development of self-regulation has a long-term effect. “There is evidence that children who can successfully regulate their emotions have more positive relationships with friends and teachers and therefore have more academic and social success. They have better academic and career outcomes and demonstrate an overall better sense of well-being.”

In Professor Suzanne Carmack’s NCLC 375 Stress, Crisis, and Well-Being class, students learn that quality of life and level of personal satisfaction are closely tied to well-being, critical for managing stress.

“How we handle challenges in our lives is shaped by our well-being,” she says. “A crisis occurs when an individual does not have the internal or external resources to handle an event. Meaningful social ties help you deal with stressful events.”

Carmack uses an example of an individual who has car trouble while driving, asking her students, “If you have car trouble, how many people can you call? How satisfied are you with that list?”

“People who rate their social support high,” Carmack explains, “also rate their well-being high.” She concludes that, fortunately, “we are wired to the idea of lending a helping hand. When we support each other, we know it’s
“Relationships in school and the family are the best indicators of civic engagement . . . . Social connections relate to many positive outcomes for students, including their academic performance, physical health, and mental health.”

—Professor Duhita Mahatmya

very good for us. Knowing that we are not alone makes a real difference in our ability to handle something . . . . When it comes to crisis, half the benefit is knowing the tools you can use to cope and the other half is using them.”

Professor Duhita Mahatmya researches how students’ social relationships are vehicles for well-being, specifically with respect to their academic performance and civic engagement. Mahatmya is collecting data from Mason students enrolled in the first-year Cornerstones program and using self-reported points to determine whether students are self-focused or more actively engaged in their community. She has student survey data from 2012 through 2015 and is analyzing these data to assess the students’ social connectedness and how that affects their civic engagement and academic performance.

Although still collecting and analyzing data, Mahatmya’s preliminary research provides significant clues on the importance of social connections among college students. She says, “Relationships in school and the family are the best indicators of civic engagement . . . . Social connections relate to many positive outcomes for students, including their academic performance, physical health, and mental health.”

Mahatmya notes that NCC’s signature elements foster well-being among students. NCC’s small class size, hands-on learning experiences, Living Learning Communities, and connection to many campus activities and organizations give students ample opportunities to make social connections that bolster well-being.

Mahatmya says, “Generally, Cornerstones students are busy and engaged. They participate in sports, government, on-campus clubs. Finding something they are interested in helps them cultivate these connections.”

NCC stands with the university in its commitment to serve students and the community, and help those students develop the strengths they need to address 21st century social, global, and environmental challenges. NCC’s experiential approach to learning, informed by the consideration of personal, community, and societal well-being, helps prepare Mason graduates to effect positive changes and make a difference.
Mason’s “First Couple” Weathers Life’s Adventures with Grace

By Anne Reynolds

Each alumnus of George Mason University takes from the university a collection of experiences and memories that shapes who they will be in the future. Two alumni in particular walked forth from the very early days of George Mason with a foundation that has allowed them to continue to flourish.

Helen Foster, MD, BA English ’69, and Thomas Foster, BA Business and Public Administration ’69, arrived at George Mason College of the University of Virginia (UVA), as it was then known, in fall 1965. The Fairfax Campus had been dedicated only one year before, in November 1964, and the original four buildings that comprised the campus (North, South, East, and West) were brand-new. Green and gold had only recently been chosen as school colors by the student body, which was less than 600 students. And at the time, George Mason College was a two-year institution that did not grant academic degrees.

Helen did not contemplate a lengthy stay at George Mason College. Her father, Edgar Allen Prichard, had been instrumental in bringing the college to Fairfax, working as a member of the Fairfax City Council and later as mayor of the City of Fairfax (he went on to become a trustee of the George Mason University Foundation and member of the Board of Visitors, where he served as rector from 1989 to 1991. He was awarded the Mason Medal in 1995). Helen, however, planned to attend Dickinson College, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, after spending her first year of school closer to home.

Tom was initially drawn to Mason because of its reputation as part of UVA and its proximity to his family’s home in Woodbridge, Virginia. “I could go to George Mason for two years and transfer to UVA after that,” he explains. “I’d get a good education and graduate from a prestigious school in one fell swoop—it looked like an advantageous thing to do.”

But when the couple met in a freshman English class, their plans shifted. Helen decided not to move on to Dickinson. And in 1966, when Virginia’s General Assembly made George Mason College into a four-year, degree-granting institution, Tom elected to stay in Fairfax as well. At the end of their junior year, the couple married, and in 1969 became the first married couple to graduate from Mason.

The Fosters recollect the excitement of being part of a fledgling school. “It was a function of being a new school, that didn’t have a complete faculty or a permanent academic staff. They really did a good job bringing in people from the
community,” says Tom. “And the community we were in, in Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C., they had a lot of good professionals that they could draw upon.”

He continues, “The people had some practical experience. For example, I remember the fellow who taught the accounting courses—whom I liked a whole lot—was the controller for the university. He was doing it as a second job. And the problems that he had us working on were the things facing him in his work. That really made it more relevant.”

