Psycho? Logical? Bulletin!

March 2007

In This Issue:
Various Things.
This is what happens when you make the Table of Contents before anything else.
It’s the only room in Baker where you can find any hospitality.

Cheer up sleepy Jean, oh what can it mean...

Helping prospective graduate students find the important landmarks on Visiting Day
Every now and then, the PLB feels the urge to include some information that someone might actually find useful. Not too frequently, of course, because then you people might expect it. But just often enough that I can vaguely justify our massive budget to the department head. So it is in that spirit that the PLB proudly presents...

**Useful (and mostly free) Programs for Mac OS X**

**Transmit**

An FTP program. FTP stands for “File Transfer Protocol,” and that’s exactly what Transmit does: transfer files. If that doesn’t sound too useful, think of this scenario: you’ve come home, but you forgot a file on your office computer. You COULD head back to your office. But if you had Transmit, you could just fire it up, connect to your office computer, and transfer the file to your home computer. And when you’re done working on it, you could zap it back to the office! Want to know more? ([Link1](#))

**VLC and MPlayer**

Macs natively play movies in Quicktime format (.mov). But they’re not so good playing movies in other formats (especially the popular .avi format). But once you’ve downloaded these two players, you’ll be able to play almost every video anyone ever sends to you. MPlayer has somewhat better controls (fast-forward, rewind, etc), but VLC plays a wider range of movie formats. They’re both keen! Get VLC here ([link2](#)) and MPlayer here ([link3](#))

**PodTube**

Ever wished you could download a movie off of YouTube to keep on your computer forever? Then you want PodTube. Even though PodTube costs 5 dollars, it’s come in handy often enough for me to include it ([link5](#))

**Flip4Mac**

Like Quicktime enough that you still want to use it as your main movie player? Then definitely grab Flip4Mac. It allows Quicktime to play Windows Media files. Super-handly! Check it out here ([link4](#))

**Handbrake**

Got a great DVD you want to show to your class? But it’s a pain to break out of powerpoint to switch to your laptop’s DVD player? Then Handbrake is just what you need. It rips DVD movies to a digital movie format that you can store on your hard-drive, and insert directly into your Powerpoint slide show, so you can show demonstrations seamlessly. Showing undergraduates gorillas that they won’t notice has never been easier! Take a look at the details here ([link6](#))

**Audio Hijack**

If you listen to internet radio on your computer, Audio Hijack is a must have. It records any audio your computer emits. Is a great interview coming up on NPR? Hello, Audio Hijack! You can find it here ([link7](#))

Super special bonus link: If you like internet radio, you should really check out Pandora.com. It asks you what music you like, and recommends more for you. Find it here ([link8](#))
Assistant Professor Erik Thiessen, in his attempts to recruit a prospective graduate student, may have inadvertently terrified her, according to several sources who spoke to the PLB on a condition of anonymity. Rather than consign the prospective student, Sarah Davis, to the 28X, Thiessen rented a car to pick her up at the airport. Thiessen’s good intentions were entirely counteracted by the fact that he hadn’t driven in over a year.

“It seemed like the right thing to do,” said Thiessen. “I mean, it was either that, or leave her to starve at the airport. Which didn’t seem like such a good way to recruit someone. Although I suppose I could hope that, by the time she made her way to CMU, she’d be so light-headed with hunger that she would have signed any form I put in front of her. Maybe I’ll consider that strategy for next year.”

Things started out poorly when Enterprise rented Thiessen a brand new PT Cruiser. Any damage stood out on the (formerly) mint condition automobile. By the end of the first evening, Thiessen had banged the side of the PT Cruiser against a wall (twice), knocked his garage door out of alignment, violated several local, state, and constitutional traffic laws, and left a fist-sized dent in the wheel-well of the Cruiser, as well as several smaller scrapes. Anonymous sources from the Enterprise-Rent-A-Car Corporation confirm that, next time Thiessen attempts to rent a car, he will receive a 1975 Ford Pinto Wagon.

