

FRANKLY SPEAKING

Olin's unofficial,
student-run news
source.

VOLUME 8, ISSUE 7

APRIL 2017

FREE, AS IN BEER

Free Soapboxes Here

Logan Davis
Interviewee

Here at Olin, we intentionally and deliberately teach students how to express their ideas. Every first year takes one writing course and two courses with design reviews to showcase and justify their progress. We give students lots of venues for presentations, public whiteboards to gauge public interest, and well, there's also this piece of paper that you're reading.

A few weeks ago, as part of a project for Six Books That Changed The World, Logan Davis put up three presentation boards around campus, each bearing seven black and white posters. The posters carried political statements like "Neo-Nazis Have Bad Ideas," "The Press Should Be Free," "Government Can Be Inefficient," and "Islam Is Not Terrorism."

"What was the goal of this?" you might ask.

According to Logan, he wanted to push a button. More specifically, his goal was a weeklong experiment that, on its surface, was very political. But if you stopped for a second and thought

about the words that you were reading, the statements could suddenly be read as rather banal.

But even though we know that government *can* be inefficient, and that Islam is *not* terrorism, and that literally everyone has bad ideas, a number of community members were made very uncomfortable by the statements..

The first morning of the project, the three poster boards vanished after the administration requested their removal to clean up for a tour group. Later that afternoon (and following a hunt for who and why and how to get them back), the boards were back up.

Phase 1 of the project, Listening, was off to a roaring start.

Despite the fact that no one uses QR codes (Logan's chosen method for contact), he was able to receive feedback through both his coded form and the Therapy mailing list. Logan said that he, "was trying to put these things out in a very public way and see what people did... and people did interesting things."

Complaints about the project ranged from the statements being too inflam-

matory to not being creative enough. Granted, some of the statements were solicited from other sources, such as "self-identifying conservative / right of center" Oliners: Logan says that "Everyone Has A Right To Life", "Government Can Be Inefficient", "Corruption Is Not Good", "Reporters Have Responsibilities", and "People Needed Coal Jobs" were inspired by conversations with such students.

None of these statements, not the right nor left nor the center-leaning ones, were meant to be attacks. "If any of them were attacks [on an Oliner's identity], I kind of failed. I didn't want them to be controversial."

Regardless of whether or not they felt attacked, Oliners gave feedback, and those that chose to do it anonymously allowed Phase 2 to happen. Logan took a thick red marker and scrawled the anonymous comments about each statement over its respective poster.

Many of us saw this artist-executed graffiti. Many of us stopped to notice what had changed about the posters that had been in our peripheral vision for the past week.

continued on next page

How many of us thought about the vitriol behind the red words? And how many of us would have spoken up for *or against* these statements if they had been said to our faces?

To round off his project for Six Books That Changed The World, here are Logan's Six Mechanisms of Silence:

Obfuscation and Administration – there is no formal process for putting up signs like this, but the activation energy required to first ask a professor and then go through facilities and StAR and then go find the means of actually displaying posters is a wild goose chase that acts as a rather powerful deterrent.

Mental Health at Olin

Megan McCauley
Contributor

Eighteen months ago, I was diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD), anxiety, and depression.

Let's back up. I am six weeks away from graduating. I have accepted a full time job at a company I am excited to work for. I have a solid core group of friends and a happy family. I spend time with my suitemates and friends, love to read, and breezed through high school with all A's. But this is all on the surface.

What people couldn't see, even my best friend from home, even my parents, was the me who struggled to stay focused on one homework subject for more than thirty

Literal Physical Removal by the Administration – signs getting taken down from public space, presumably or explicitly by the administration.

Literal Physical Removal by Students – signs getting taken down from student spaces, presumably by students.

Anonymous Directed Feedback – e.g. emails and feedback forms that went to Logan. It's not a dialogue/conversation if your target can't respond. It's bullying.

Anonymous Public Feedback – e.g. the Therapy email thread, because people

minutes. Whenever I started working on one assignment, I would suddenly remember something else that I desperately needed to do. I couldn't go back to the first thing I was working on until I added the just remembered task to my To Do list. This went on and on until it was hours later, I had a million Chrome tabs open, and my To Do list filled up the front and back of a piece of paper.

I want to use my personal experiences as a catalyst to start the conversation about mental health, especially as it relates to engineering. I felt so alone with my problems for such a long time. But after I got the help that I needed, I started to open up to my friends, and even to strangers, about my struggles

want to speak their minds but they don't want to be judged by others for what they say.

The Myth of Olin – the myth being that Olin is apolitical. We don't show politics on tours. Our students don't talk about politics, for fear of ostracism and for fear of being the ostracizers. "Being apolitical is just an endorsement of the way things are."

So why do we have such an aversion to putting our names on our opinions? And do we actually want silence, or to make it safe for our voices while drowning other opinions out?

with ADD, anxiety, and depression.

What I found out surprised me. So many of the people that I talked with had also had been dealing with similar problems. Some of them had just started their journeys. Others had been handling them for years. I was stunned. Many of my friends and peers were struggling with the same problems that I was, and yet, I had no idea.

Talking with other people about mental health challenges is something that I go out of my way to do. Sometimes all it takes is one conversation to realize that you have more in common with someone than you thought.

My goal is to break down the barriers that sur-

round talking about mental health. To allow those who are struggling or those who are watching someone else struggle to not be afraid to speak up and speak out regarding their experiences and their feelings. I want people to know that it's okay to ask for help.

I think that my personal struggles were perpetuated by the demanding environment of an engineering education and the ambition of the culture and people around me. At Olin, we all try to do everything, from school work to clubs to having a social life. But the truth is, you can't do it all. There are only so many hours in a day and when you take time out to sleep, because yes, even engineering students need sleep, you will find that you HAVE to give some things up. Maybe you don't need to get an A in every class. Maybe it's okay if you are just a member of the club and not the president. You get more out of everything you do when you focus on a few activities and don't spread yourself too thin.