The late 1960s were a turbulent time in U.S. history, with college campuses often at the center of the unrest. George Mason College was no exception. Helen relates the activities of James Shea, an associate professor of philosophy who was an outspoken opponent of the Vietnam War and the draft, and recalls attending services at a local African American church after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

After graduation, the Fosters moved from Fairfax to Charlottesville, Virginia, where Tom earned his master of business administration degree at UVA. The couple was part of the first observance of Earth Day in 1970, and while in Charlottesville, they welcomed their first child.

With Tom’s MBA degree in hand, the family moved to Hunterdon County in central New Jersey, where Tom played a role in the rapid transformation of the region. “I was a loan officer for the bank up there and that was in an era when that community was changing. It had been a rural farming community, and one of the big things happening was that Merck was moving its corporate headquarters out to that county. So my farmer clients were in the process of selling their land to developers, getting big amounts of money and trying to figure out what to do with it. Of course, the bankers were very happy to help them.”

While in New Jersey, Helen and Tom added to their family, and Helen pursued a passion that continues to this day: writing. She has had a number of poems and other pieces published, is the author of several books that are yet to be published, and is involved with a writing group.

After nearly six years in New Jersey, however, the family was drawn by a business school contact to the Eastern Shore of Virginia. Tom became the financial director of a group of family-owned businesses and Helen tracked down the pre-med courses she had been unable to take while at George Mason College. “I commuted with our little boy in the car to the University of Maryland, Eastern Shore, and renewed my science courses, organic chemistry, and biochemistry.”

With the science requirements completed, Helen applied to the Medical College of Virginia (now part of Virginia Commonwealth University) was accepted, and the family moved to Richmond.

Helen launched into her medical school classes, residency, and career as a psychiatrist, while Tom worked with United Virginia Bank (which became Crestar, and later SunTrust), for a 13-year tenure with the company. By that time, he says, he was in a position “as the compliance officer, a job that should have been manned by a lawyer. While I had a lot of legal knowledge specifically about employee benefit plans, I didn’t have the general legal background. So I thought, this is the right time to go to law school.”

Tom chose to attend the University of Richmond for much of the same reason he had chosen George Mason for his undergraduate education. “It was convenient, right in town, and in addition, I maintained my contacts. I continued working with a law firm in Richmond doing employee benefits work for them while I was in law school.”

With Helen’s medical practice established in the Richmond area, Tom recalls, “At one point, she had two children in college and a husband in law school, who she was supporting.”

Today, the Fosters make their home in Richmond, having raised two children and with a fourth grandchild on the way. They return to Mason when their schedules permit; their last visit was in fall 2014, following the 50th reunion of Helen’s class from Fairfax High School.

Asked their impressions of Mason’s Fairfax Campus now, Helen replies, “Well, it certainly has grown, and it’s very impressive.” She relates that the staff of the Fenwick Library was particularly helpful in tracking down a photograph of their days at Mason.

“I, for some reason or another, missed the picture taking almost every year of the yearbook,” she explains. “The last year, they took a picture of us . . . because I was student teaching at Robert Frost Junior High School and wasn’t there when they took pictures. We’d ordered a yearbook, but I don’t believe we actually got it. We hadn’t seen it yet. So we went over to the library and they helped us find it.”

Asked for advice appropriate to someone who is starting out, Tom suggests that there may not be one piece of counsel that fits every situation. “Different things work for different people. Individuals need to figure out the path that makes sense for them,” he says.

Helen agrees and stresses flexibility. “I would give advice to follow your heart, and do something you think you can be happy with . . . You know, ‘Do what you want to do,’ doesn’t mean that the circumstances along the way will always be to your liking. But if you keep your eyes on where you want to go and keep your eyes open for opportunities, you can get through those hardships pretty well, I think.”

Helen and Thomas Foster in Dr. Foster’s Richmond, Virginia, office.
Rei Berroa, Poet and Professor, on Responsibilities, Poetry, and the Pursuit of Humanity

By Anne Reynolds

Rei Berroa, professor in the Department of Modern and Classical Languages, is a man with many claims on his time.

For the past 22 years, he has served as the literary advisor for the annual Teatro de la Luna Festival, for which he organizes the Maratón de Poesía (Marathon of Poetry). He invites poets from around the world to Washington, D.C., compiling a substantial anthology of their work for publication. Berroa asks each invitee to supply 30 to 35 poems, which represents, in his words, “a good swath of the fabric of the poetic dictum” of each writer.

Berroa locates the poets through his travels. Last year, he visited 16 different areas of the Americas (and lamented that his duties prevented him from traveling to New Zealand). He has taken part in poetry festivals in, among many other places, Mexico, Cuba, Spain, Turkey, Colombia, and Italy, where he received the International Poetry Award for lifetime achievement in 2011.

Last fall, Berroa received his most recent honor: the Ministry of Culture of the Dominican Republic dedicated the eighth annual Feria del Libro Dominicano, or Dominican Book Fair, to his work.