Initially, Sarah Davis was pleased to be greeted at the airport by Thiessen. However, she soon became worried. “When we were leaving the airport, it was clear that he (Thiessen) wasn’t too familiar with the car. He couldn’t figure out how to roll down the window. He had to open the door to pay the parking lot attendant. I figured out how to roll down the window for him. I didn’t think that was a good sign.”

By the end of the drive to Jess Cicchino’s apartment, Sarah’s fears had been confirmed. While the pair suffered no accidents on the road, Sarah was discomfited by Thiessen’s continual muttering about directions, other drivers, and his uncertainty about the location of several important pedals and levers, as well as the wild-eyed intensity of his gaze. “I was just happy to be alive,” Davis reported upon reaching Cicchino’s apartment.

There is no word on how the experience affected Davis’ ongoing choice of a graduate program. Thiessen is reported to believe that his driving will actually benefit CMU’s efforts to recruit Davis, by making the program look vastly better by a kind of contrast effect.
Stowaway Squirrel Grounds Jet
By: Ellen Conser

Officials at Homeland Security have warned Americans for years that ethnic profiling performed by airport TSA security screeners is ineffective and does not capture “homegrown” terrorists. Recently, we witnessed a shocking confirmation of that assessment when a stowaway squirrel with allegedly nefarious purposes boarded an American Airlines flight with the apparent intent to take down the plane via quite novel, low-tech means. A Homeland Security official, refusing to be named due to the sensitive nature of the operations, said this news could mean that in the near future, only toothless Americans (e.g., children under the age of 6 months, and elderly who failed to floss regularly) will be cleared to proceed through TSA screening and board U.S. flights.

According to CNN, authorized by TSA “State and federal agriculture and wildlife officials boarded the plane, set traps and captured the eastern gray squirrel....Fearing it might have been carrying rabies, authorities had the rodent killed.” Official confirmation of the rabies diagnosis awaits dissection of the accused’s brain. However, 2008 presidential candidate Barack Obama, mistakenly believing a microphone had been turned off during a pre-campaign event in Iowa yesterday, was quoted saying, “Rabies is currently being used as a convenient excuse to murder an innocent expatriate squirrel... It’s another disturbing example of the deliberate erosion of Americans’ fundamental Constitutional rights by the massive right-wing conspiracy.”

While previous PLB reports uncovered our own Ken Kotovsky as a fierce ideological enemy of the squirrel ethnic class, a position he denies and for which he has been roundly criticized in the left-leaning Tartan, a PLB reporter recently discovered a disturbing trail linking the deceased suspect squirrel to Kotovsky. Surviving family members of the deceased ‘terrorist,’ now residing in Tokyo, report they were driven from their home of 2 years by Kotovsky, after persistent ethnic intimidation, verbal harassment, and pelting with sticks and snowballs. Kotovsky allegedly materially sponsored violent attacks by neighborhood cats on the squirrels’ longtime home, bribing the cats with supplemental food aid (Pounce) and risque entertainment (catnip). “We were living in harmony with our sworn enemies the red squirrels and the chipmunks for over 2 years” said the family, “but Mr. Kotovsky finally forced us to flee fully halfway across the planet to achieve some level of peace.” It is speculated that this harassment, and the resulting emotional upheaval, led the accused toward his ultimately suicidal plot to bring down an American flight by chewing on wires above the cockpit.

The plot by the “varmint” was thwarted when its activities were overheard by pilots and the plane diverted before a tragedy could occur. Kotovsky, meanwhile, was escorted today from his Baker Hall office by Homeland Security agents, and apparently is currently undergoing ‘aggressive’ questioning, according to a source.
March’s Graduate Student of the Month is Jingyuan Huang, who was very nice to our PLB staff even though we continually mangled the pronunciation of her name. We talked about what it was like to live in the worst dorm in China, and to move from China to the US.

PLB: Let’s start by learning a bit about you. Where are you from, and where were you an undergraduate?
JH: I’m from China. My home town is in the center east of China. My undergraduate study was at Beijing Normal University. It’s a University that is used to train teachers. I was in the psychology department. I was always dreaming of doing research in some field. I dreamed of studying biology in high school, but the entrance exam is different in China than here. I didn’t get a good enough score to get into the biology department, so I got into the psychology department. But I finally found that it’s more interesting than biology.