People take on too many things, there are too many meetings, and we all have too much work. Engineering students, as well as many other STEM students, seem to have a culture of perfectionism built into them. Students will compare their busy schedules; whoever got the least amount of sleep wins. No one ever talks about their problems. To do so would be a gross sign of weakness.

It took me a long time to

reach out and get the help I needed. Too long. I spent almost every night during my sophomore year curled up in my boyfriend's bed, sobbing uncontrollably. Nothing he said or did could make my tears stop, but his presence made me feel better. I had enough experience with these nights to know that when the sun came up, these feelings would go away. At least, until the next night.

I went on feeling this way, barely scraping by, for an entire year. I got a C- and a D in the two classes I was taking in my major. I knew that something was wrong. I knew that Olin students had access to mental health resources and therapists. But I was scared. I was terrified of what these experts would see when they talked with me. What they would say.

I did finally take the steps to make that first appointment, but it was not something that I did on my own. It took support and urging from my friends, who could tell that I wasn't feeling or acting my best. It took me going to StAR, sitting in someone's office while they put the phone on speaker and left that first message on Colony Care's answering machine on my behalf.

I started weekly therapy sessions. Less than a month later, I met with a psychiatrist who diagnosed me with ADD, anxiety, and depression. To hear her pronounce all three of these diagnoses was terrifying. After my appointment, I sat in the car and sobbed for about 15 minutes. I thought about my

reaction and realized that these weren't tears of sadness. They were tears of relief. Someone else had finally been able to see inside me, and now, I was going to get the help that I needed. This was the last moment that I had to feel alone, hopeless and helpless, surrounded by my problems.

I think a big part of going to therapy is knowing what you are there for. You want to be clear about how you are feeling and what you want to walk out of your sessions with. I had thought that I was struggling with depression -- that was why I had gone to therapy in the first place -- but to have another person, a doctor, spend less than half an hour with me and pronounce these diagnoses was both terrifying and liberating.

I thought I didn't have time to invest every week into my mental health. I mean, I was barely able to finish my homework on time! But looking back, I realize that I was wasting more time by not getting the help that I needed. Every tearful night spent struggling through or ignoring my homework was time that I should have redirected to caring for myself, to feeling better.

My father once sent me an email that said: "With engineering, as in life, some things will come naturally to you and others will be more of a struggle." My mental health problems have caused many daily tasks to be more of a struggle for me.

I am still learning to

cope with my mental health problems. The best strategy I have found for myself is making sure to clear out some personal time in my schedule. This means I set myself a “meeting curfew” at 10pm and block off the time on my calendar. This means every week I see my therapist and I also make sure to get out of the bubble and spend time off campus. Having this time to myself is very important. I look forward to it and I crave it.

The semester after I started therapy and medication, I got three A’s and one B, a huge improvement over almost failing one of my courses the semester before. I’ve gotten better at recognizing my feelings and knowing my triggers, and I have come up with personal coping techniques to help. Over the past year, I have been able to feel myself returning to the person I used to be.

I know my journey isn’t over yet. And it likely won’t ever be. Mental health issues are known for sticking around. I have continued to see my therapist weekly

and meet monthly with my psychiatrist to check on my medication. But I still have bad nights sometimes, and there are still some days where I can’t convince myself to get out of bed. With the help and support of my therapist, friends, and family, I know that these bad times are only temporary. One bad day doesn’t undo all the progress I have made. My mental health issues do not define me.

Want to know how my experiences compare to other Oliners? Ask them! I encourage each one of you to help break down the stigmas surrounding mental health. Open up a dialogue on campus. Talk to your friends, your family, your classmates, your coworkers. Ask someone how they are feeling, and then really listen to their response.

In February, I sent out a survey asking how students wanted to engage in the discussion about mental health¹. Fifty-seven of you responded. Here’s a small bit of what you said:

- 33 (63.5%) wanted to hear others’ experiences

- 21 (40.4%) wanted to have an open discussion

- 20 (38.5%) wanted to read a Frankly Speaking article (Here you go!)

- 15 (28.8%) wanted to share your own experiences

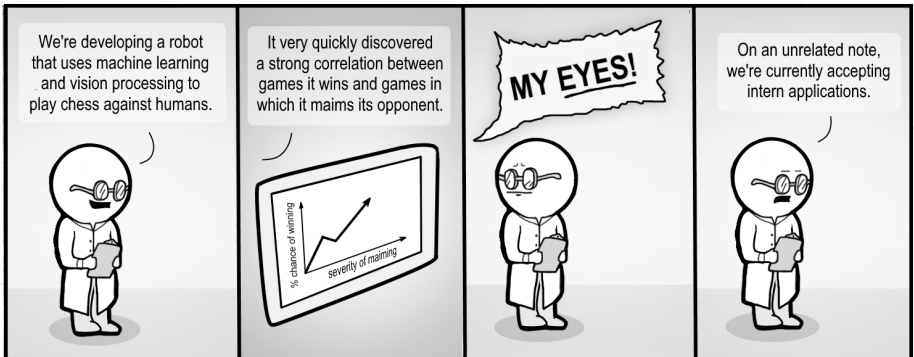
- 12 (23.1%) wanted to write about your own experiences

What I want everyone to take away from this article is that it’s okay to ask for help. Moving forward, let’s talk (and listen!) to each other. Join me this Wednesday at SLAC for an open discussion about mental health from 7pm-9pm. Feel free to find me on campus or email me, anonymously if you want, at meg@students.olin.edu.