This annual fair celebrates the literature, music, and culture of the Dominican Republic. Held in upper Manhattan in New York City, the multiday festival invites thousands of visitors to poetry readings, short films, history presentations, and tributes to Dominican folklore and music. In the announcement of the fair in June, Carlos Sánchez, the Dominican Commissioner of Culture in the United States, lauded Berroa as “a singular voice in Dominican poetry, a renowned essayist, scholar, and translator, who has 40 published works.”

The event organizers asked Berroa to submit some of his own work or prepare something new to provide to attendees. Berroa elected to prepare an anthology, drawing from the many books of poetry he has written, including two books in their entirety, Palomas Pensajeras (Thoughtful Doves) and a short book on Alzheimer’s disease, which he prepared while his own mother faced the illness.

The title of the resulting anthology, De quites y que rencias: Antojología de poemas y poéticas, is a play on the Spanish word for anthology, antología (antojo translates to “whim”). The anthology comprised nearly 600 pages of poems and introductions to them and proved very popular. According to Berroa,

[The festival organizers] brought only 200 copies, and they finished the 200 copies the first day. I was almost left without a book. I had about three readings the next day and about five on Sunday. So at about noon, when I had the first meeting, I called one of the people that worked there, and I said, “Can I have a copy of the book so I can read from it and show it to people?” And the person from the ministry of culture comes back and says, “We have only two copies left, and the minister said to give you one because he wants the other for himself. We sold all the other copies.” And I said, “Well, this is terrible!” But it was very nice at the same time.

The festival took place over the course of three days in late September. Berroa modestly plays down his role in the opening of the fair:

It was wonderful. We got to New York, they told me that I had about 15 minutes to talk, and I told them, “You don’t want anybody to talk 15 minutes. At a celebration like this you’re going to have 15 people and then at the end there is going to be music. People are not there to listen to us. They’re there to listen to the music.” Nobody should speak more than five minutes, I told the minister of culture. Nobody. And he said, “But you are the person we are celebrating,” and I said, “No. I will speak five minutes. No more.” And true to his word,
When we got to the Gran Teatro United Palace, a theater in New York that has the capacity for about 4,000 people, it was packed. First, the minister of culture spoke, then the presenters, and this and that. Then they asked me to come up to the stage.

I went up there, and I said, “I know that anyone else could have been nominated for this . . . there are a lot of writers that could have been chosen. So I am really appreciative of the ones who decided to select my name. Probably it was the result of a friend wanting a favor, and they put my name there, or an enemy wanted to put me in ridicule, and this person put my name here. In any event, thank you very much for choosing me. I was going to read a poem, but I have already spoken for four and a half minutes.

Since you are here to listen to the music and not to me, and you are asking, ‘What is this old man doing up there talking if we are not interested in listening?’ I have listened to what you have to say and I will do exactly that. Thank you very much.”

Berroa relates that this speech was very well received.

Around the world, Berroa is best recognized as a poet. He has written 40 books of poetry, anthologies, literary criticism, or translation, and is in the process of publishing his research on the poetics of motherhood: a study of motherhood, feminism, and the perspective of fathers who also serve as mothers.

“In Latin America, poetry is a fantastic thing,” Berroa explains. He describes participating in a poetry festival in Medellin, Colombia, that drew around 200,000 people over the course of 10 days. Despite pouring rain, a crowd stayed to listen to the international poets speak.

“I went to some people, and they told me, ‘We have been waiting all year for this moment, to listen to the poets. We are not going to allow anyone, or any act of nature, to deter us from this celebration.’” He contrasts this to a poetry reading he attended by Robert Pinsky, the poet laureate of the United States from 1997 to 2000, which drew fewer than 10 audience members.

Back in Fairfax, Virginia, this celebrated poet, a renowned voice of Dominican culture, concerns himself with the responsibilities of a professor of Spanish literature at a diverse and bustling university. Part of this role is administrative; much of his time last fall was spent combing the Middle East Studies Association meeting for a faculty member to join Mason’s modern and classical languages faculty.

But it is with the students that Berroa is able to forge the ties among scholarship, poetry, and how literature brings together all aspects of what it means to be human.

“Every experience you have is an experience that is creative and at the same time educational,” Berroa says, “for you and for the ones who are going to be receiving the education.”

Since 1984, Berroa has been educating Mason students in literature and literary criticism, using literature to talk about far more than the art of the written word. “When you’re reading a literary text, you’re reading about psychology, religion, politics, sometimes it’s about science, human behavior, the human attitude. The poet, or the short story writer, or the novelist, is writing about the human experience. And there is nothing more enriching for the human mind than being able to read and enrich their presence on this earth.”

Berroa admits that trying to give a sense of totality contradicts the compartmentalization to which many students are accustomed. But, he adds, students have come to him after class (and in some cases, years later) to let him know that the connection clicks for them. He finds those moments gratifying: “There is nothing more valuable than knowing that you have contributed in great measure to the development of at least one individual.”

Berroa also stresses that it is sometimes hard to know what effect a professor’s (or a writer’s) words will have in the future. As an example, he describes a poem he wrote about a rooster he encountered while living in Madrid many years ago. In clear contrast to the late-night way of...
life in Spain, the rooster steadfastly greeted each morning
at 6 a.m., waking Berroa in the process. That is, until one
particular day, when there was no morning cry.

