Calendar:

October 15-16: Family Weekend

October 20: Last day to drop a course or change a course to pass/fail

October 25: Spring registration begins

November 11, 12, and 14 FITD’s Noises Off in the Utopia Theater

November 25-28: Thanksgiving break

December 3: Last class day

December 2-5: FITD’s The Changeling

December 4-5: Fall graduation ceremonies

From the director’s desk:

I have just been reading Steven Farr’s new book, Teaching as Leadership, an account of the practices of Teach For America’s most successful teachers. Steve graduated from U.T. Austin in 1993 and taught for two years with Teacher for America in Donna, Texas. After graduating from Yale Law School, he returned to TFA and currently serves as the organization’s Chief Knowledge Officer. Successful teachers, it turns out, set big goals. In LAH one of those goals is that every LAH student graduate with excellent writing skills. The freshmen sometimes grow weary of hearing the LAH mantra, “Write, rewrite, and write some more.” But they quickly learn that writing well is a key to success in their classes; from what our alumni tell us, it will be a key to their success once they leave the Forty Acres. In this newsletter you will be able to sample some delightful prose, Caleb Britton telling us in a most lively way what the young can teach their elders, Kelsi Tyler recounting her two weeks at the Cannes Film Festival, and Paul Cuno-Booth, drawing upon his summer learning Arabic in Alexandria with the Flagship Arabic Program, capturing the mores of Egyptian cab drivers. While relishing the prose, you will also get a glimpse of our students pursuing other big goals we have for them as they hone their leadership and organizational skills outside the classroom. What Caleb writes of our freshmen is a goal that I have for all LAH students, that they be “able to assess problems from different angles and with new perspective...[be] able to turn an issue sideways and find new inspiration, to mix and match the materials given to create new colors, ideas, and thought.” I welcome your comments, suggestions, and questions (carver@austin.utexas.edu).

Larry Carver
“Mr.Cal-!”
“Have ya se-?”
“She took m-!”
“Stop it!”

I walk into the room and I feel like a paratrooper inadequately armed to survive in this war zone. The floor is littered with the broken pieces of block cities unable to outlast the battering of children’s hands and searing tantrums. Underneath the immense chaos there is that most clinical of smells. It is the smell of hand sanitizer, positioned at every doorway, smothered over everyone and everything. An unbearable smell, it is an ineffectual napalm against microscopic dissidents and bacterial rebels. As anarchy slowly creeps over the room I attempt to reestablish peace shouting, “Who wants to color!”

A gleeful chorus seems to erupt from the very walls of the room as the throng of children find an empty space on the floor and sit down. This reward of crayons and paper is a boon all too familiar to the kids and an imperceptible snake is given life as they share their excitement and expectations. As I pass each of them they hold their hands in the air, opening and closing their tiny fists, transformed into little birds wanting worms from their patron. Without words they easily translate a universal emotion with their grabbing sign language and wide-eyed stares: want. I finish distributing the supplies, which includes a picture of Mozart for the kids to color and a few crayons each, and an ethereal sound soon envelops the room. Nothing is heard but the scratch and scribble of crayon upon paper harkening back to a room full of monks copying manuscripts by hand. I sit on my regal throne in front of the room, in reality a metal folding chair with strange stains on it, the purveyor of peace.

After ten minutes a few from the horde have finished their drawings and come up to show me. The first kid, Ryan, shows me his drawing and I visibly shrink back in horror. Such desecration! Ryan decided to mix and match colors and has endowed Mozart with a green face, red eyeballs, and pink hair. It looks like Mozart has an unfortunate case of the bubonic plague. I look back and forth from Ryan to Mozart and back again. I realize I can’t verbally abuse this child so I stammer, “That’s, uh, an interesting Mozart ya got there.” Ryan smiles at me and sits down as the next young artist Sylvia steps up. If I thought Ryan’s was sacrilegious, Sylvia’s picture is downright heretical! Instead of coloring Mozart at all, Sylvia turned the picture sideways and has used Mozart’s head as the configuration of a ship at sea! Again I scramble for the right words and find that, “That’s inventive,” has crawled out of my mouth. I give her a weak smile, borderline grimace, and she sits down.

The rest of that day continued in much the same way, children bringing defiled Mozart’s to my chair and I unsuitably praising them. However I realized later that night that this situation with the children is not unlike new students at any school. The teachers and professors at the school have fixed habits and behavior and are accustomed to certain outcomes, such as how I imagined Mozart should have been colored. When new students matriculate, it is assumed that they are the least experienced and knowledgeable of everyone there at the school. In actuality these students bring not only fresh ideas, but new materials and, most importantly, an open mind. Just like the little children, freshmen are able to assess problems from different angles and with new perspective. They are able to turn an issue sideways and find new inspiration, to mix and match the materials given to create new colors, ideas, and thought. Through this exploration they benefit not only themselves, but also those around them such as their teachers and friends. While I was shocked at first by the children’s drawings, I soon began to enjoy the infected Mozart and the ship erupting from his head. In the same way do new students with innovative ideas influence and broaden the minds of their professors and others around them, creating an ever-widening circle of appreciation and tolerance, bettering not only a small amount of individuals, but ultimately a culture.

