



academic excellence

Think back to when you were 17.

You may have known right from the start that you wanted to attend Canisius College when you graduated from high school. But there are some teens whose heads just spin with ideas about where to pursue their undergraduate degrees. For some of us, the goal was to find a good school close to home. Others seemed drawn to the notion of spending the next four years in a particular city or town. Sometimes it was the success of an athletics program or the realization that an early assurance program into medical school sure would be nice. And, there are even a few of us who were probably wooed by the notion of attending college within close proximity of a high school sweetheart.

CAPTION (PHOTO ABOVE): Canisius Ambassadors for Conservation Kim Simon '02, Joseph Riedy '01 and Adrienne Vargo '03 are briefed on water quality research conducted at the Monterey Aquarium in California (April 2000).

But no matter where your pubescent brain meandered in the process, or what detours you took with mom and dad in the family station wagon “to see just one more school,” – in the end - when the acceptance letters came in - the decision came down to one major consideration – where would you get the best education for the money. And that is undoubtedly why you now call Canisius *alma mater*.

If you have yet to experience this from the parental perspective, things are not much different today than they were when you were applying to colleges. The college guidebooks continue to measure academic excellence with numbers – SAT scores, high school averages, percentage of faculty with terminal degrees and student-faculty ratios.

Here at Canisius, we take those numbers very seriously. As Anthony J. Bellia, dean of enrollment says, “High school averages and SAT scores are two indicators of the type of students with whom your son or daughter will be living and learning.” He adds, “Those numbers also help our Admissions Office in offering a Canisius education to the best and brightest students.”

Take for example the freshman class of 2000. Students averaged 88.8 percent in high school and 1092 on their SATs. Those are impressive numbers. Even more impressive is, despite increased enrollment, Canisius has successfully maintained a significantly low student-faculty ratio (16:1) allowing for *cura personalis* – care for the individual. And, as the college continues to advance into the top ranks of regional colleges in the Northeast, so will the standards for academic excellence at Canisius.

“We’ve been trying to raise the bar on academic excellence throughout the 90s,” says Dr. Herbert J. Nelson, vice president for academic affairs. “We’ve raised our entrance requirements. We continue to recruit strong faculty who think in terms of excellence. We’re working to provide excellent facilities. We’re trying to think of excellence pervasively.”

But at Canisius, the commitment to excellence extends beyond the numbers to the promise of a great education. A promise that began with St. Ignatius Loyola and the Society of Jesus hundreds of years before anyone ever took an SAT with a number two pencil. It is a promise that is the essence of the core curriculum. A mandatory grouping of classes specifically designed to provide Canisius students with a well-rounded education. One that exposes them to important issues in philosophy and religious studies; one that gives students a solid cultural background in terms of history and literature; and one that develops their understanding of math, science and the



social sciences. These are courses that unleash and nurture critical thinking skills – and Canisius has a reputation for doing this best.

“We put more emphasis on the core curriculum than most schools,” explains Dr. Nelson. “Even among the Jesuit schools, our core curriculum is one of the largest in terms of the number of required courses. Roughly speaking, the Canisius core is made up of 18 of the 40 required courses. That reflects a nice balance that says the core is as important as the major requirements.”

That emphasis on the core curriculum is what sets Canisius students apart, says

Mike Stachowski, a 1970 graduate and trial lawyer, who continues to value the education he received. “The core curriculum makes the person into a well-rounded adult,” says Mike. “It develops students into what they used to call a renaissance person – a person who can talk about almost any subject.”

Canisius began reviewing its core curriculum more aggressively about six years ago when it first introduced a core curriculum committee. The committee replaced the former general studies committee and instituted a mandate for a more regular review of the core curriculum. Led by the three academic deans and members of the faculty, it is the responsibility of this group to annually review the structure of the core curriculum and determine whether it is working, whether it needs change or whether it simply needs a slight adjustment. Dr. John Zeis, chair of the Philosophy Department, chairs the core curriculum committee.

“Needs are changing,” says Dr. Zeis. “If we want to continue to serve our students well, put them at an advantage when they enter the marketplace and provide them with a foundation for lifelong learning, it is essential that we review the core curriculum and make changes when necessary.”

The committee, adds Dr. Zeis, is currently reviewing the core curriculum in all three schools to determine how best to meet new state and accreditation standards while, at the same time, provide students with enough flexibility to complete their education in four years. Next on the agenda, Zeis says, the committee will examine how the Catholic and Jesuit ideals can be further integrated into general studies courses. And so as to keep Canisius students at an advantage in this new age of technology, the college has introduced new undergraduate degrees in digital media arts, accounting information systems, bioinformatics and a master’s degree in health and

human performance.