“..."And the next day, I waited for that rooster and I didn't
hear him," he says. "And a sadness just occupied my soul in
such a way that I couldn't stop thinking about that rooster.
A rooster that was telling humanity, 'Okay, guys! Forget
about yesterday... it's time to develop, to produce...' and I
wrote this poem that I call 'Cock of the Dawn.'"

Years after writing that poem, Berroa participated in a
poetry festival in Izmir, Turkey. To his surprise, the orga-
nizers of the festival told him that "Cock of the Dawn" had
been adopted by the country's literary community as an
anthem to protest the government's arrest of an outspoken
poet and later a journalist. Berroa was asked to read the
poem at the opening of each day of the festival, and again
at the close.

Berroa's surprise grew on his return home. An email
from a colleague told him that many of the Turkish news-
papers had published "Cock of the Dawn" to call attention
to the imprisonment of the journalist, and because of the
protest and the poem, the government freed the journalist.

He was astonished at the effect of his words.

"Even now, I'm telling you this story and I feel like, how
can this happen?" he says. "That something you wrote 28
years before had been waiting for its moment to help, to
make a real difference. I mean, these are not words that I
invented. These are the words of everyday. I am simply
lucky that I began to write and this order, this syntax, found
itself on the page. I am simply the channel for it. And now,
that way of putting those words together has been so pow-
erful to help with the liberation of a human being."

Berroa concludes that this is the gift of the poet or any
artist: "We are interested in the need we have as human
beings to have the capacity to use words to lift us above all
the pettiness that we have to face everyday," he says. "And
that is an act of liberation. It is a revolutionary thing."
As a young university, our focus has always been firmly fixed on the road ahead. Your gift allows us to provide vital funding for student scholarships, technology-rich learning, transformative research projects, and all-important funding for the arts and humanities. If we are to continue to provide a robust, relevant learning experience that is accessible to all, we need your nurturing support.

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Plasticity and Mortality:
A Biological Anthropologist Looks at the Effects of Environment on Growth and Development

By Daniel Temple, PhD

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Daniel Temple, a faculty member in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, earned a PhD in biological anthropology with a minor in anatomy. He studies the effects of stress that humans encounter at early ages, with significant results for the subjects’ later lives, and has worked with skeletal and dental remains from Japan, Siberia, Alaska, Florida, New Mexico, and Arizona. Here, he describes the phenomenon and how it is used to learn about ancient cultures.

The demand for products that reduce infant stress is high, supported by the desire to protect vulnerable infants from environmental and culturally induced stressors. New research demonstrates scientifically sound reasons for seeking these protections. The findings suggest that protecting infants from environmental stresses yields long-term benefits because individuals who experience unhealthy infancies experience less healthy adulthoods.

This research has its roots in medical perceptions of health, particularly cardiovascular disease and diabetes. For instance, for a long time, people saw higher rates of heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension in African American communities as a racial statistic. However, as most introductory biological anthropology students quickly learn, race is not a valid category for classifying human populations.

Human biological variation is not racially patterned. Instead, it is the developmental environment that holds important answers to cardiovascular disease risk later in life. Specifically, research findings that hint at the “plasticity” of infants—their ability to adapt to changes in their environments—and consequences of early life stress, predict results in future environments.

For example, among humans, poor nutrition during the early stages of life is associated with greater deposits of fat and insulin-resistant tissue. The challenging nutritional environment faced by some African American children as a result of socioeconomic inequality makes for a more likely source of elevated risk of heart attack, stroke, and diabetes during adulthood. Moreover, new genetic studies demonstrate that these stress experiences may be inherited from earlier generations. That is, the consequences of stress exposure early in one person’s life may be transmitted to that person’s children through epigenetic inheritance, the phenomenon in which traits are passed down outside an organism’s DNA.

This result may occur as genes are degraded through a process called methylation. Many of these genes are important in controlling immune system development, fat deposits, and insulin-resistant tissue deposits. The questions facing biological anthropologists focus on the evolutionary relevance of this response, and whether the process represents plasticity and adaptation.

Plasticity references the range of phenotypes (observable characteristics of an organism) that may be expressed by a single individual genotype (the genetic make up of an organism) in response to environmental pressures. In infants, the ability to survive these pressures is an indication of plasticity, evidenced by the trade-offs experienced during this process. For example, stress in a growing organism results in reduced energy directed toward growth, so that the narrowed energy budget can be directed to growing essential tissue (think heart, lungs, endocrine system). The results produce individuals with shorter stature, but the individuals survive stressful events. Many scientists use the term “adaptive plasticity” to describe this process. Here, the term “adaptive” refers to the fact that the plasticity in question permits immediate survival and the possibility of future reproduction. That is, organisms that have the capacity to survive stress events may experience reproductive success later, while those experiencing limited plasticity may simply succumb to stressful events.
DENTAL EVIDENCE

Teeth provide the key to applying the concept of plasticity to ancient populations; they are great sources for understanding the consequences of stress during infancy. Human front teeth form between 1 and 6 years of age. These teeth are very sensitive to environmental disturbances, and enamel secretion is frequently disrupted in response to them. These disruptions, known as linear enamel hypoplasia, appear as lines where enamel is depressed. Teeth also have incremental markings called striae of Retzius. Striae of Retzius form over approximately eight-day intervals, which map the developmental chronologies of teeth: scientists can count striae of Retzius to pinpoint the precise age when a section of enamel formed. The location of linear enamel hypoplasia on a tooth crown allows scientists to visualize growth disturbances on teeth and estimate the age when these disturbances occurred.