This article is edited from a speech I wrote for an event called ‘Square WomEng Hear + Now: College Edition’ which took place on August 11, 2016 in San Francisco, California. Read more about that event here: <https://squarewomenghear-nowcollegeedit.splashthat.com/>

[1]: www.tinyurl.com/olin-mh-survey

IMPOSTER SYNDROME



Back Pain Included*

Mel Chua
Interviewee

Mel Chua '07 would have chosen to link her brain to her computer and forgo her body completely. Her fingers couldn't type fast enough to keep up with what her brain was creating. But there's a part of this rote engineer mindset that needs consideration: how do we take care of ourselves?

About a year after graduation (I had been a computer geek for many years at that point, and had spent lots of time hunched over laptop keyboards and tinkering with horrible ergonomics), I had a horrible bout of Repetitive Strain Injury (RSI).

When you misuse your body in the same way for prolonged periods of time, the muscles start seizing up in weird ways and you stop being able to have mobility. I couldn't move some of my fingers, and when I did, nerve pain would shoot up my arm. It was really bad; I

wasn't sleeping, I had to stop working for a couple months because I couldn't touch a keyboard without occasionally crying.

So I decided, 'I never want this to happen again, what do I need to learn?' That's what spurred my interest in anatomy and movement and muscle care. In grad school, I accidentally stumbled into the dance department when they were offering Modern Dance 1. That ended up with me being immersed in dance classes for the rest of grad school and learning that it's really hard to start ballet when you're 25.

One of the things I noticed in industry when I talked with my older colleagues was they said, 'Yeah, that. That's normal. It's completely normal to have crippling pain that's work related by the time you're 25, if you're *really* serious about this.' That's awful, why would we think that this is ok?

We talk about beautiful soldering, boards that have

been very well put together, or the path that a tool takes as it cuts through material. So we have those notions for talking about good mechanics of inanimate things interacting with inanimate things and we value them and we value good craft. But if you're soldering some through holes and the tip of the soldering iron is moving beautifully and the rest of you is scrunched over, why aren't we changing this system too?

One thing I wish could happen on campus is if it were more ok to move and sit and stand in classrooms or meetings, like *explicitly ok*. You can sit on the floor, you can lean against the wall, and if you need to fiddle or go get water, if you want to take your shoes off and walk around in socks, that's fine. Sometimes not being able to do those things can be more distracting.

Whatever lets you be present in this room, do it.

What Do We Learn From Failure?

At Olin we talk a lot about learning as much from our mistakes as our successes—maybe even more. Marketing and Communications would like to hear your stories for a video series that puts the focus on failure. Maybe it's a project that didn't work out, or a machine that malfunctioned or part of a class that left you scratching your head...

Whatever it is, if you learned from something that didn't go as planned let us know.

If you would like to share your story, please email adorning@olin.edu. We plan to videotape these stories on April 18. More details to come.

Notes on Your Capstone

**Benjamin Linder and
Alisha Sarang-Sieminski**
Interviewees

What is the Design Capstone? Officially, it is a two semester project class that is a culmination of the skills that students have learned over their Olin career. The Design Capstone focuses on design, effective communication, and teamwork; skills that, in other college capstone projects, are also taught alongside the capstone itself.

It should be noted that “Capstone” is both SCOPE (Senior Capstone Project in Engineering) and ADE (Affordable Design and Entrepreneurship).

These two Design Capstone directors also coordinate with and inform each other. Benjamin Linder (ADE) and Alisha Sarang-Sieminski (SCOPE) work very closely to provide experiences for students that will meet a broad spectrum of needs, from job preparation to international engagement.

Money

“SCOPE is really rich and ADE is really poor.” Actually, both programs have roughly the same amount of funding per student. They just spend it differently.

Recognition

SCOPE has a big celebratory event at the end of the year. ADE doesn’t. That is in part due to the fact that SCOPE has a beginning and an end, while ADE is designed to keep going for many semesters, trading out

students as they graduate.

The other reason is, in Ben’s words, “[it would be] very difficult for [ADE partners] to attend, and they don’t have the resources to do it. When you do work in poverty, it’s not appropriate to have celebrations where resources could have gone to this specific context.”

Travel

This was a personal query, but it’s still a valid fact: you don’t *have* to travel in order to take ADE (or SCOPE). For example, I would possibly be in physical danger were I to travel to Uganda (they’re very anti-LGBTQ+). Now, I can obviously choose a different team. But let’s assume that I wanted to be on the Mississippi Delta team that I’ve been working with for another class. I don’t feel particularly safe in the deep South either, but I could still be on that team. I wouldn’t travel, and while my experience would be different, it wouldn’t be significantly diminished for not having personally interacted with stakeholders.

Thoughtful Sponsors

Some people say they don’t choose SCOPE is because of the military aspect of it. Currently, the only SCOPE sponsor that has military ties is Raytheon, although they are not solely a defense contractor and do important work in supporting STEM education. SCOPE is aware of students values when it comes to choosing project sponsors.

No, you’re not selling your soul to the Defense Department if you choose SCOPE. And you can choose to not work with a sponsor with defense ties. Bottom line: if SCOPE is a compelling option for you, there are plenty of great sponsors to choose from.

Getting Technical

Once upon a time, there was an ADE project that had to be discontinued because no one at Olin had the technical skill to move the project along. “At one point, I sent an email to the entire student body of one semester, saying ‘we are dying for technical expertise here,’ and I listed all the technical challenges that we needed help with.”

Conversely, SCOPE is not purely technical. The Mitsubishi Team is doing a very experience-heavy, UOCD-esque project that isn’t really geared toward a technical solution. That said, if you want a technical role, it can be found in almost any project. If you want a more user-centered role, it can be found in almost any project.

Your Design Capstone will ultimately be what you make of it.

To help you make an informed decision, Alisha and Ben will be holding an info session this Wednesday at lunch (12:30-1:30) in the Crescent Room. Bring your lunch and your questions. You do not need to be a Rising Senior to attend.

Moments of Jon's Life

Jon Adler
Interviewee

Please read in the voice of YOU.