“We will continue to offer new majors that relate to changing technology,” states Dr. Nelson. “But the major thrust, in terms of trying to do even better – in what we are already doing a good job of – means trying to extend more broadly the kinds of things that we are able to do with the Oishei Professorship Program. To have the resources to be able to do things that enrich the educational experience for students, I think, is the wave of the future if we really want to be excellent”

Beyond the core curriculum and the new majors, Canisius offers unparalleled opportunities for its students: the Honors Program (page 14); the McGowan Learning Communities Program (*Canisius College Magazine* – fall 2000); and the Oishei

Professorship Program.

This five-year program, which began at Canisius in 1999, is funded through a \$1.5 million grant from the John R. Oishei Foundation, established by the late founder of Trico Products Corporation. The grant supports a total of nine, three-year professorships and five visiting one-year professors, whose programs center on teaching creativity. In receiving this grant, the college’s commitment to academic quality was reaffirmed and its academic programs are now growing at a new level of excellence. From English to psychology, biology to international studies, the Oishei Professorship provides unique learning opportunities that might not otherwise be available to students.

For example, how often do you hear about students who are actually taught by

and meet with the authors whose works they read in their modern literature courses? In the past two years, eight nationally prominent authors spoke on campus. Four more will speak next year. Their visits made possible through the Canisius College Contemporary Writers Series, created by Dr. Mick E. Cochrane, professor of English and *Writer-in-Residence*, with funds from the Oishei grant.

And when was the last time you spoke with college students who spent their summer studying endangered animals like the Orca whale, big horn sheep and manatees? Students of Dr. Michael Noonan, a specialist in animal behavior, are doing just this as Canisius Ambassadors for Conservation. Also funded through the Oishei Professorship, students travel to national parks to study various animal species. These ambassadors then use their first-hand experiences to educate the Western New York community at zoological institutions, including the Buffalo Zoo, the Aquarium of Niagara Falls and Marineland.

Similarly, resources from the Oishei Professorship awarded to Dr. Sara R. Morris, an assistant professor of biology, supported a speaker series on the natural history of Western New

Nicole Chaika '00 and Amanda Rucker '01, both Canisius Ambassadors for Conservation, explore the habitat of Bighorn sheep in Colorado’s Rocky Mountain National Park (May 1999).





York this spring. Next winter, funds from the Oishei grant will enable students to study ecology and evolution in the Galapagos Islands, off the coast of Ecuador. And in 2002, the Oishei Professorship will help defray the cost of a geographic information system (GIS), a modern piece of technology, which will be used by environmental science majors in their study of natural history.

“Students can only understand natural history by actually getting out and experiencing it,” explains Dr. Morris. “My three years of Oishei will allow students to study natural history in Western New York, in

the Galapagos Islands – which is one of the world’s most amazing natural areas – and to approach natural history from a very scientific perspective.”

But the Oishei Professorship stretches far beyond the boundaries of Western New York. Instead it extends across borders and abroad. The Oishei Professorship awarded to Drs. Julia L. Wescott, chair of modern languages, and Coral R. Snodgrass, chair of management/marketing, is helping students link their language and international business studies through internships at companies in Mexico. Their cross-cultural education is enhanced even further through a series of dance and music performances on campus, which immerse students in Hispanic culture. These living and learning experiences not only educate students to the cultural and economic needs in other countries, but also to the needs in their own backyards as well.

“The Oishei Professorship,” says Dr. Wescott, “effectively enables us to move students from the classroom ‘lab’ experience directly into a cultural ‘field’ experience – an essential move too often short-

circuited in the traditional language-learning experiences.”

Of course, the success of our graduates speaks louder than any program or number ever could. Having an alumni base with leaders in business, government and community is the finest illustration one can give to exemplify the level of academic excellence at Canisius. And as the college scales the wall of the top ranked regional schools in the Northeast, so will it continue to create new and unique learning



Students in Drs. Coral Snodgrass and Julia Wescott’s Oishei program pose with a craft shopkeeper in Pátzcuaro, Mexico. From left are Kim Cox '00, Laura Struebel '00, Jenny O'Brien '01, Dr. Coral Snodgrass, Rachel Eberl '00, shopkeeper, Dr. Julia Wescott and Crissy Harder '01.

environments that enrich our students’ education and fulfill that promise of academic excellence first instituted by St. Ignatius Loyola and the Society of Jesus.

“It’s part of the conviction that in everything we do we ought to be striving for excellence,” says Dr. Nelson. “And you don’t strive for excellence if you sit back and rest on your laurels. You have to constantly watch what you’re doing and think ‘this was great now how can I make it even greater.’ That’s the kind of framework we operate with at Canisius.” ■

Greg Kilburn '02, an environmental science major, and Jim Schmitt '01, a biology major, conduct work with Dr. Sara Morris on an overnight mammal trapping laboratory at Tift Nature Preserve. (All mammals captured were released unharmed.)