- Caleb Britton, English/Liberal Arts Honors
LAH Pre-Med Society

The LAH Pre-Med Society is a student-run organization focused on combining the world of Liberal Arts and medicine. Our goal is to provide avenues of resources that will ultimately benefit students who are pursuing a career in the health-care field but are currently majoring or focusing on a degree in the Liberal Arts arena. Some of the things we have to offer are links to internships around the Austin area, volunteer opportunities at local hospitals and clinics, access to Kaplan and Princeton Review’s MCAT preparation classes, and guest speakers who have gone through the process of balancing Pre-Med with liberal arts that can give us insight into how they worked it all together. Also, in order for all the members to be fully incorporated in the society, we will have a different member bring in information about a medical school or an MCAT question that they can share with everyone else at each meeting. However, it’s not all academic and work. We have social outings and get-togethers so we can vent and let off some steam. After all, it’s not easy being a Pre-Med student!

LAH Yearly Scholarship Winners

First Year
- Michael Arrington
- Emily Boyd
- Caleb Britton
- Jessica Devenyns
- Derrek Fay
- Paige Kerr
- Hayden Lambert
- Sarah Lusher
- Emily Neie
- Eric Nikolades
- Cassandra Shulter
- Kalyan Venkatraj
- Will Tangney
- Andrew Whitley
- Sanjna Zadoo

Second Year
- Jessica Chung
- Kathrine Erwin
- Madision Estes
- Armen Hazarian
- Severine Kale
- Mary Perkins
- Issa Ramos
- Dietrich Riepen
- Kelsi Tyler
- Miranda Wargo
- Steven Xie

Third Year
- Shanup Dalal
- Kathleen Kidder
- Michael Krocker
- James Lamon
- Pavel Nitchovski
- Michael Sierra-Arevalo
- Gabriela Villareal
- Lauren Williams
- James Yu

Fourth Year
- Katherine Clabby
- Nicole Craigen
- Rebecca Dobyns
- Euvelester Gutierrez
- K. Merrit Martin
- Justine Pak
- Darcy Kues
- Jennifer Pier
- Christopher Shook
- Lindsay Taraban
Working on a movie crew is probably not something I’ll do again any time soon, but while I was on the set of the upcoming movie, Doonby, this past summer, filmed in Smithville, Texas, I gained a unique glimpse into the production of movies. For some background to this ordeal, I guess I ought to admit that I mainly accepted the position of an unpaid intern on the set because of the possibility of my receiving some funds from the Rapoport Grant.

But once production began, I dove in head first, quickly learning to take on the responsibilities of a Production Assistant (which is a fancier term for Gopher). On the set, my duties included such important tasks as stopping traffic, wrangling the extras, fetching snacks and water, and running things to and fro.

I was never an ideal PA, of course, because this was the first time I had done anything like that, but the other PA’s were very polite and helpful. They did astounding jobs, and were able to sound cool on the walky-talky like nobody’s business. I sometimes felt bad because, as efficient as they were, they were often spread thin, and had to rely on my inexperienced skills to keep production from becoming difficult.

And there were definitely times when production was difficult. Easily the hardest days of production were the night shoots, when we would begin shooting around seven p.m. and continue until three or four in the morning. There were also some days were it rained, including a small flood in a local bar we were shooting in at the time.

There were a number of peculiar moments as well, like the time I was told to retrieve a prop from a crew member’s living quarters, only to get the address wrong and accidentally walk into someone else’s house. The door was unlocked so I walked right in, but fortunately the owner was very understanding or I’d have had an embarrassing tale to tell the cops! Another thing I thought I’d never have to do was go to Wal-Mart at 3am. I was told by one of my higher-ups that, because of the upcoming soccer World Cup, we needed patriotic t-shirts, and we needed them now.

By far, though, the coolest part was meeting John Schneider, of Dukes of Hazzard fame. During my first day on set, he was sitting with the extras, strumming a guitar, and I thought, “Neat, that guy’s not shabby on the guitar.” But I quickly discovered he was John Schneider, and before the end of the shoot, he had shaken my hand and told me that he had noticed my hard work on set. Too bad I forgot to get an autograph…

Overall, production was exhausting for everyone, because of the sweltering Texas summer sun. But I saw some interesting things, learned quite a bit about the production aspect of movies, and even did a few things as a PA that I didn’t expect myself to do otherwise.