At Mason, one laboratory has been investigating these questions among the Jomon culture in prehistoric Japan. This culture, which depended upon a hunting and gathering subsistence economy, existed between 10,000 and 2,300 years ago. Today, we can study the teeth of members of the Jomon that have been preserved in archaeological sites. High-resolution casts of them viewed under a microscope reveal that the former owners of the teeth studied suffered disturbances in their growth patterns. One important question about these growth disturbances involves their relationship to adaptive plasticity and the trade-offs in the investment of biological energy that this plasticity entails. For example, scientists know that infants with linear enamel hypoplasia survived the growth event, as enamel continued to grow after the defect was produced. Less is known regarding the relationship between these defects and life history.

To explore this relationship, scientists use silicone to collect high-resolution impressions of teeth. They then coat the impressions with resin in order to create a full replica of the tooth, which now can be studied under an engineer’s measuring microscope. Scientists are seeking the precise spacing between the perikymata (the external evidence of the striae of Retzius) and the depth of the tooth enamel. The measurements provide a surface profile and a spacing profile of each tooth. Grey bars indicate tooth depth, while black bars indicate perikymata spacing. Linear enamel hypoplasia is found where perikymata spacing is accentuated.
Because perikymata provides an accurate chronology of each tooth, it remains possible to calculate the ages when each linear enamel hypoplasia formed. Once the chronology of linear enamel hypoplasia is established within each individual, researchers in our bioarcheology lab integrate information from the skeleton with the findings from the tooth samples.

Information such as age at death, number of growth disturbances experienced during development, body size, chronic infectious disease, and chronic metabolic disease can be elucidated from skeletal remains.

Skeletom is vast storehouses of information about the life history of individuals. Information such as age at death, number of growth disturbances experienced during development, body size, chronic infectious disease, and chronic metabolic disease can be elucidated. We used Mason’s bioarchaeology lab to compare the age when linear enamel hypoplasia was first observed with the total number of linear enamel hypoplasia and age at death of each individual. Our results found that individuals who experience linear enamel hypoplasia at comparatively younger ages were at greater risk for developing more linear enamel hypoplasia and dying early. This research suggests that life history trade-offs are possible to measure in prehistoric humans. The individuals who experienced growth disruptions at earlier ages invested less energy in preventing these disruptions when they were older, and these individuals died when they were relatively young.

The totality of this research suggests the importance of avoiding infant stress exposure. Not because infants are frail—infants have a great deal of “built-in” plasticity to survive stressful events. But the expense associated with surviving these events has dire consequences at older ages.

All these findings are environmentally and culturally contingent. Anthropologists studying these questions have found that individuals with evidence of linear enamel hypoplasia from lower socioeconomic status have higher risks of death than those from upper classes. Therefore, the ability to elude death following stress during infancy is also patterned along financial boundaries—those with limited access to resources may have experienced more marked trade-offs simply as a consequence of how frequently they encountered deprived environments.

These findings suggest that humans pay an important physiological consequence for stressors experienced early in development and consequences may be more severe when socioeconomic inequalities place the individual at greater risk for stress exposure.
Farmer's Market on Wheels: Reducing Hunger and Promoting Community Well-Being

By Amy Best and Jeff Johnson, MA Sociology ’10

ABOUT THE AUTHORS: Amy Best is professor of sociology and chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. Jeff Johnson graduated from George Mason University with an MA in sociology in 2010. He is a doctoral student in George Mason’s sociology program.

An old school bus, freshly painted a sprightly green, with shelves of fruits and vegetables extending from its side, is parked outside an apartment building for seniors in southeast Washington, D.C. Elderly men and women speak in easy cadence and intimate tones. A “Good afternoon” is offered here, a “How you doing?” in reply. Ida, a market regular, chimes, “Got any watermelon?” from her perch in her wheelchair. “No, hopefully next week. We have peaches, though.” Plastic bags crinkle open, and potatoes, chard, and garlic are dropped inside. It is a typical day at Arcadia Center for Sustainable Food and Agriculture’s mobile farmer’s market.

Limited access to healthy food in low-income, urban areas is well documented as part of “the new hunger” in the United States. Gone are the days of food shortages captured in the haunting images of Depression-era breadlines thanks to widespread cheap, highly processed, nutrient-poor food.

