



A major with strings attached: Connecticut student Lauren MacKenney with Professor Ballard

Puppets Aren't for Dummies

When Robin Petras came to the University of Connecticut to get a degree in theater arts, her exposure to puppets was the same as most people's. "You know," she says, "the Muppets." Then, on a whim, she took a class in puppetry. "I began to realize there was art in it. It's the one art form that involves all skills—acting, building, voice, choreography." That's when she decided to switch majors, joining a small, dedicated elite in UConn's puppetry program.

The program, one of just three in the country (the others are at the universities of Hawaii and California), was started in 1962 by Frank Ballard. "There's been a surge in puppetry since the '70s," says Ballard, who remains the program's sole professor and guiding spirit. Jim Henson's Muppets had a hand in it; so did the sophisticated electronic puppets used in movies. Ballard himself is "old-fashioned" and draws the line at robotics. His 12 graduate and undergraduate students study construction, production and history of the art, leading up to a year-

end production of a classical work. How demanding is it? Petras had to take two incompletes in other subjects last semester and give up her waitressing job to make time for long nights in the puppetry lab. "You can never know too much," she says.

And yes—job prospects are good, thank you. One of Ballard's graduates works for filmmaker George Lucas; another is redesigning the model of the starship Enterprise for the new "Star Trek" TV series; a third operates the man-eating plant in the off-Broadway production of "Little Shop of Horrors." Says Ballard, "We get so many calls. We just can't turn them out."

Girl-Crazy in Chapel Hill

Women now outnumber men at the University of North Carolina—and that has some old boys alarmed. "We have a girls' school in Chapel Hill," UNC trustee John Pope, 62, complained to a local paper. The university was once a mainly male bastion, but strong departments in such female-dominated areas as nursing and pharmacy have attracted

a student body that is 60 percent female. Pope and other trustees worry that this sex ratio could mean fewer gifts from alums. "Most female graduates I know are not wage earners and don't have any money," laments trustee George Ragsdale, 51. "They married other folks and are at home raising children."

Pope proposes that UNC try a new kind of balancing act: a mandated 50/50 male-female ratio. It's unlikely that his proposal will pass, but even so, the trustees' review of UNC admissions has sparked charges of sexism from students of both genders. "I don't think any good reasons have been presented yet for revising the admissions process," says student body president Brian Bailey. "It made the trustees look really backward."

A Student 'Like Everyone Else'

Until now, young people with kidney disease usually had to forgo college. Thrice-weekly dialysis sessions meant spending hours in hospitals, and most campus cafeterias didn't offer special diets. At Penn State, however, an off-campus dorm will be offering students with kidney problems nutritional guidance and help with treatments. The hope is that these students will be able to concentrate on their minds—and not just their bodies. "The idea is not to lie around and think you're going to die," says program administrator John McQueary.

A private nonprofit group has supported the effort so far. If he can locate \$175,000 in additional funding from other sources, McQueary plans to expand the program to 30 students, with a floor of the dorm devoted to dialysis machines. The six students living there now drive to a nearby hospital for dialysis; they also receive counseling to help them stay in school. Guy Martin, 22, for example, had dropped out of college in New Jersey. Now he is a Penn State freshman who majors in business, coaches in a recreational basketball league and plans to try out for the baseball team this spring. "Before I came here, I wasn't doing anything at all," he says. "Now I go to parties and have fun like everyone else."

Special help: Penn State student Jimmy Giargiana in dialysis

