HEALTH IS HAPPENING EVERYWHERE AT AU

American University students and faculty share an important quality: they are deeply engaged in the classroom and in the world. In this issue of Connections we explore the diverse ways this philosophy is taking root in the College of Arts and Sciences.

“Health is Happening Everywhere at AU” is the unofficial motto of the new Department of Health Studies. But you’ll see the university’s commitment to health reflected in every corner of the College, including biology, sociology, economics, psychology, environmental science, and even mathematics and statistics.

You’ll meet Gaming Professor Josh McCoy, who is turning preconceived notions about video games on their ear, designing and implementing them to change people’s lives for the better. Anne Sullivan is one of his postdocs, and she is busting gender stereotypes in the field.

Kim Blankenship is part of a DC-wide consortium determined to find new ways of prevention and treatment for HIV and AIDS. She answers our questions about why rates of HIV are so high in Washington, and what’s being done to bring them down.

Finally, we’ll reveal surprising research findings that could help veterans manage the crippling chronic pain from which so many suffer.

So, whether you’re at home or on the AU quad, we hope you’ll enjoy learning about some of the latest goings-on in the College of Arts and Sciences. As always, to stay connected, please follow us on facebook.com/AUcollege, and twitter.com/AUcollege.

Peter Starr
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

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Letter from the Dean

Creating a Culture of Health
A new collaboration at AU

Breaking Boundaries, Creating New Gaming Worlds
Postdoctoral Fellow Anne Sullivan

Ahead of the Game
Josh McCoy, persuasive play, and the AU Game Lab

The Discovery of Homo Naledi
AU PhD student helps excavate ancient human relative

Health is Happening Everywhere at AU
Faculty across the College contribute to the field of health studies

Shaping Public Health Policy
Justin Morgan focuses on health—for everyone

The Power of Meditation
Helping vets cope with chronic pain

One Gives, Another Receives
The Carol Bird Ravenal Travel Award

5 Questions for Kim Blankenship
Fighting HIV through scientific leadership

The 13 Keys to the White House
Allan Lichtman’s historic record of predicting elections

Achievements
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY’S new Department of Health Studies (DHS) was born last fall within the College of Arts and Sciences to promote scholarship in a field that touches every school in the university.

Improving health—on campus, in the District of Columbia, across the United States, and around the world—is one of the most important issues of our time. Aging populations, global pandemics, increasing environmental degradation, and a rise in childhood obesity are just some of the many global health challenges, and they are all addressed in the new collaboration at AU. Its overarching goal is training future leaders in effective ways to improve health and reduce health disparities.

New and Autonomous

Until this academic year, the Department of Health Studies and School of Education were part of the same unit—the School of Education, Teaching, and Health. The growth of their respective programs led the university to elevate them into autonomous units.

Already, DHS has more than 430 students enrolled in its undergraduate and graduate programs, earning degrees in health promotion management, public health, and nutrition education.

Students can also enter a three-year Public Health Scholars Program, or take part in the department’s newest program, an online master’s degree in nutrition education that is already enrolling nearly 100 students a year.

Health, Everywhere

Health is a core component of many other departments in the College—including psychology, sociology, math and statistics, biology, environmental science, and history. In addition, there are health-related majors and courses in the other schools at AU.

In the College of Arts and Sciences, health studies students may tailor electives from a wide range of disciplines—classes include the history of medicine, environmental health, infectious diseases, and the psychology of health and well-being. Students in statistics help create mathematical models for disease epidemiology. Biology students conduct cell biology research that is published in peer-reviewed cancer journals. Neuroscience students are working with faculty to explore how chemicals in the brain may influence things like addiction and inflammation.

“DHS has the unique opportunity to teach and conduct collaborative research across all the boundaries and all the units within the whole university,” said Professor Stacey Snelling, chair of the new department.

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A Culture of Health at AU

Of course, good health begins at home—which, for thousands
of students, faculty and staff, is
the AU campus. Snelling points
out that efforts aimed at bet-
ter health can be seen every-
where—in the fitness center,
the student dining hall, the fac-
culty-staff wellness program, on
its green walking paths, and all
over the tobacco-and smoke-
free campus. “We are work-
ing across units—and with the
offices of Human Resources
and Campus Life—to create a
culture of health for everyone,
so that students, faculty, and
staff can reach their full poten-
tial. We want our students to
become models for making
good and healthy choices.”

Among higher education
institutions, AU is a national
leader in its commitment to the
mental and physical health of
its students. AU College of Arts
and Sciences Dean Peter Starr
believes it is essential for the uni-
versity to look critically at its sup-
port system. “Our student body
is changing dramatically, and our
infrastructure must do the same
if we are to ensure academic
success and well-being for all of
our students,” he said.