The new hunger is best understood in terms of blocked access to foods that sustain health and enable long-term well-being. Community-based efforts to bring local and affordable fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins to low-income communities in the form of farmer’s markets have been offered as one strategy to improve healthy food access. But farmer’s markets in these communities have experienced uneven success. The characterization of farmer’s markets as expensive and signaling gentrification, combined with a history of negative consumer experiences for those who are low-income, especially if African American, often deter potential customers.

More recently, mobile farmer’s markets have developed as an alternative, community-based intervention to improve access to healthy food in economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. An estimated 40 mobile markets operate in the United States, and early evidence suggests that mobile market patrons consume more fruits and vegetables than their nonmarket counterparts. Mobile markets differ from conventional farmer’s markets: they are single seller, able to move across various community hotspots, and do not require a substantial time commitment from farmers for direct-customer selling.

The target customers for mobile markets are users of WIC/EBT/SNAP payments (formerly called food stamps) and senior farmer’s market nutrition vouchers. Many mobile markets also provide information about federal food assistance programs and eligibility since one of
their goals is to maximize the use of federal assistance to purchase foods that enable health.

We spent summer and fall 2012 observing a Washington, D.C., mobile market program run by the Arcadia Center for Sustainable Food and Agriculture, a Fairfax-based nonprofit. As sociologists, we were asked to evaluate the Arcadia program. We analyzed its financial records and visited the market during its first selling season, spending several hours each week talking with customers and taking notes of what we saw. At the time, the mobile market was run by a small but dedicated staff. Benjamin Bartley and Juju Harris were the bones of the operation and were assisted by three committed interns. Despite the small staff and relative newness, the mobile market program was a success. So, what enabled its success?

At first blush, building demand in an area where access to fresh produce is severely limited would appear to be relatively straightforward: go in, set up shop, sell fresh food. But many obstacles arise in launching such a program. The shortage of grocery stores in lower-income communities often contributes to a sense of ambivalence toward market options. Residents might view outsiders as indifferent to their abandonment by those with serious political and economic muscle. Groups and organizations from outside the community intent on having a positive impact run the risk of being perceived as interlopers. Program activities can be met with suspicion or interpreted as patronizing and disingenuous.

Yet, there are also ways a new program can mitigate these obstacles. Arcadia did a lot of upfront work that paid off later, harnessing community-based networks along with city-level administrative offices and grassroots organizations. It ran an effective community outreach campaign that helped solidify partnerships with food access and community stakeholders.

The result was a matching program in which low-income customers could receive $20 worth of fruits and vegetables for $10, which made their food more affordable. Arcadia also selected market locations carefully. Market stops had a high volume of SNAP, WIC, and senior voucher participants, and it was important that the stops were anchored by trusted community institutions (a senior wellness center, in one instance).

The mobile market’s success also hinged on building social trust, and recognition of the collective and individual dignity of its customers, which too often is denied to people in disadvantaged communities.

Our first inkling that the market’s success rested in daily market interaction came early in the selling season. A customer who appeared to be in her sixties asked Best if she was a “news lady.” Best replied that she was observing to see how the mobile market was doing. The woman replied unequivocally, “Excellent!” Best asked, “What makes it excellent?” She replied, “How they treat you. They’re friendly and nice, and they tell you stuff. They introduce themselves. They help you. They tell you what’s coming next.”


Indeed, on any given day, a visitor to the mobile market would be greeted by a bustling scene marked by respectful and instructive exchanges with staff. Useful information about cost-effective and healthy cooking and eating was exchanged in the context of casual conversation: how to ripen fruit, which heart healthy oils to use, how to learn about eligibility for food assistance programs, what distinguishes grass-fed beef from grain-fed beef. There was a lot of healthy talk peppered in the regular rounds of chit-chat about comings and goings, and family and friends. This, combined with food sampling and cooking demonstrations, created an effective environment of learning with significant opportunity to build awareness about health and food.

Some people have suggested that economically disadvantaged people prefer junk food over fresh food. Our observations find these explanations wanting. Customers often compared the food the mobile market sold and the poor quality of produce in grocery stores in low-income communities. Many expressed genuine concern about health and well-being for themselves and others in the community. In fact, customers often bordered on exuberant about the improved access to the healthy foods the mobile market provided. On one occasion a woman, maybe in her seventies, remarked to Johnson, “I am happy inside.” She explained that she had heard there were “pesticides and penicillin in all our food. In all that food that you get at Safeway and Giant. And we need this, and I’m just so happy.”

The frequent expressions of customer gratitude for goods and services also hinted at a broader context of marketplace discrimination. The consumer market experience for a large number of black Americans, in particular, is marked by a well-documented legacy of hostility, humiliation, and indifference that persists even today with little recourse. Accounts of black customers being refused service, sold inferior products often at inflated prices, being followed by security personnel, and being denied entry to retail settings have been recorded by legal scholars, journalists, and social scientists. The accumulative effect of these routine encounters is guarded apprehension and distrust.

Arcadia’s mobile market offered a fundamentally different shopping experience. We often saw mobile market staff helping customers select items, carefully bagging items, and keeping track of total money spent and the remaining balance on food assistance checks and vouchers. Customers were encouraged to “try before you buy”
from the range of healthy offerings. Samples were regularly placed on the service table for customers to try.