- Casey Dees, English/Liberal Arts Honors
At times it felt like a typical vacation in the south of France, mostly in the way that it made me painfully aware of how un-French I am. I began my mornings by strolling along the seaside, studiously avoiding looking at all the topless women and Speedo-clad men so as not to offend my delicate American sensibilities. Feeling peckish, I’d stop at a café to grab a warm croissant and a thimble-sized cup of coffee, which lasted two sips on average. But as I approached the center of town, it became obvious that I was experiencing something more than the standard tourist getaway. The hordes of paparazzi indicated that I was near my destination, and sure enough, I turned a corner and saw the iconic red carpet. A marquee declared that I was at the 63rd Cannes Film Festival, and I asked myself for the hundredth time, “Kelsi, what on Earth are you doing here?”

For two weeks, I stayed at an international school on the Mediterranean seaside with several aspiring young filmmakers from Canada, Morocco, Algeria, Greece, and Singapore, and they were way more qualified to be there than I was. Everyone else had to submit a film reel of his or her own work to win the trip; I only had to watch a French movie and write an essay about it. All of the other people were lovely, and we clicked instantly. There were nights when we opted out of watching a film and instead sat on the beach together, eating expensive gelato and drinking cheap wine. Other nights, we dolled ourselves up in evening gowns and tuxedos to walk the red carpet and take photos of each other… until the security guards got annoyed and yelled at us in French.

I hate to shatter any illusions, but the Cannes Film Festival is not as glamorous as one might think. I spent the majority of my time waiting in line to see films, and some of the movies made me question the credibility of the festival. I came to Cannes expecting every film I saw to move me to tears, to make me question the meaning of my existence, to inspire me to drop out of college and move to L.A. to become a filmmaker. And although I still kind of want to do the latter, I was disappointed in some of the movies that I saw. I walked out of a screening of Jean-Luc Godard’s *Film Socialisme* shaking my head in disbelief. Look Jean-Luc, I get that you were a pioneer of the Nouvelle Vague, and *Breathless* is great, but I feel like *Film Socialisme* is just two hours of proof that you are losing your marbles in your old age. That isn’t to say that I didn’t see some amazing films. One of my favorites was Xavier Dolan’s *Les amours imaginaires*, a visually striking tribute to Truffaut’s classic *Jules et Jim*. Dolan wrote, directed, and starred in this film, his second to premier at Cannes, at the ripe old age of 21.

Even when I was waiting in line in the sweltering heat or sitting in a darkened theater watching yet another foreign film that made absolutely no sense to me, I couldn’t stop thinking about how lucky I was to have had this opportunity. Never in a million years did I think that I would be able attend the most prestigious film festival in the world, especially not at only 20 years old. The icing on top of this already amazing cake is that after the festival I got to go to Belgium for a week to visit my friends and host family from when I lived there as an exchange student. I cannot believe that I was so fortunate to be able to return to Belgium less than a year after my exchange, and I had a blast catching up with my dear friends and family over beer and waffles.

The moral of this story is what Dr. Carver has been drilling into our heads from day one: writing is an invaluable tool that can open the door to myriad opportunities.

Because of a measly three-page paper I wrote in an hour one afternoon, I got to spend a day in Paris wandering les rues by myself, attend a world-renowned film festival in the south of France, and return to my second home in Belgium. Some naysayers have expressed doubt that my English and Rhetoric and Writing degree will get me anywhere, but it has already taken me to Europe once, and this is only the beginning.

- Kesli Tyler, English/Liberal Arts Honors
One of my proudest moments this summer was when a taxi driver in Alexandria, Egypt, upon hearing I was American, asserted despite my pale European features that at least one of my parents must be Egyptian. I swelled at pride with the knowledge that I was likely the only white person he had ever met who had mastered terminology and pronunciation expected of Egyptian taxi passengers.

I hate to fulfill the cliché of the freshly repatriated student who “learned to appreciate another culture and people,” but it holds true—with an important distinction. The cultural education abroad lies not in the grand sweep of things: one can read political history, religious traditions, and works of literature anywhere on the globe. The everyday, however, can only be experienced firsthand; several hundred pages of print can hardly offer up the same eclectic array of details the outsider can observe on a street corner for ten minutes.

Or, of course, riding in a taxi—one of the most surprisingly pleasant experiences of my stay in Alexandria. In large Egyptian cities, every second or third car is a taxi, and their drivers are some of the most interesting characters I met. To a great extent, they serve as a microcosm for Egyptians as a whole: one bearded listening to and singing verses of the Qur’an, one in his 20’s wearing sunglasses and listening to European house music; one with a doctorate in history who speaks classical Arabic fluently, another with a doctorate in geography and impeccable English; one extremely shy and withdrawn, one who hit on his female passengers; one who wants to sneak me into Mecca and give me a tour; one who asked for our phone numbers; one whom I accidentally promised to find a job in America; many who talked about their love of Islam, many who talked about their love of America (sometimes the same people); and many who didn’t talk at all.