Meet Jon Adler. Jon was a public school theater kid from Newton, MA, who acted in high school plays alongside Anne Dudek and B.J. Novak. His senior year, he was involved in six of the thirteen productions his school put on that year, directing one of them.

After high school, Jon went to Bates College, thinking that he would study English or History because he really liked stories. After taking a class called "Representations of Mental Illness in Literature," he found that it was really the characters that fascinated him. So he majored in psychology.

Jon knew that he wanted to get clinical training as a therapist. Unsure as to whether or not he would want to do therapy full time, he began looking into graduate programs that would allow him to research personality and do clinical work. Through a serendipitous meeting with a current grad student at Northwestern University, Jon found his future graduate mentor, Dan McAdams (who had developed the theory of Narrative Identity as a major player in Personality Psychology).

Looking back, Jon now sees that he mostly put his own personal development on hold during undergrad,

in favor of his intellectual development, a strategy he now wishes he could go back and undo. Towards the end of college and the years that followed, he worked hard on his identity and also came out as gay. At the beginning of grad school, he met his future husband. They were married six years later, in Massachusetts in 2008, back when it was the only state in the country to recognize same-sex marriage.

As they were not residents of Massachusetts at the time, Jon and his fiancé were told that it would up to the individual city clerk whether or not they could be legally married. Trying Provincetown as the "safest bet," the clerks were very excited to fill out their marriage paperwork.

True to the teacher he would become, the marriage was as much a teaching moment as it was a celebration: instead of a traditional rehearsal dinner, they had a "catered conversation," complete with readings, homework, and flip charts. They led the guests in a discussion about the history and nature of marriage.

Back in Chicago for the last year of his PhD in Personality and Clinical Psychology, Jon needed to do a year-long residency, which occurred for him at a VA hospital in inner-city Chicago. He worked primarily with veterans coming back from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a very intense po-

sition that was not the right fit, but still gave Jon a very good breadth in addition to his previous years of clinical training.

After his residency, Jon knew that he wanted a faculty job. He and his husband also knew that they wanted to have kids, ideally close to Jon's parents in Newton, so location did factor into his job search, though he applied all over the Northeast and in Chicago.

He was mostly applying to narrowly-scoped positions in psych departments at small liberal arts colleges, until he saw the listing for an Assistant Professor of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences at Olin. Having lived in the area, Jon knew of its existence, and thinking that the job and school sounded exciting, he sent in his application.

He came into his faculty "Candidates' Weekend" excited and he left really excited.

Eight years later, the rest is history.

At Olin, Jon (now an Associate Professor) is the only psychologist on the faculty and there are no psych majors to speak of. That means, "I get to teach the things that I think our students most need to know. I'm not preparing them for a major, so it really is about psychological concepts that are going to be useful to you in life, and not because the concepts are going to be useful to you in the 300-level of your major or

because they are going to get you into grad school. So I've been able to organize my teaching entirely in around psychological concepts that I think are going to be useful to our students as people."

Jon also does a lot of research into Narrative Identity, or making sense of the stories people tell about their lives. He collects stories, examines the themes (among other things), and then relates those findings back to mental health. He's interested in identifying the most productive (for mental health) ways people make meaning of difficult experiences. He also makes the distinction between historical truth and narrative truth. One is the series of events as they objectively, verifiably happened, the other is the series of events as the narrator comes to make meaning of them. It's the narrative truth that serves as the foundation of our identity. Jon is also an editor at the *Journal of Personality* and he's spoken with the media a lot about his research.

When he's not being a teacher or a researcher, Jon returns to theater, although he personally enjoys directing more than acting. This semester he's co-teaching a new course called *Constructing and Performing the Self* (the final deliverable, a fully-staged series of personal student monologues, will be April 20 and 21).

Back in 2011, FWOP had a free weekend at Babson's Sorenson Theater where they weren't planning on using the space, so they asked

Jon if he wanted to direct something. He chose *Our Town*.

The play was written by Thornton Wilder in the 1930's, set in the small, fictional town of Grover's Corners, New Hampshire, where everyone knows everyone. To Jon, Grover's Corners was Olin. So he set out to direct the play with two goals in mind: to reflect our community (he got students, faculty (Mark Somerville! Brian Storey!), staff (Sharon Breitbart!), and even faculty's kids to act in the play); and to be an example at Olin of how out-of-the-box thinking can be applied to the performing arts.

At the beginning of the show, the audience was actually brought up onto the mostly-bare stage and they never returned to their seats. They became the townspeople, wandering around the stage as a scene popped up here or there.

Jon will tell you what happened next:

"In the third act, the main character, Emily (played by Claire Barnes '15), has died and the action takes place in the town cemetery. We had the actors playing the dead walk out onto the stage with these white picture frames and lie down on the ground. That brought a chill to the audience; all of a sudden, you couldn't just run around the stage because you don't want to step on someone. So people sort of stood still and looked down the way you do in a cemetery.

"And when the narrator of the play invites Emily to

go back and visit her life, what happens in the play is she picks her tenth birthday. She goes back to her tenth birthday and she can only stand to be there for a few minutes because she realizes how little people appreciate all the details of their daily lives while they're living.

"So the narrator takes her up out of her grave and walks to the upstage curtain, which I assume the audience thought was just the back wall of the theater, but in fact it opens to a very elaborate 1901 kitchen set. The Olin students built us a cast iron stove and there was Emily's Mom (Kate Dramstad '13), in period dress with early morning stage lighting, cooking bacon, and you could hear it sizzling in the pan and you could smell it as soon as the theater curtains opened. She pours coffee that you can smell, and each of us in the audience has this experience that Emily is having. They've been in this imaginative space in their heads and all of a sudden, real smells and real sounds are hitting them, and it's intense. So they're having the experience Emily has and she can only stand it for a few minutes. Then the curtain closes and we're back to the cemetery for the last thirty seconds of the play."