The Future
As DHS grows, so does its
influence. On campus, it
continues to build a culture of health. Beyond, it works to
improve the lives of people
cross the world—through
research, community service,
and training the next gener-
ation of leaders in health and
health promotion.

“Health is a field that touches
every member of our commu-
nity, as well as the world around
us,” says Snelling. “Our faculty
members are pioneers in innova-
tive research. Our students, and
the entire AU community, stand
to gain so much from the work
being done here.”

Breaking Boundaries,
Creating New
Gaming Worlds

Postdoctoral Fellow Anne Sullivan

by Patty Housman

ANNE SULLIVAN is breaking
boundaries in the traditionally
male-dominated world of gam-
ing. Eschewing the shoot-em-
up video games that dominate
the industry, Sullivan is developing games
that focus on human relationships, the arts,
crafts, and storytelling.

“Right now, most games are targeted
to a specific audience of men,” she says.
“They are not representative of all new
game players. I am interested in explor-
ing new areas in game play to provide new
games for new audiences.”

Sullivan herself is part of the demograph-
ic change sweeping through the game
world. A recent survey by the International
Game Developers Association found that
the percentage of women in the gaming
workforce has doubled in recent years—
from 11.5 percent in 2009 to 22 percent
in 2014.

Cross-Cultural Competence
Sullivan is working with Computer Science
Assistant Professors Joshua McCoy and
Michael Treanor on a video game for
Educational Testing Services (ETS), which
will be used to test cross-cultural compe-
tence—the skill set that helps people adapt
to, and even thrive in, intercultural or unfa-
miliar environments. “Players are space
explorers who crash on another planet, and
they must trade, bargain, persuade, and
build rapport to survive,” Sullivan says.

This is play with a purpose. What makes
the game unique is its artificial intelligence
system, which will personalize the game’s
characters and give each one different
human traits and corresponding behav-
iors. Greedy characters, for example,
will act differently from open and friendly
characters. “In this game, interactions
with people matter,” says Sullivan, who is
helping develop the artificial intelligence
system, design the game, and create tools
dialogue.

Computational Craft
Sullivan, who holds a PhD in computer
science from the University of California–
Santa Cruz, is an artist, designer, quilter,
programmer, and engineer. She says she
is most excited by projects that combine
these passions. In particular, she works
on computational craft projects that merge
technology and crafting. She developed
Loominary, an artificial intelligence-assisted
weaving game that creates personalized
scarves based on a player’s choices in the
game. She also co-founded Play Crafts,
Inc., a company that creates online design
tools for crafters.

For Sullivan, the best part of crafting and
game development is telling a story. “In
crafting, there is a lot of storytelling hap-
pening in a visual way, and games can be
the same,” she says. In the future, Sullivan
wants to continue developing games with
a strong narrative component. “I’m most
interested in creating games with stories
that make players smile as they play.”
How has gaming changed over the past quarter century?

Inside the AU Game Lab, students are hard at work playing video games. These are not your parents’ old-fashioned video games, however, and the “play” is not just for fun. AU’s Game Design Program has a serious purpose. It is the center of AU’s strategic effort to turn game design and development into an academic discipline, with real life application in areas as diverse as bullying prevention, drug addiction recovery, and persuasive play. AU is rapidly becoming a national leader in the field—The Princeton Review ranked the Game Design Program in the Top 25 in the world.

The gaming graduate program is a partnership between the College of Arts and Sciences and the School of Communication. Faculty member Josh McCoy is a key member on the College side of the team. An assistant professor in computer science, McCoy came to AU in 2014 from the University of California–Santa Cruz, where he specialized in artificial intelligence in computer games.

How has gaming changed over the past quarter century?

Other than the well-known fact that video games have eclipsed movies in worldwide revenue, they have grown in ways that make them have real impact on the world. Games now include a much larger demographic, are playable in many more spaces, and can express an ever-increasing range of ideas, themes, and emotions. It is now common to see people in all walks of life playing games in any number of settings.
While expanding in demographics and locations, games have also been maturing as an expressive medium. In contrast to sports games, and games based in violence, you can now experience games with computationally generated worlds in which the entire environment is subject to alteration and play. Vibrant, emotional, and immersive stories can be experienced. Players can engage in social play in domains ranging from intense competition in future-themed cyberspaces to soulful exploration of the remains of ancient cultures. What makes the current moment in games truly interesting is how much we have yet to explore. Video games are still in their infancy when compared to other media like print or film.

**How did “playing games” become a serious academic discipline?**

Games are now seen as more than the playthings of children, and are considered complex, human-centric, computational artifacts. Expanding the technical aspects of how games are created, studying how they are played, reflecting on what they reveal about the human condition, and experimenting on what they can express are all now part of academic discourse. As one of many areas in this discipline, my research and works combine game technology, social science, artificial intelligence, and design to make new types of games and computational experiences possible.