Taxi drivers, more than anyone else, trained me in the art of Egyptian flattery. If someone compliments you, you are expected to return the compliment, and then some. It becomes a game of constant one-upmanship, even with people you’ve just met. I eventually developed an unbeatable formula:

Me: Alexandria’s a wonderful city
Driver: You’re wonderful
Me: You’re more wonderful
They usually went quiet after that.

Another way to prove to them your Egyptianness is to offer them part of whatever you’re consuming in their taxi. Should an Egyptian run into a friend who is eating lunch, for example, that friend is expected to offer him some, and the other is expected to politely decline—another part of the intricate game of social interaction. My friends who smoke always had an advantage over me in taxis, offering the driver cigarettes, until I started eating rushed breakfasts on the way to campus and could offer them half a falafel sandwich. (If they know what’s up, they should decline and offer you a napkin in turn.)

Taxi drivers also have an extensive knowledge of the city. Tell them you like fish, they’ll recommend a dozen good seafood restaurants. Tell them you’re a student, they’ll describe a used book bazaar. Once, in need of Egyptian-y gifts for American friends, I said I wanted to go to a certain shop to buy a hookah. The driver told me they’re much cheaper in another part of town and took me there (which, coincidentally I’m sure, cost twice the fare the first place would have).

I can’t claim to have given you the full picture of Egyptian city life in these few paragraphs, nor can I claim that knowledge myself yet. I am, however, closer than I was at the outset of the summer—not through the novels I read or the media I studied or the history I learned, but by observing the details of Egyptian life, then putting them into practice. I now feel I can fit in in Egyptian city life as much as a white-skinned American with a backpack can, because I can order falafel, bargain for merchandise, and, most importantly, bond with cab drivers.

- Paul Cuno-Booth, Arabic Language and Literature, English, and Humanities/Liberal Arts Honors

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**LAH Abroad:**  
**Alexandria, Egypt**

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**LAH Music and Theater Events**

The Amorous-Paulharmonic Music Ensemble is working on a lot of new music as we start this semester. We have many new members this year and we are really excited to be growing in number and talent! We are planning a concert at the end of the semester with everything from jazz to The Beatles. We also look forward to playing at Explore UT in the spring.

Foot in the Door Theatre will present Noises Off on November 11, 12 and 14 and The Changeling on December 2, 3, 4 and 5. Please check the LAH website for further performance details.
Photos taken by Lauren Williams Linguistics and Arabic Language and Literature/Liberal Arts Honors, clockwise: a Bedouin playing drums on a gas can in the middle of the desert; all of the traveling UT Students (to Egypt and Syria) plus two new friends from Oklahoma University; and Qaitbey Citadel built on top of and incorporating the ruins of the Great Lighthouse of Alexandria.
LAH Alumni in Action: 
Michelle V. Nguyen

I’m Michelle V. Nguyen, a 2007 University of Texas at Austin graduate and alumnus of the Liberal Arts Honors program.

Graduating early, I spent half of my senior year in Washington D.C. and the other half in New York City. It was the best decision I ever made, next to enrolling in The University of Texas at Austin. I received the wonderful honor of being selected as an Archer Fellow, interning and taking UT classes in Washington D.C. This was the greatest introduction to the “real world.” It was the first time I had to juggle 40 hour work weeks with studying and living off campus. With the help of supervisors who believed in me, my request to transfer from Washington D.C. to the New York City office was approved.

I returned to Texas to begin law school. However, working for lawyers changed my mind very quickly. Changing my career path meant asking myself, “What did I want to achieve?” The answer was as clear as the UT Tower after a great achievement.

Ready to return to the 40 Acres and serve my alma mater, I was given the opportunity to work for UT’s Central Development Office, specifically on President Powers’ event planning team. This amazing experience was filled with great examples of leadership and impeccable event planning.

All of this prepared me for the role I play now at UT. I am the Events Manager for the new Student Activity Center (opening Spring 2011). Overseeing all events in the building, it’s my job to make sure every event is an amazing event for students and departments of UT.

Not bad for a government major, right?

Michelle V. Nguyen at the top of the Tower of Pisa (yes, she climbed up there!)

Liberal Arts Honors and Humanities Programs

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This newsletter is produced each semester and distributed via our website in pdf form. Those interested in submitting work for the upcoming issue should contact Stacey Amorous at samorous@austin.utexas.edu or Linda Mayhew at lmayhew@austin.utexas.edu within the first 2 weeks of the semester. Special thanks to Rebecca Reilly and Ali Wongsoarj for their careful editing of this issue.