The play was a wonderful community experience, one Jon would like to create again someday. But, for now, he plans to hold off anything big like *Our Town* until his kids get a little bit older and he has more time to devote to it (they're 2 and

4, so sadly we may have to wait a while).

While we're waiting, Jon thinks we could all benefit from working on our own personal narratives. His field of research suggests that in adolescence we start

to become the author of our own lives, rather than being a character in a story told by someone else (often our parents). The first steps in self-authorship ask us to simply parse the flow of our lives into the key moments that

make us who we are. These "self-event connections" are the building blocks of Narrative Identity. If you want to write it, great, but this is the kind of thinking we should all be doing as we start to live our own stories.

Overworked, Burnt Out

Keith Hopper
Contributor

As many of us are gearing up for that final push of the semester, this seems like an excellent point to remind everyone that the faculty are indeed not trying to run students into the ground with project work. Keith Hopper, Entrepreneur in Residence, weighs in.

Most people I've spoken to at Olin about being overworked acknowledge that it can be a problem here, risking the creation of an environment that negatively impacts learning. It's not just students. The few faculty and administration I've spoken to about overwork seem to agree.

It might be easy to blame faculty, because of the assignments they give and the course load, but this can't be the full story. Similarly, it would be easy to assume that students just voluntarily take on too much, but it's likely not that simple either. I wonder if the structure and resources of Olin itself might set up a potential problem.

Olin is an environment that rewards taking on a lot of stuff. Of course, the nature of project-based education is

you can't just study for a test, take it, and be done. Most projects will take as much effort as you're willing to give them. The final tends to be a project deliverable, and most of these deliverables coincide at the end of the semester. As the semester wraps up, some students probably aren't sleeping. They're just trying to get it all done, although arguably this happens at any high-performing school.

Additionally, Olin provides endless opportunities to engage outside of classwork. There's clubs, and SLAC, and a cornucopia of tools, resources, machines, and materials to learn and create with. Wrapped around all this are several structures that encourage more engagement, like passionate pursuits, self-directed courses, SERV, and co-curriculars. And those are just the ones off the top of my head. These all seem like a great, even critical part of the Olin experience, but do endless opportunities for creative engagement come with a downside?

Perhaps there are ways we might improve the situation without sacrificing what makes Olin such an amazing place. Better defining the problem and designing

experiments to reduce overwork or its impact seems like the Olin way. For example, what if we experimented with fewer curricular projects, but ones that went further? This might provide the opportunity to vary the pace of work across semesters and courses and reduce switching costs and distractions from juggling too many simultaneous things. Alternatively, class projects might be broken up into more discrete efforts to vary the pace of work within a semester. I already see some faculty nudging courses in this direction.

I could also see the benefits to just making overwork and student engagement a more active topic of discussion and directed learning. For example, it's important for all of us to learn when to explore and try many things and when to turn away from the distractions and follow through with fewer things. We all need to make decisions throughout our lives on how much we should be taking on and how broad that sweep is. I see Olin as a great place to explore these ideas, and ideal if all of us (not just students) could avoid learning the hard way to the point of getting overworked and overwhelmed.

Everyone's A Charmander

Graham Hooton

Interviewee

The following are the positive and enlightening thoughts from Graham Hooton '14.

Urgency

I feel like everyone, especially in college but just in life, has a sense of urgency. Every time you have an idea, you need to go and implemented immediately, you need to go to change things this cycle. If you have the idea that you can do better then you have to start doing that right away, and it has to become a habit right away. You have to change your life because you had that idea.

Then we're disappointed when we fall short of those goals in our New Year's resolutions or things don't change. We wanted that something to change and we talked to people about it and it didn't change. OK.

Let me point about that [falling short] is expected, that's what happens time and again. Why should you be surprised? It always happens that way, be surprised if it does [work the first time], be happy when you succeed and then if you don't succeed take that as a lesson.

I have dozens of different notebooks and apps and organizations systems. It's funny to go back and revisit [them] because it's like, "Oh OK, well I'll use this for tracking my workouts or use this for tracking reading," and I go back and I see these

lists and I thought of all these great list, but I never went back to it because I didn't stick to it.

Can you imagine if I kept up with all this? That's all I would be doing. I'm an ideas guy. I have great ideas about myself, about the world. I don't have to act on all these ideas; in fact, I need to pick and choose, decide what I want to do. What to do as opposed to what can I get what can do.

Instead of looking at how to change yourself, accept yourself and the community and everything around you. And if there are things that need changing, figure out how you can do those while not actually taking on more work, more labor, more time, because you don't have it. [We] always fill ourselves up to the brim. If you're going to take on something else, be explicit about what.

Teaching

(Graham is getting his teaching certificate for high school science, more specifically physics)

It's amazing and it's actually quite liberating because I feel like I can just teach them anything and everything and they're learning something. And if "this" is the concept, I literally have to talk about the words that are associated with this concept; they've never even heard them before, so you have to learn those words.

It's fundamental but that's what the difficulty of teach-

ing is. Figuring out what people don't know and trying to remember what it's like to [not] know. You can't teach it from a position of knowing and that's why a lot of college professors struggle because they know so much. There's a saying, "The more that you the more you know the more you see." So you see the connections that students aren't seeing, often-times things make sense to you because of a higher level concepts that you've already grasped.

Because of that higher level thing I understand this more basic thing more completely, but [the students] have never seen a lot of [concepts] so they can't use that.

I thought it would be strange to be called Mr. Hooton but it's... I think it would be very strange if they call me anything else because they are Charmanders, running around and they've got their little stubby arms, big eyes and everything and they're so far from evolving into Charmeleons. Or at least, they have a little bit of self awareness. That's my grade elevens, I think, they're the Charmeleon level.