**What is persuasive play?**

Persuasive play is the application of game design to influence interests, activities, or opinions of individual players, and to potentially convey the message of the game to a broad audience. Often this means the use of games in non-traditional contexts such as policy, advocacy, and social justice. The goals of persuasive play vary wildly, and can include building empathy, or teaching lessons in cross-cultural competence. Persuasive play can include games that are digital, analog, 60 seconds long, 60 days long, playable on a smartphone, or playable on a pay phone. The unifying concept is designing for change.

**What do you hope to accomplish in AU’s Game Design Program?**

The university’s Game Lab is key to my goals as a researcher and educator. As AU is one of the few universities in the world with a focus on serious games, it presents a rare opportunity to put games in the center of research that is both technical and interdisciplinary. The type of work I do can be seen in Star Trek. Think of handling the complexities involved in creating a Holodeck character driven by artificial intelligence that actually behaves like a Victorian lord or noir detective. This is the level of computed character detail and nuanced generated performance I strive to approach. Not only does this type of work require developing new artificial intelligence systems, but it needs to be informed by what we know about social science, the humanities, and experience design.

A critical aspect of this work is including AU students in my research in meaningful ways. I want to share the results of this work with students—particularly those in the Game Lab and the Computer Science Department. While participating, students take the roles of developer, designer, author, and creative foil. The basic requirement for joining in this work is having the drive to create the types of games they want to play in the future.

**What makes the current moment in games truly interesting is how much we have yet to explore.**

**What characteristics do your gaming students have in common, and how do they differ?**

Our students come from surprisingly diverse backgrounds, and have wide-ranging experiences. Our ranks include clinical psychologists, screenwriters, journalists, and visual novel authors. Although our game design students arrive with a wide variety of passions, goals, and life experiences, they all want to apply game design or persuasive play to their own areas in useful ways. They arrive with agendas and topics and leave with the ability to design and develop games tailored to their goals.

**Can you describe a situation where videogames diffused a tense situation, or made people think differently about their behavior?**

One of my works is the game Prom Week, a dramatic playable story about the lives of several high school students set in the week before their prom. This game features an artificial intelligence system that models character behavior, and is based on concepts from social science and the humanities. As such, we were able to author stories that contain complex social puzzles for the player to solve.

One such puzzle is based around Oswald, the debate team captain, who has the goal of finding a date to the prom. Many players try to spark a flame between Oswald and the adorable yet emotional Lil, the popular and imperial Monica, or even Jordan the competitive skater. However, we designed all of those potential solutions to be very difficult to achieve. The easier path is found when the player breaks with the pervasive heteronormative bias in video games and kindles a romance between Oswald and the class president, Nicholas. Four years after Prom Week’s release, we still receive messages from play-
The Discovery of Homo Naledi

AU PhD Student Helps Excavate Ancient Human Relative

by Patty Housman
FOR BECCA PEIXOTTO, it all started out with a Facebook ad seeking “tiny and small specialized cavers and spelunkers with excellent archaeological, palaeontological, and excavation skills.”

Peixotto, a College of Arts and Sciences anthropology PhD student and graduate of the public anthropology master’s program, answered the ad—and became part of the team that made one of the biggest archaeological discoveries in recent years: a new species of human relative named Homo naledi.

The excavation was heralded across the world and is expected to change the way scientists think about human origins. “It was a momentous discovery,” said Peter Starr, dean of the College of Arts and Sciences. “And we at AU are very fortunate and proud to have one of our own play such a central role in this enormous effort.”

The Expedition

Two years ago, Peixotto and five other female scientists squeezed into a narrow chute leading to the Rising Star Cave in Maropeng, South Africa. Over three weeks, they worked 30 meters under the ground to excavate more than 1,550 fossil specimens, making it the single largest-ever fossil hominid find in Africa.

The specimens represented at least 15 distinct individuals, both male and female, and ranged in age from infants to older adults. They were identified as belonging to a previously unknown human relative that was named Homo naledi by the expedition’s lead investigator Lee Berger.

The Beginning

For Peixotto, the expedition began with the Facebook ad, placed by Berger, looking for skilled archaeologists. Successful candidates also had to be small enough to fit through the narrow chute that led to the chamber. “It was the fastest cover letter I’ve ever written,” said Peixotto, who jumped at the chance to be part of the expedition.

“Studying at American University, I received really excellent training in field methods from the Dismal Swamp Field School with Professors [Daniel] Sayers and [Richard] Dent, and many other archaeologists along the East coast, so I felt that I had a good background to be working in this kind of environment,” she says.