The rapport-building efforts of market staff enabled customers to ask questions about the food and cooking preparations. One afternoon, Harris told a woman who had just bought a lemon cucumber that she could mix the cucumber with a little vinegar and salt. The woman nodded with an assuring smile and said that sounds good, adding she might also try the zucchini. She then told Best that Bartley has “taught her a lot.” After collecting her items and preparing to go, she hugged Bartley and Harris. And then, quite unexpectedly, hugged Best, too.

Cooking demonstrations were particularly effective in promoting healthy eating habits. They introduced customers to new food, with noted impact on customers’ perception and appreciation of unfamiliar vegetables. One afternoon, Harris sautéed eggplant for several women gathered around the table. One woman asked about the eggplant. After she and Harris chatted for a minute, the woman said, “I’m going to try it.” Another woman remarked on how good it smelled, adding, “I want to try to make it at home.” She asked whether the oil has to be a specific brand. Harris said no, but she does use the olive oil because it is heart healthy. One of the women held up the cup to her nose. “Smells like Chinese food,” she said. She then tried it and remarked that it was good. The other woman had eaten hers and placed the cup in the trash. She thought it was “okay,” but a minute later asked whether she could have another. The two women talked about the sample eggplant and seemed genuinely surprised by how much they liked it.

“All I know how to make it,” one remarked excitedly and asked whether she could have another. The other woman also asked for a third. “A new taste, I like that.”

While mobile market staff engaged in educational outreach, they also valued the customers’ food knowledge, often asking them how they prepared food at home. Customers shared stories, memories, and their existing knowledge, with noted references to a not-so-distant agricultural past. Much of the food sold at the market honored the distinct foodways of its customer base—culturally rooted staples of Southern soul cooking such as collards, mustard greens, green tomatoes, butter beans, and sweet potatoes.

Quantifying intangibles such as respectful communication or caring customer service is difficult, yet the mutual respect and sharing of helpful information and the encouragement by staff for customers to share food knowledge of their own, taken together, enabled an easy rapport to develop between staff and market customers, helping to ensure customers’ return.

Policy work and practical interventions to increase access to and consumption of healthy foods have not focused enough on these most basic human needs. Gradually, we came to appreciate that shopping at the mobile market was a kind of belonging, a way to claim membership in the larger community. Exclusion from consumer spaces for the underprivileged and the old often means exclusion from the broader lattice of public life.

Johnson still remembers one afternoon just before the market closed. An older black woman approached the bus. She perused the potatoes and apples and then asked Bartley, “What are these?” He responded, “That’s Swiss chard.” She nodded. “I’m trying to eat healthy.” She commented that she had not eaten well in her life and that she had some bad habits from her twenties and thirties. Her phone rang and she answered, talked for a moment.

Then with clear delight in her voice, she said, “Let me go. I’m at my local farmer’s market. I’m buying fresh and buying local!”

We learned a lot about the conditions that need to be set for improving genuine food access and to increase consumption of healthy foods. Watching effective positive change unfold before your eyes is probably one of the highlights of being a sociologist. And Arcadia hit it out of the park.

Since the launch of its market in 2012, Arcadia’s Mobile Market program has grown substantially from 7 market stops to 18. More than 60 percent of its first-time SNAP customers became return customers, and the market has grown by 50 percent each year almost entirely through word of mouth. In 2014, they sold more than 20 tons of local, sustainably grown fruits and vegetables at reduced prices to low-income customers.

Mobile markets alone can’t fix health problems that may result from being financially disadvantaged, nor secure well-being, but they certainly get us a little closer.
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and Carol Lasser
Donald and Elyse Lehman
Cornelia Levine
Matthew Martinez
Duncan and Kelly McCaskill
Barry McGhan
Anne Mellinger-Birdsong and George Birdsong
Marc and Diana Pelath
Matthew Person
Hugh Perrine
Dadia Ponizil and Judy Berlfein
Public Choice Society
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P. Michael Riffert
Julian Robertson
David Rocheach
Molly Ross
Chris Rufer
James Russell
Josh Sacks
Mona Sarafaty
Arthur and Elizabeth Schmidt
Robert and Leslie Speidel
Keith Stanger
Walter Sylva and Paula Petrik
Georgi Tonia and Julie Christensen
Terry and Daniel Tyson
Wake Forest University
Beverly Walters
Eileen Wiegert
Susan and David Wilson
Harlan Zimmerman and Randi Rashkover

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Louis and Janet Ford
Russell Libby and Mary Schmidt
Nancy and Peter Mangione
Robert and Becky Mortlock
Roy Relph
Diane Schultz Catherine Slichter
and Nicholas Aiuto
Steven and Susan Sultan
Lisa and David Van Wagner
Jane Wendelin

What’s New?
We want to know...
➤ Where are you now?
➤ Have you moved?
➤ Gotten married?
➤ Had a baby?
➤ Landed a new job?
➤ Seen former classmates recently?

Submit your class notes to Mason Spirit, the university’s magazine, at spirit@gmu.edu. Please be sure to include your graduation year and degree.