You're never going to know everything so. And sometimes, you get really good at the stuff you're doing, you don't really realize that you're getting good at a certain thing. [You might be] keeping track of shipments or something and [you] get really good at keeping track of [shipments]. And that's a lit-

tle tool in your toolbox that you never really knew you needed and maybe you never do need again. But maybe it does come in handy.

Being Deliberate

Align your actions with your intentions. If you want to be a certain way and you immediately start acting that way; if you realize you're not acting that way, just start acting that way. Take that moment of realization to kickstart you again. And then you eventually build it into habits.

Also, leap at whatever opportunities that you have to do the things you want to do. That's an instinctual thing, you say, "All of this

Engineer Adjacent

Mitch Cieminski

Interviewee

Mitch Cieminski '16 on his plans for after Olin, and the things about his college experience that led him to the path he's exploring now.

I was working at Insper in Brazil halfway through my sophomore year. And I think the reason I decided to leave Olin and do that wasn't because I was some great engineer educator. I didn't feel like I knew anything. But I just needed something to change and I didn't really know what it was. That was coming off of a summer of research that was interesting but I didn't totally love it.

The opportunity to go to Brazil just kind of presented itself. I went and it was awe-

seems like something I want to do. And I just follow it and see where it goes."

Do your best at things. If you're going to be doing something, really dive in, lean into it. Make sure you're getting most of it, and you're putting the most into it.

Find something you can give to people that's really easy for you to give but that makes them feel so special, because you're amplifying your positivity that you bring to the world so much. If what you're doing makes their day, and for you that was just ten minutes. Whatever it was, if you're amplifying your impact, I think you're putting your own efforts to really good work.

some, I'm sure anyone at Olin can attest that I didn't stop talking about it for almost three years. Why I liked it is because really what I was doing there was being an engineering education consultant. And consulting is like a really broad term, but basically I was a collaborator and designer and people respected me by virtue of my position.

Insper professors would ask me questions and seriously want to know my answer because it would seriously affect what they would decide [to do]. I very much felt like my position was not tokenized while I was there, even though we were all kind of worried that it would be. But we really did real work there, so I loved being this engineering education con-

For the first two weeks of my teaching, what mattered to me was that maintaining a life outside of it. And then the process stepped up, so I was teaching every other day, and then it stepped up [again] so I was teaching every day. And I realized that at that point what I valued was doing a really good job. So I dropped [everything else]. I was getting [to school] at seven and staying until nine pm. And then that's when they kick you out of the building, that's when the engineer comes around and says that it's time to go.

But you realize what you have to do what you value, you have to decide what to do and what not to do.

sultant. 'OK, how can I do this for the rest of my life?'

That's where I started.

I [figured] I would probably want a degree so people would believe I know things. I started looking at engineering education programs. And I came across one at Purdue University. And that's where Mel Chua was going at the time. I didn't know her at all. I kind of just like emailed her out of the blue and said, 'Hey I'm thinking that maybe I might want to study engineering education. And you're doing it right now and you're an Oliner, so maybe we should talk.'

We had a conversation while I was still in Brazil; that was the first time I ever met her. It was a weird conversation, in part because she told me to not go to grad

school. She said to get some years of experience as an engineer, then think about it.

That was like pretty decent advice. But I spent the next two years trying to say, 'Well if I'm going to be an engineer what kind of an engineer am I going to be?' I was trying to find jobs within engineering that I liked and it turned out that all the ones that I tried I didn't really like.

My SCOPE project went really well, and I think that was the best engineering experience I had after it came back [from Brazil]. But in general I realized in being back at Olin that I like engineering but not as an engineer. More as an engineer adjacent.

At first I wanted to be the socially engaged engineer

who cares for the world. But now I want to focus way more on the social engagement than the engineering. And slowly that became, 'I want to be a social scientist who studies engineering.'

There are lots of Oliners who do not identify as engineers. Given that so many Oliners aren't engineers, what is our rallying cry at this point? Who are you, fundamentally?

I think that in the world there's a lot more flexibility than people acknowledge. I can make a big decision about where I'm going to grad school right now and the truth of this that in two years I could leave with a master's degree and do something else or at the end of five years I could have a PhD, and just say, "actually I

just want to be an engineer," and I could go back to that. Or I could just decide to do something totally different; I actually do have a lot of flexibility.

And I'm young so that's useful and. I have skills, so those are useful as well, but I'm in a very privileged position to be able to have that kind of flexibility. Right now, I'm living with my parents in between college and grad school and that's because they can support me through that and they're willing to as well.

If I make the wrong decision I can probably deal with it. And I'm pretty confident I can do that. Most people I've met in my life, especially at Olin, can definitely do that as well. Switch and figure things out.

Out of the Ashes

Leon Lam
Contributor

Chapter 8

[THE CLANS SEEK RE- SHANESE PATRONAGE. WHAT IS YOUR REPLY?]

"Good luck, Ambassador," you say. "You'll need it."

Ambassador Yesui gives you an amused look. "There is no luck in my line of work. Only opportunity. Those who seize it prosper, and those who let it slip..." she trails off, then changes the subject. "I find it strange that an enemy would wish me well."

You shrug. "As strange as an enemies sitting at the

same table and having a pleasant conversation?"

Yesui smiles. "Just so."

"If today's ally may be tomorrow's enemy," Adrian cuts in, "perhaps the reverse can be true as well."

Zhenjin's face clouds over, and Yesui's other bodyguards begin to mutter angrily. "You would have us be allies? After what your people have inflicted on mine? After—"

"Zhenjin," Yesui says warningly. He shoots you an incensed look, but falls silent. "My bodyguard has no tact, but he speaks truth. Your people have wronged us greatly—" she raises a hand to forestall Adrian's rebuttal. "—and we have wronged you

in turn."

"I cannot dispute that," you say, "but—"

Yesui shakes her head slowly. "It is not so easy to forgive, Knight of Imvarr. It is not so easy to forget."