30 Meters Deep

Peixotto explains that excavating in the chamber requires a unique skill set. “It’s not just that you have to be a caver, it’s not just that you need to be an archeologist or palaeoanthropologist,” she says. “It’s also that you have to be able to deal with the environments, deal with the eyes of senior scientists watching your every move with video cameras, and also deal with things when they go wrong, because a lot can go wrong when you bring technology into an environment that it’s not built for.”

Physically, the excavation was not without danger or difficulty. “It was between a 25- and 45-minute commute from the surface down into the final chamber, traversing the cave system to get there,” Peixotto says. She and her team needed to slide down and sideways, climb on their stomachs, scale a jagged wall, step over gaps, and deal with the lack of light and the potential of falling.

At the same time, Peixotto describes the incredible beauty of the Rising Star Cave, which was named for the calcite formations on the ceilings of its chambers. “They are starburst-like formations, really delicate and beautiful,” says Peixotto, “and when you sit in that cave and shine your headlight up, it looks like you are looking at stars. It is really amazing.”

An Open Access Expedition

The Rising Star Expedition, says Peixotto, was unusual in the traditionally closed, guarded field of paleoanthropology—it was officially an open access expedition. This means that expedition members blogged, tweeted, and video chatted to share their work with schools, teachers, and the public all over the world. At the same time, all their research and articles are downloadable and available to everyone.

The multidisciplinary team included senior scientists, early career researchers, students, and volunteers, highlighting the collaborative nature of anthropological research. In a field where discoveries are closely guarded, the open access ethos of Rising Star represents a radical shift toward a more inclusive space.

“Shifting this paradigm, and changing the traditional power structure, and changing who has access to this information is really important and quite exciting,” says Peixotto, who explained that each time she visits a school to talk about the
Health is Happening Everywhere at AU

Faculty Across the College Contribute to the Field of Health Studies

“My work is in the field of spatial statistics. I develop statistical tools that can detect geographic trends and clusters in data sets. In particular, my methods help locate epidemic diseases and outbreaks.”

MONICA JACKSON, Associate Professor, Mathematics and Statistics

“My interest in public health began in the 1980s when HIV/AIDS first came to public attention. I was attracted to the intersection of immigration history and the history of American medicine and public health. In addition to teaching courses in the history of medicine and migration and public health, I published three books about health and history, including Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the ‘Immigrant Menace’ (Basic Books, 1994).”

ALAN KRAUT, University Professor, History

“I lead the public health curriculum and advise students studying this curriculum. Our students are passionate about making a difference in the world, and public health provides them opportunities to do so through social justice, advocacy, science, health policy, and more. I always tell my students that they have chosen a most noble profession.”

JOLYNN GARDNER, Director, Public Health Program, Health Studies

“My research lab evaluates and presents research on the cost-effectiveness, cost-benefit, and cost-utility of suicide prevention, cognitive-behavioral therapies for depression, alternative treatments for seasonal affective disorder, substance abuse prevention programs for children, gender-sensitive inpatient treatments for substance abuse, and consumer-operated services for mental illness.”

BRIAN YATES, Professor, Psychology
“My research and policy experience is in a number of areas related to public health, including access to health insurance, causes of rising healthcare costs, anticompetitive behaviors of pharmaceutical companies, healthcare antitrust, and federal regulation of food and tobacco products.”

MARTHA STARR, Professor, Economics

“My research focuses on nutritional neuroscience. I study the positive protective effect of micronutrients and the negative effects of food additives on neurological function. My work influences the field of public health by producing information on the treatment and prevention of neurological symptoms through dietary change, which can then be used to inform public policy work.”

KATHLEEN HOLTON, Assistant Professor, Health Studies

“Research in my laboratory focuses on tobacco and caffeine. My research investigates cognitive and behavioral factors that influence smoking and behavior. My caffeine research examines the effects of caffeine on sleep and anxiety, and the caffeine withdrawal syndrome.”

LAURA JULIANO, Professor, Psychology

“My research shows that diet, obesity, and cognitive functioning are causally intertwined. We have identified mechanisms that link overeating and body weight gain to impairments in learning and memory processes. Our studies suggest that the emergence of dementia during late adulthood may originate obesity-related brain dysfunctions that can occur even in childhood.”

TERRY DAVIDSON, Professor, Psychology, Director, Center for Behavioral Neuroscience

“My research in Guam measures the impact of sewage pollution on nearshore ecosystems such as mangrove forests, seagrasses, and coral reefs. These ecosystems provide a broad range of important services, including food production, coastal protection, and recreation. As these ecosystem decline, so do the services they provide. Diminished coastal ecosystems undermine food security and protection against a rising ocean. A healthy ocean is a requisite vaccine against public health concerns in a rapidly changing world.”

KIHO KIM, Department Chair, Environmental Science

“My research focuses on community-based health promotion programs for people at risk for health disparities. I am researching the efficacy of nutrition education, parental stress management, and community gardening components on the health behaviors and diets of Latino families living in affordable housing communities.”