For more information, please visit chss.gmu.edu/alumni.

Save the Date for Alumni Weekend!
October 16–18 with a special event for CHSS alumni on October 17.

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Habila’s novels, poems, and short stories have won many honors and awards. In 2003 he was awarded the Commonwealth Prize for Best First Novel (Africa Section). In 2005–06 Habila was the first Chinua Achebe Fellow at Bard College, New York. His second novel won the Virginia Library Foundation’s fiction award in 2008. In the same year Habila’s short story, “The Hotel Malogo” won the Emily Balch Prize. Oil on Water, which deals with environmental pollution in the oil-rich Niger Delta, was shortlisted for the Commonwealth Writers Prize (2011) and the Orion Book Award (2012). It was also a runner up for the PEN/Open Book Award (2012). Habila is a 2015 Windham-Campbell Prize winner for fiction.

Habila has been a contributing editor for the Virginia Quarterly Review since 2004, and he is a regular reviewer for The Guardian, UK. From July 2013 to June 2014, Habila was a DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service) fellow in Berlin.

Helon Habila lives in Virginia with his wife and three children.

VOMITORIUMS

In ancient Rome, in the age of empire
And decadence, a house was incomplete
Without a vomitorium. Houses then were
Large and sprawling, covering multiple acres
There were vast terraces, pools and gardens,
Marble columns towered in rows like sentinels

The interiors were mostly baroque: vases,
Busts and idols—Jupiter and Juno in a niche,
Cupid and Venus, in the buff, customarily
Formed the centrepiece; tendrils on window ledges,
Imitation hanging gardens, frolicking pigs and
Peacocks (the decadent seek, often, to overreach
Its possibilities)

In decadent Rome vomitoriums were practical
Necessities; for, say you were an ancient Roman,
Someone of high estate, a tribune, or a senator,
And tonight you entertain. Expected are the
Empress, the Emperor, the great Cicero, and other
Notables. What would you do but inform your
Cook: ‘Tonight, go the whole hog!’

Say you were the Emperor (hoary, soon to die
And become a deity), faced with such tempting variety,
And you so used to having it all, which would you
Eat, which ignore; fish, flesh, or fowl? And
So they built vomitoriums.

Now, a vomitorium is a tiny adjunct, like a vestigial
Appendage, fixed to the hall. It could be square or
Circular, based on the builder’s bent, enclosed or open-air,
But never large, just standing room for one. (There was
At times, a gilded chair within.) a towel hung from an
Ivory stand; a washing bowl rested on a marble ledge.
Finally another bowl, of polished silver, stood as
Receptacle for the rich Roman vomit. It had a trigger
Bottom that parted at the merest touch, and beneath
A conduit pipe quietly, efficiently, sucked away the
Mucilaginous mush.

The Emperor, or Cicero, or some other notable,
Fed to surfeit, would waddle across the smooth marble
Floor, sweating mildly, farting softly, to the vomitorium.

Back at the table, the portly, bald-headed citizen wouldn’t
Directly fall to. He must first control his still heaving
Belly, and recondition his sour mouth with some wine …
But not all Romans had vomitoriums, not every
Roman was rich and portly. Majority were poor,
Pressed into ugly shapes by taxes; some were slaves
From Britain, Gaul, and Africa. And there were the
Christians who lived chiefly on fish, themselves fodder
For Coliseum lions.

—Helon Habila
NEST WEAVING

I don’t know much about birds.
These ones look tiny, like day old chicks,
Only sharper. Robins, perhaps, or sparrows.
The female is dun, unremarkable beside
The male’s black and green gaudiness.
Certainly not canaries.

But who has a God’s patience to note how
Exactly a bird looks, where or when a sparrow falls?

What impresses is the determination in each hop,
Each pause; the eagerness to make a home in
The fold of my window curtain—
But as the sun ascends I detect method in their frenzy:
One always stands guard as the other flies into the
Horizon to procure brick. And always that
Air of qui vive in the revolving gaze;
A warning whistle at the slightest motion of my hand,
Or a page fluttering on my desk.

One needs such winged alertness to build a home,
A world, to deal with obstacles: rivals, lies,
And sometimes, waning passion. Heavy furniture
That often stand between brick and mortar. And trust
That she would return each time she goes out
To get straw.

2.30. The winged masons, acclimatised to the
Weather in here, my riffling motions and gaze,
The contrast in light outside and within, have grown bolder,
Painting the ledge bird-shit grey, chasing straw onto
The filing-cabinet, sometimes disappearing for brief breaks –
Two, three, hops on the concrete runway before lift-off.

3.30. They are past mid-way.

But most homes never reach roof level.
Most homes are razed down by mysterious fires,
Or flood, demolition balls swung as if by celestial hands.

4.30. Soon I have to go.
I admire the dream home unfolded in a single day:
The intricate interweave of straw with straw, the air-spaces,
The tricky, aesthetic curve at each angle—

5.30. I stand up and pull down the curtain,
Bringing down to earth a bird’s dream of home
And happiness at lintel level.

—Helon Habila