You nod. "One of the first Knights wrote: *'The tree of violence grows swift and strong; its roots gorge themselves with blood. But its branches cast a dark shadow, and it bears only bitter fruit.'*

The tree of mercy is delicate and fragile; it must be tended with care, kept safe from worms and rot and frost. But its blossoms are fragrant, its fruit is rich and sweet.'"

"I would not have thought to hear this from a warrior,"

Yesui says.

You nod again. “A lord commands,” you say. “A general directs. A soldier fights and kills. But a surgeon saves those that can be saved, and eases the passing of those who cannot. All place a different value on life, and I cannot say who is right or wrong.”

Out of the corner of your eye, you see Lord Anselm and Lady Jin returning from their meeting with Reshan’s Finance Minister. Your superior looks inordinately pleased with himself, your host wary, and the black-robed Minister looks like someone who’s been convinced to do something unpleasant.

“Ambassador!” Lord Anselm says brightly. “Good to see you at our table. Is something the matter?”

“I was hoping to discuss the river tariffs,” Yesui says without preamble. “Nine parts in a hundred?”

“Nine? They’ll have my head on a pike,” your superior shoots back, sitting down and pulling a plate towards him. “Twelve, and I’ll put in a good word with the new Duke...”

Zhenjin’s ire subsides as Ambassador Yesui wheedles Lord Anselm down to one part in ten, and he begins to move restlessly as they make small talk. You watch him impassively in case he tries anything, but he doesn’t seem to have violence on his mind. In fact...

“Is there something you want to say to me?” you ask Zhenjin. He has prom-

ised you a tale – perhaps he means to tell it now?

“Yes,” he says, and the conversations die down. “I will tell it now, if there are no objections.” He looks around the table for approval, then clears his throat.

“It was at Krakov,” he begins, and you know who he is talking about.

“Sixteen,” you say. “His name was Johannes.”

Zhenjin’s lips are a thin line as he gazes over your shoulder and into the past, putting a name to the face of his past opponent. Then eyes harden, and the young man steels himself against the unwanted connection. “You knew him?”

You nod. Then: “Tell me how he died. I will bring your tale back to the Order, so his successor may learn the truth.”

Zhenjin’s nod is jerky. Out of the corner of your eye, Yesui’s gaze flickers to your face for a moment. Then she coughs and looks away, and Zhenjin obliges.

“It was Krakov where I first fought one of your kind,” he says again. “Where we first learnt that Knights could be killed.” He leans back slightly, casting his gaze about the table. “How much do you know?”

“I am told it was a battle of some import,” Lady Jin says with a shrug. “Heavy losses on both sides, but eventual victory for the clans.”

Yesui nods. “Overwhelming victory in the field – our first – followed by a six-month siege. An Imvarri army dead, along with two

Knights.”

“A city razed,” Adrian growls. “Its inhabitants put to the sword.” Yesui’s bodyguards bristle at the accusation in his words, but decorum keeps them in check.

“Unfortunate. But – alas – all too common in war.” Lord Anselm leans back in his seat, ignoring Adrian’s look of betrayal. “Forty-Seven?” he asks.

“I was there,” you say, and you remember.

~
You remember the disastrous rout; the Second Army caught on the march just as it left Krakov – a volley of arrows followed by a wedge of elite troops and heavy cavalry punching through Lord-Commander Gregor’s weakened center, splitting the army in half and encircling its thirty thousand soldiers to be butchered like sheep.

Then signal banners wavering over the carnage for brief moments, standard-bearers fighting tooth and nail for a few more seconds to pass on the Lord-Commander’s last message:

Retreat.

A desperate push for freedom, agonized screams tearing through the air behind you; some are cut off by choked gurgling, others go on and on and on...

Columns of panicking men and women struggling to maintain formation at a dead sprint, slipping and sliding in the mud while arrows fall like hissing rain and howling half-men tear into the rear...

But Imvarri discipline

holds. Your force takes grievous losses, dozens of men dying in agony for every foot of ground you take, but they fix their eyes on your back as you cut through the encircling clansmen, carving a path to salvation with steel and fire.

Nothing stands in your way for more than a moment, enemy rank-and-file fleeing in the face of inevitability – a pack of shapeshifters hurls themselves into the melee in a cacophony of howls and roars; a cumulative ton of feral strength and bestial fury seeking your death, but you cut them apart in the blink of an eye.

A spearhead of grim-faced soldiers widens your breach for their comrades to pass, and your ragged division tears its way out of the killing field step by bloody step. The few surviving mages churn the soil and mud behind the rearguard into quicksand, stymieing your enemy's pursuit.

After what feels like an eternity, a ragged cheer goes up from the Imvarri as you break out of the encirclement, the last enemies finally breaking and scattering. The city of Krakov sits barely a mile ahead of you, its walls the only safe haven within a day's travel.

But you have so few soldiers left – two thousand, if your eyes can still be trusted – and more clansmen are surely be on their way. A competent commander would send shapeshifters and cavalry to catch up to you before all two thousand men can find shelter in the

city, and the Khagan is nothing if not competent.

A full retreat is suicide, you think. We won't get everyone into the city in time, and the enemy will attack when Krakov's gates open to let us through. If we fight and lose, they'll take the city in a day.

You traverse the length of the column, loping past exhausted troops in an officer to consult a surviving officer on strategy, but your efforts are in vain. Not a single red armband remains – it seems the clansmen focused on finishing off the chain of command after killing mages.

Two thousand is not nearly enough, you think as your soldiers stumble and limp past you, too tired to do anything but put one foot in front of another. Ten thousand would not be enough.

You consider your options, then make your decision...

~
WHAT DID YOU CHOOSE?

1. [Sacrifice. You bought time with the lives of your soldiers. Five hundred men and women in ambush were no match for the best warriors the plains had to offer, but they blunted the Khagan's advance enough for you to evacuate everyone else.]