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ELIZABETH COTTER, Professorial Lecturer, Health Studies
WHEN JUSTIN MORGAN (BS public health ’16) graduates from American University this spring, he will begin a career aimed at creating social and physical environments that promote good health for all. As a research assistant at the Urban Institute, he will focus on the social determinants of health—everything from access to good food, clean water, healthcare, exercise, workplace safety, and green space.

This is not the first time that Morgan will work collaboratively to analyze public health issues from a perspective of social justice. As a scholar in the AU Frederick Douglass Distinguished Scholars (FDDS) Program, Morgan received mentorship and leadership training, met with leaders dedicated to service such as Colin Powell and Sonia Sotomayor, and worked on multiple service projects with other FDDS scholars. In reflection, he says that the time he spent with other students in the program is one of his most treasured experiences at AU. “Some of my favorite moments were spent sitting and talking with my FDDS cohort about life, service, and social justice.”

It was through these interactions with his peers and mentors in the FDDS program that Morgan decided to pursue a public health major. And in 2013, he became the inaugural president of the Public Health Association, a student group that creates a community for students majoring in public health at AU.

In addition to his leadership on campus, Morgan has immersed himself in the public health field in DC through internships at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health; the American University Center on Health, Risk, and Society; the Center for American Progress; and the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Morgan also spent a semester studying abroad in London through the International Education of Students Program.

Morgan attributes many of these opportunities to Jolynn Gardner, director of AU’s Public Health Program. “Professor Gardner has connected me with professionals in the field and helped me greatly as I explored career options and opportunities,” he said.

As he begins his career, Morgan sees issues of social justice and access as the most pressing topics in public health. “The health of communities is less shaped by personal decisions and more shaped by your circumstances and access,” says Morgan. “Is your neighborhood walkable? Can you access a grocery store? These are the critical issues I want to address in my career.”

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Shaping Public Health Policy

Justin Morgan Focuses on Health—For Everyone

by Hannah Klaus
THEY RETURN to the United States with multiple types of trauma, and suffer from chronic pain at one of the highest rates of any population in the United States. They are US veterans, and their healthcare providers are working overtime to help alleviate this pain.

Now, a new study suggests that veterans may be empowered to help themselves with the practice of meditation. Research conducted at the Washington DC VA Medical Center reveals that veterans who practiced meditation reported a 20 percent reduction in pain intensity, as well as pain interference (how pain interferes with everyday aspects of life, such as sleep, mood, and activity level).

“Meditation allows a person to accept pain and respond to it with less stress and emotional reactivity. Our theory is that this process increases coping skills, which in turn can help veterans to self-manage their chronic pain,” said Thomas Nassif, who conducted the study while a professorial lecturer in AU’s Department of Health Studies. He is also a researcher at the VA Medical Center, and lead author of the study, which was published in Military Behavioral Health.

Pain is a significant health issue among the approximately 2.6 million service members who served in Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and Operation Iraqi Freedom in Iraq since 2001, according to the Veterans Health Administration. Musculoskeletal pain conditions are the most frequently diagnosed issue, exceeding any other medical and psychological concern. Chronic pain is also found in most combat veterans who have sustained a traumatic brain injury.

The form of mindfulness meditation administered in the study, Integrative Restoration Yoga Nidra, or iRest, is used at Veterans Health Administration medical centers and active-duty military facilities nationwide. The study participants attended meditation sessions twice weekly and were given iRest recordings to engage in self-practice. By the end of eight weeks, they had acquired useful mindfulness skills that empowered them to use meditation as a tool to help manage their pain, Nassif said.

“In many cases, primary care physicians are the ones expected to help individuals overcome their chronic pain,” Nassif said. “One of the most commonly used tools in our toolbox is opioids. Veterans in this study, and many who come to meditation sessions, find that opioid medication is a short-term solution. Meditation could be a useful tool to help veterans manage their pain over the long term.”

### Helping Vets Cope with Chronic Pain

by Rebecca Basu

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Carol Bird Ravenal

Carol Bird Ravenal was born into a family of artists and architects. But her personal artistic journey was further inspired by a series of opportunities to travel extensively throughout Europe. Her exposure to other cultures and artistic expressions propelled her to become an accomplished painter, professor, and art historian.

After earning her PhD from Harvard in art history, she received a travel award to explore Europe for a year. “I travelled from one end of Europe to the other; I visited countless museums to experience the works I had admired in years of classes,” she says. While teaching art and art history at AU, Ravenal received another travel award, and she travelled to Norway to study the work of painter and printmaker Edvard Munch. Several years later, the five Scandinavian embassies awarded her a travel grant to study and teach nineteenth century Nordic Art in connection with an exhibit at the Corcoran Gallery of Art.

