

Faculty Notes

Ron Elardo, foreign languages professor, presented a paper at the International Medieval Conference entitled, "The Love Potion in Gottfried's TRISTAN: Shadowy Agent of Liberation." The conference draws thousands from all over the world to Kalamazoo in May.



Bosio Boudreau Lamprecht

Cindy Bosio, Pete Boudreau '61, and Beth Lamprecht from the math department recently attended the "Conversations Among Colleagues" conference at Grand Valley State University. This conference for the newly-formed Michigan Mathematics Teacher Educators group was sponsored in part by the Michigan Council of Teachers of Mathematics. It was designed to foster communication among those who provide math education to Michigan teachers.

In June, **Camilyah Johnson**, director of multicultural student services, served as diversity co-chair of the Michigan College Personnel Association's Diversity Summit at Oakland University. **Pam Boersig**, vice president and dean for student affairs, and **Maher Mualla**, chemistry professor, represented AC's diversity education committee at the summit by leading a breakout session called "Diversity at its best: A small college approach to diversity."

Jim Martin, assistant professor of biology, took another trip to Honduras this summer to collect insects. While there, he was interviewed about his research and experiences for a program on the local television station in Catacamas, Honduras. He also served as a presenter at a conference on the status and prevention of HIV/AIDS in the area. The conference was organized by Peace Corps Honduras, and the title of Martin's presentation, roughly translated, was "The Biology of HIV: Prevention, Pathology and Treatment."



Muqtedar Khan of the political science department is a contributor to "A Practical Guide to Winning the War on Terrorism" (Hoover Institution Press, 2004), a collection of essays edited by Hoover research fellow Adam Garfinkle that recommends methods that go beyond the use of force to win the war against terrorism.

AC Chaplain **Rev. Chris Momany '84** published the introductory article on "The Pastoral Letters" in the "Adult Bible Studies: Teacher" magazine, a resource of The United Methodist Church. It is the companion piece of his biblical study treatment of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus that has recently been published in the "Daily Bible Study," a publication by The United Methodist Publishing House in Nashville that has a circulation of over 40,000. Momany's series is titled, "Guidelines for the Church's Ministry," and features 40 compact reflections with exegetical notes and commentary.



Know It All

What determines sexual orientation?

My wife and I were surprised about how our children turned out: we're both right-handed, and they're both left-handed. While most people are, of course, right-handed, a significant minority is left-handed, and a much smaller number are ambidextrous. Like handedness, sexual orientation appears to be a difference among people where most are heterosexual (straight), some are homosexual (gay or lesbian), and a small number are bisexual. And also like handedness, the evidence suggests that sexual orientation is determined early, not consciously chosen, and very resistant to change. Many gay or lesbian people report feeling different from others of their sex, even as children. Gay or lesbian individuals don't report simply choosing to be attracted to the same sex, any more than straight people report choosing to be attracted to the other sex. And telling gay or lesbian individuals to be heterosexual has some parallels to telling right-handed people to just start using their left hands.

Maybe we needn't worry too much about why people vary in their handedness or their sexual orientation, but science does ask such questions. For better or worse, we often work hardest at trying to understand the people who seem different – in this case, gay, lesbian or bisexual individuals. Investigators have studied many possible determinants of homosexuality which involve socialization. Whether it's childhood sexual experiences, exposure to gay or lesbian individuals, or childrearing practices, there have been no consistent findings. Hope College psychologist David Myers summed up our knowledge of what parents might do that could determine a child's sexual orientation. His answer: "I haven't a clue."

Biological approaches seem more promising. In the field of behavioral genetics, researchers compare the behavior of identical twins (who share all their genes) with that of fraternal twins (who share about half). Because identical twins are more likely than fraternal twins to have the same sexual orientation, there does seem to be a genetic component to sexual orientation. But since even identical twins don't always have the same sexual orientation, genes cannot be the whole story.

It may be that prenatal hormone levels, or sensitivity to those hormones, affect human sexual orientation the way they appear to affect sexual orientation in animals. Other researchers are looking at the brains of straight and gay individuals for differences, possibly in the hypothalamus.

The idea that individuals can choose their sexual orientation doesn't seem likely; how many people would choose to be part of a minority that faces such hostility and discrimination? I suspect that in the future we will find that whether we are attracted to women or men is caused by a complex interplay of biological and environmental variables. For now, it remains a mystery.

-This Know It All was provided by Dr. Gordon Hammerle, professor of psychology.