2. [Endurance. You organized a fighting withdrawal into Krakov. The Khagan hammered your forces between his elite troops and the anvil of the city gates, but you held your ground in the face of heavy losses. Imvarri steel

may bend, but it does not break easily.]

3. [Aggression. You feigned retreat, then fell upon your pursuers. The Khagan's elite soldiers were deadly and swift, but in their minds they had already won. After all, how much fight could a routed foe possibly put up?]

~
“~we cut down almost all the Imvarri, but the Alukhai and Tariat were too eager for glory and spoils. Their ranks thinned, and they let a handful of soldiers escape,” Zhenjin is saying. “Four–five thousand?”

“Closer to five,” you say. “Two thousand from the western pocket, a little more than two and a half from the east. The eastern breakout was able to pull away and flee. Those from the west... not so much.”

The clansman nods. “I heard the tales of your flight,” he says. “The Khagan sent sixty of his finest warriors and ten thousand men to bar your path to the city, but they returned without success.”

You remain silent. “Truly, a cornered foe is capable of anything,” Zhenjin continues, and you can tell from his grimace that the words are bitter on his tongue.

Lady Jin nods. “A trapped beast will gnaw its own leg off to gain freedom; a man can escape almost any snare, if he has wits and strength and composure in equal measure.”

“Beyond that,” Lord Anselm says, “killing the

hunter tends to be a valid – if somewhat more bloodthirsty – option.”

I did what was necessary, you think. I did what I had–

Yesui interrupts your thoughts. “Those of my people who fought at Krakov have a name for you,” she says. “For all three of you. They call the archer *Khar Sumnuud*, the assassin *Olon Sün*. Black Arrow and Hungry Ghost.”

She pauses for a moment. Looks you up and down, gaze keen and appraising and just the slightest bit wary.

“They call you *Yar-gachin*,” she says finally. “Butcher.”

You incline your head in acceptance as Zhenjin continues his tale. War is war, after all.

~~~~~  
Zhenjin’s tale of the siege is, unsurprisingly, a grim one. Taking a city tends to be as messy and lethal as it is long, especially one as well defended as Krakov.

*“The defenders refused to surrender, so we camped a third of a mile away from the city walls,” he says. “Far enough to keep us safe from the stone-hurlers, but not far enough for Khar Sumnuud. Two hundred dead on the first day – pack leaders, shamans, medicine-bearers, picked off one by one. Strong warriors or wise healers, youthful or battle-hardened, brave or cowardly... all dead the same way.”*

Zhenjin purses his lips and whistles, and Yesui’s bodyguards begin to fidget.

*“First a faint whistle*

*getting louder and louder. Then–”*

He claps his hands abruptly, and the bodyguards jump and shoot him reproachful looks.

*“Another one gone,” he says, scowling. “Just like that. No honor in their deaths – not even the chance of retaliation. We moved the camp three times, back and back and back. But we were never far enough, and could not retreat further without dangerously thinning our lines. So we grit our teeth and watched good men and women die as we felled trees and dug into the earth to form the circumvallation – watchtowers and barracks ringing a ten-foot earthen wall.”*

You remember Thirty-Five casually loosing arrow after arrow from the city walls. “*It’s like killing ants,*” she’d said. “*No matter how many you squash, there are a thousand more.*”

Zhenjin goes on:

*“We completed the wall six days and nine hundred men later. It should have taken us two weeks, but we worked ourselves to the bone. We would be safe once it was up, after all.*

*Olon Sün had been busy, as it turned out. The night the earthworks were complete and we toasted our success, he slit four dozen throats – medicine men, experienced fighters, pack leaders... important men and women whose loss would be felt most keenly.*

*From then on, his targets slept together, packed into great tents ringed with keen-*

*nosed shapeshifters. But Olon Sün never so much as tested the sentries.*

*He knew we couldn’t guard everything at once, so he switched to sabotage.*

*No-one so much as caught a glimpse of him in action – all we ever saw was the trail of destruction he left behind: siege engines and tents in flames, food and water laced with slow-acting poison that took its toll over weeks...”*

The plainsman grins.

*“Then he slipped up. We held a clandestine meeting of most of the surviving medicine-men – the bait was too tempting for him to pass up. He was expecting four or five shapeshifters, maybe eight at most, but we had two dozen lying in wait.*

*We fell upon him when he tried to silence the sentries – his ungodly power made him almost invisible in the dim light, but we sniffed him out and tore him to pieces.”*

Zhenjin pauses for a moment, then continues: “For what it’s worth, *Olon Sün* went down fighting. He killed six of us, and left me with this.” He pulls at his collar, revealing a jagged scar across one side of his neck and part of his chest.

“I... see,” you say. “He...”

*What else do I say? You wonder, a vague sense of unease crawling up your spine. What do I say in memory of a fellow warrior who gave his life in battle? What do I say to his killer?*

*What will they say about me?*

“He will be missed,” you say at last.

# The Civic Designfest is coming to Olin College

The Newton Innovation Center is partnering with Olin College and the BOW Collaboration to host the MassChallenge Civic Designfest, connecting students with civic leaders across the local public and private sectors. They will brainstorm solutions to some of the biggest issues in civic technology, with a focus on Sustainability, Civic Tech/IoT and Transportation. Students will walk away with a clearer understanding of the processes and technologies needed to create impact, along with a portfolio of specific civic innovation proposals and Designfest Award Certificates.

## **CIVIC EXPERTS:**

**Transportation** *Nicole Freedman (City of Newton), and Justin Holmes (Zipcar)*

**Civic Tech & IoT** *Chuck Tanowitz (N2 Innovation District), and Travis Connors (Borealis Ventures)*

**Sustainability** *Susanne Rasmussen (City of Cambridge), and Jeff Satwicz (Big Belly Solar)*

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