For the last seven years, Ravenal has given AU students the same chance to learn about art firsthand through the Carol Bird Ravenal Travel Award. Ravenal provides grants to AU studio art and art history students, in the hope that exploring great works may inspire their own artistic sensibilities. “If you are creating art, or studying the many facets of art history, you need to explore, savor, and digest the wider world. A student’s world can expand exponentially with the first views of a strange and unknown place, whether it’s Paris, Berlin, New York, or California. Perhaps this experience will change lives. It surely has enriched and changed mine.”

Ravenal taught K-12 art education, art history, design, color, and painting at AU, and is now a professor emerita. She previously taught art history at the Rhode Island School of Design. Ravenal has lectured at the National Gallery of Art, the Corcoran Gallery of Art, the Kreeger Museum, and the Smithsonian Institution, and has exhibited in more than 40 venues around the world. Ravenal is a founding member of the AU Arts Council and the AU chapter of Phi Beta Kappa.

One Gives, Another Receives
The Carol Bird Ravenal Travel Award

by
Emily Davis

12

CONNECTIONS
In 2010, Hedieh Ilchi received the Carol Bird Ravenal Travel Award to support her MFA thesis research. She travelled to Tehran in her home country of Iran to study the art of tazhib (Persian illumination). “This experience strengthened my understanding and ability to incorporate Persian painting in my thesis paintings,” she says.

During her three-week trip, Ilchi also wanted to better understand how Iranian women confront social and gender related boundaries. She documented their lives in the form of photographs, which she later used as a source of her paintings. Her paintings are still influenced by her travel to Tehran and by her exploration of her cultural identity as an Iranian-American.

In talking about her work, Ilchi says, “My recent paintings reflect an ongoing interest in the fusion of visual codes of western abstraction and traditional Persian art, with an emphasis on the ornamental abstractions of tazhib. The resulting synthesis evokes allegories of intrusion and invasion, referencing the historical and contemporary sociopolitical conflicts.”

Ilchi received her MFA in studio art from American University in 2011 and her BFA from the Corcoran School of the Arts and Design in 2006. She is currently an adjunct professorial lecturer in AU’s Department of Art. She received the Robyn Rafferty Mathias Student Research Grant from American University and the Bethesda Painting Award. Ilchi has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions nationally, and her work has been reviewed in a number of publications including the *Washington Post* and *Art Papers* magazine. She has been an artist in residence at the Vermont Studio Center, the Arlington Arts Center, and the Jentel Foundation.
What is the HIV infection rate in DC, and why is it so high?

The HIV rate in DC is about 2.5 percent across the population as a whole. This is very high—the World Health Organization defines a severe epidemic as 1 percent of the population living with HIV—but the DC rate is down from 3 percent of the population in 2009, so that is some good news. The number of newly diagnosed infections has also declined. There were 680 new infections in 2012 (most recent complete data). Most striking about the

AU Sociology Professor and Chair Kim Blankenship is part of a national consortium of scientists focused on reducing rates of HIV infection and AIDS, particularly in areas where the numbers are still alarmingly high. She recently received $490,000 as part of a five-year grant from the National Institutes of Health to support HIV research and prevention.

Blankenship is the director of the Social and Behavioral Sciences Core of the District of Columbia Center for AIDS Research (DC CFAR). Its mission is to provide scientific leadership in HIV/AIDS research, and to work with the DC government and community to make sure the research translates into better prevention and care in DC and beyond.

Blankenship also directs AU’s Center on Health, Risk, and Society, an interdisciplinary group of scholars conducting research that applies social science perspectives to the analysis of health.

We asked Kim about her work, and the impact she hopes it will have.
epidemic in DC and across the US is that it disproportionately affects blacks, who make up 77 percent of new infections in DC. Black men who have sex with men (MSM) and black MSM who inject drugs (IDU) make up one fourth of all new HIV cases, the largest share, and black heterosexual women make up another 18 percent, the second largest. Contrast that white MSM and MSM/IDU, who comprise 10 percent of new infections. White women make up only 0.6 percent of new cases in DC.

Newly diagnosed cases are also geographically concentrated in certain wards in DC. There are many reasons for the high rates in DC, but in general, they do not result from lack of knowledge about HIV-related risk factors. What interests me most is how social processes of community disruption and social structures of race, gender, and class inequality produce vulnerability to HIV. I’m especially interested in the disruptions created by mass incarceration and the re-entry cycle, and the policies and systems of class, race, and gender inequality that create them. Gentrification is also a major disruptive process.

Are the known prevention measures working or not, and what could the city and community be doing to improve the situation?

Yes, known prevention approaches are working. This partly explains the decline in HIV rates over the last five years or so here. DC is doing a good job offering many different opportunities for people to get tested, and if they do get tested, DC does a better job of linking people to care than a lot of other places. But there is a lot more to be done. For example, there are still people who don’t get tested, and we need to understand the reasons for this. I think the reasons are more complicated than simply that there aren’t enough testing sites. Even when people are tested and linked to care after a diagnosis, they don’t necessarily remain in care. And many of the same things that put people at risk in the first place—homelessness, joblessness, disruption of stable relationships, violence and trauma, incarceration—also help explain why they don’t get or stay in care.

How do you think the DC CFAR collaboration can help prevent future infections and treat those who are infected now?

One of the great strengths of the DC CFAR is that it represents a highly committed, multidisciplinary group of researchers. Through our collaborations we can challenge the epidemic from many different directions. We have people doing research to try to find a cure, people doing research to identify new models for linking people to and keeping them in care, and people doing research to understand how social processes, structures, and behaviors create vulnerability, and more. I think it will take all of this to ensure not just that the overall rates go down, but that the disparities are eliminated as well.

What are the most recent national trends in HIV transmission, and the newest means of countering them?

New infections in the US have been holding pretty steady over recent years, but, so have the disparities. In DC, new infections have declined, but the disparities have not. I think this is something that we cannot forget when considering trends. As for new approaches, people have probably heard about a lot of biomedical approaches to prevention—antiretroviral therapy (ART) for those who are infected, which reduces viral load and makes it much harder to transmit HIV to others; pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), which can be taken by people who don’t have but are at high risk of getting HIV, and which can keep the virus from getting established if they are exposed; and post-exposure prophylaxis that can be taken soon after a high risk event to prevent acquisition of HIV.

As a social scientist, I understand the value of these biomedical approaches, but think that they will only be of limited impact until we really understand the factors in people’s lives and social context. For example, PrEP is only effective if taken consistently. These new approaches are not really all that different from condoms in this regard. Condoms work extremely well at preventing transmission/acquisition of HIV in the laboratory, but consistent condom use in people’s lives is incredibly difficult to maintain.

What do you, personally, hope to see come out of the DC CFAR collaboration?

An end to AIDS! And a knowledge base that can be used to address a wide range of other diseases and health issues that already exist or that may emerge.
WHO WILL BECOME the next president of the United States? It’s a question that’s stump-ing even the most seasoned pundits.

Luckily, American University’s Distinguished Professor of History Allan Lichtman is offering a tried-and-true formula that has correctly predicted every presidential election outcome since Ronald Reagan’s 1984 re-election.

In 1991, Lichtman and co-author Ken DeCell published The 13 Keys to the White House (Madison Books, 1991), a book laying out the 13-key forecasting system initially developed in 1981 by Lichtman and renowned mathematician Vladimir Keilis-Borok. They developed the keys based on their analysis of trends in presidential campaigns since 1860. The keys are simple to use: if 8 or more of the 13 keys are true for the incumbent party, its candidate will win the election—but if fewer than 8 are true, the challenger will win.

The 13 Keys

1. Party mandate: After the midterm elections, the incumbent party holds more seats in the US House of Representatives than after the previous midterm elections.
2. Contest: There is no serious contest for the incumbent party nomination.
3. Incumbency: The incumbent party candidate is the sitting president.
4. Third party: There is no significant third party or independent campaign.
5. Short term economy: The economy is not in recession during the election campaign.
6. Long term economy: Real per capita economic growth during the term equals or exceeds mean growth during the previous two terms.
7. Policy change: The incumbent administration effects major changes in national policy.
8. Social unrest: There is no sustained social unrest during the term.
9. Scandal: The incumbent administration is untainted by major scandal.
10. Foreign/military failure: The incumbent administration suffers no major failure in foreign or military affairs.
11. Foreign/military success: The incumbent administration achieves a major success in foreign or military affairs.
12. Incumbent charisma: The incumbent party candidate is charismatic or a national hero.
13. Challenger charisma: The challenging party candidate is not charismatic or a national hero.

So, who does Lichtman predict will win the 2016 election? He says at this moment, months before the election, the pivotal keys appear to be numbers 2 and 11.

“The outcome of the 2016 general election will hinge on whether Democrats continue their bitter and protracted nomination struggle,” Lichtman says, “and whether President Obama can sell his foreign policy initiatives to the American people as one or more major triumphs for the United States.”

The 13 Keys to the White House

Professor Allan Lichtman’s Historic Record of Predicting US Presidential Elections
Grants

MICHAEL BARON (mathematics and statistics) won a $273,630 National Science Foundation (NSF) grant for the project “ATD: Efficient online detection based on multiple sensors, with applications to cybersecurity and discovery of biological threats.”

KIM BLANKENSHIP (sociology) won a $490,278 National Institutes of Health (NIH) award to work with the District of Columbia Center for AIDS Research (DC CFAR).

DAVID HAAGA (psychology) won a $321,750 NIH award for the project “Looming Vulnerability and Smoking Cessation Attempts.”

JEFFREY KAPLAN (biology) won a $130,436 Kappa Biofilm, LLC award for the project “Antibiofilm Compounds from Marine Bacteria.”

DELORES KOENIG (anthropology) won a $230,783 NSF award for the project “The Long-Term Socioeconomic Dynamics of Resettlement.”

DEMETRIOS POULIOS (physics) won a $1,157,609 NASA award for the three-year project “Laser, Fiber, and Optical Technology.”

ANGELA VAN DOORN (environmental science) won a $189,972 Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) award in a coordinated effort with SARAH IRVINE BELSON (education) and CHRISTINA PONDELL (environmental science) for the project “Learning and Teaching Science with Scientists - DC Math Science Partnership Program (DC MSP).”

SHOUZHONG ZOU (chemistry) won a $117,375 NSF award for the project “Electrocatalysis on Structure Controlled Metal Nanocrystals: Unraveling Particle Structure-Catalytic Activity Relationships.”

Awards

EVAN BERRY (philosophy and religion) won the first-ever AAR-Luce Fellowship in Religion and International Affairs.

ROBERT BLECKER (economics) was named to the editorial board of Metroeconomica.

KRISTINA CRONA (mathematics and statistics) won the 2015 World Technology Award for Health & Medicine.

KYLE DARGAN’S (literature) poetry collection, Honest Engine, was a finalist for the Kingsley-Tufts Poetry Prize.

ROBERT FEINBERG (economics) was elected to the Board of Trustees of the Southern Economic Association.

CHERYL HOLCOMB-MCCOY (education) was named a Fellow of the American Counseling Association.

LISA LEFF'S (history) book, The Archive Thief: The Man Who Salvaged French Jewish History in the Wake of the Holocaust, won the 2016 Sami Rohr Prize for Jewish Literature. It was also named a finalist for the 2015 National Jewish Book Award.

BARRY MCCARTHY (psychology) received the Masters and Johnson award for lifetime contributions to the sex therapy field from the Society for Sex Therapy and Research.

CHEMI MONTES (art) was selected as one of the top 100 artists, designers, and photographers of 2015 by Creative Quarterly. A poster he designed for the Department of Performing Arts will be published in their 100 Best Annual publication.

DANIELLE MYSLIWEJC (art) won a Vermont Studio Center Fellowship.

MARIANNE NOBLE (literature) won a 2016-17 Fulbright US Scholar grant.

MARTYN OLIVER (philosophy and religion) was a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Scholar.

DEBORAH PAYNE’S (literature) article, “Pepys and Theatrical Spectatorship,” was selected as a “choice article” by the Review of English Studies and was also nominated for the James L. Clifford Prize.

NANCY SNIDER (performing arts) was awarded a Cultural Fellowship by the Likhachev Foundation.

Publications, Productions & Exhibitions

FERNANDO BENADON (performing arts) published “More Rhythmic Interactions in Two (or Three) Aksak Performances” in Empirical Musicology Review.

ZOË CHARLTON’S (art) artwork has been included in the traveling exhibition State of the Art: Discovering American Art Now at the Tellus Museums.

The journal Appetite published The Proceedings of the American University Symposium on Childhood Obesity, a direct result of the Center for Behavioral Neuroscience’s symposium held last year. TERRY DAVIDSON (psychology) served as one of the editors.

TIM DOUD and NAOKO WOWSUGI (art) are finalists in the 2016 Outwin Boochever Portrait Competition at the National Portrait Gallery. Their work is on view through January, 2017 and will travel the US throughout 2018.

STEPHANIE GRANT (literature) published “Postpartum” in the New Yorker.

CONSUELO HERNÁNDEZ (WLC) published Mi reino sin orillas, a poetry collection in Spanish (Editorial Torremozas).

Two of CALEEN JENNINGS’S (performing arts) plays were featured in the Women’s Voices Theater Festival.

KIHO KIM (environmental science) coauthored a chapter on marine debris in the Global Reporting and Assessment of the State of the Marine Environment, United Nations Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea.


ALLAN LICHTMAN (history) published the sixth edition of The Keys to the White House (Rowman & Littlefield).

COLIN SALDANHA (biology) published “Centrally Synthesized Estradiol is a Potent Anti-Inflammatory in the Injured Zebra Finch Brain” in Endocrinology.


JENNIFER STEELE’S (education) coauthored article “Disentangling disadvantage: Can we distinguish good teaching from classroom composition?” was published in the Journal of Research on Educational Effectiveness.

KATHARINA VESTER (history) published A Taste of Power; Food and American Identities (University of California Press).