PLB: Is it a big university?
JH: It’s quite huge. Most Chinese universities are bigger than universities here, I mean, population. The campus isn’t that big – it’s about the same size as the campus here. But there are much more people there. And all of them live on campus. The dormitories are tall. We don’t live in apartment. In our dormitory, we share rooms. My dorm room was about the same size as your office – but there are eight people living there! That’s one of the worst dormitories in China. In most of them, only 4 people share a room.

PLB: What made you decide to come to CMU?
JH: First of all, I think that cognitive psychology in America is much better than in China. I’m interested in speech, and there are not many people studying speech in China. But I had never heard of CMU before I applied to grad school. I had only heard of Stanford, MIT, Harvard, schools like this. But when I applied to grad school, I saw a list of which is the best one. And of course, CMU was on the list. I tried to find out about what kind of university it is. And I had many friends in Computer Science, and of course, they knew about it! I think I’m the first person to come here, from my department. But I think it’s a big challenge for me to come here. Even now, I still have some problems when I want to express my feelings. And when other people speak, with other accents, I have a big difficulty understanding that!

PLB: You obviously made a big move to come to grad school, and I’m sure you prepared for some things. But what didn’t you expect? What caught you by surprise?
JH: Two things surprised me here. The first thing is, in my mind, before I came here, American cities should be built up, with tall buildings, crowds, shopping malls. That’s what a typical big city in China is like. When I went to New York, I found that. But when I come to Pittsburgh, I think, whoa, it’s all small houses. There’s not lots of people here. I even can’t see any people after 7 in Squirrel Hill some time. It’s more like a village, in my mind. That surprised me.

Another surprise is, when I came here, I heard a lot about American laws. I knew that American laws are very strict. And I heard that everyone should clean up the snows from their sidewalk. But when it snows here, I don’t see anyone cleaning up the snow in front of their house!

PLB: What else is different here?
Many other things are different. One thing I’m still getting used to is the shopping. I’m quite near to Giant Eagle. But Giant Eagle doesn’t have all the Chinese food I need! So I go to shopping malls about twice a month, to get all the food I need and store it in my home. But in China, my mother goes to shopping mall every morning to buy fresh food.
PLB: What is your research focused on?
JH: There are many theories about how people perceive speech. Some theories are focused on spectral features, and some on articulatory gestures. Older studies show context effects, and say they come from the mapping in human minds about phoneme representations. Lori did an experiment in 2005. She used sine waves and demonstrated a similar context effect. My experiment is to build a bridge between these two experiments. The first part is to replicate the old experiment. The second part is to isolate F1 and F2, making a “half-speech,” and see if it has the same result. Then the third part will use sine waves, which are non-speech, and compare the results for all of them.

PLB: What do you like to do for fun?
JH: I like cooking. I didn’t like it in the past, but I like it now, because I have to cook everyday! I also like to read novels.

PLB: Chinese novels or English novels?
JH: Normally Chinese. Reading English is more like work for me, not like pleasure. I read, I think, two English novels in China, and it takes me 10 times longer than reading Chinese! English gives me a little headache when I read novels.

PLB: OK, now for the three tough questions. The first one: what, for you, is the big question you want to answer with your research?
JH: Now, I think, the biggest question I’m interested in is how Chinese people learn English. Almost all the people in China are learning English now, and they have a hard time. My focus is on the speech. I’m focused on the sounds and features that are different that Chinese and English use, and from this, how it affects Chinese people learning English. I started on this question because I wanted to see if Chinese people can learn English better, and I hope I can develop a theory or approach that can help the English teachers in China.

PLB: If you weren’t a graduate student, what would you be doing right now?
JH: I’m not quite sure. There are some companies – I don’t know how to say this in English – that are organizing or designing things. Things like, you have to organize a party or organize a conference. I like this kind of thing, I like thinking about doing the organizing. So I might be going to one of these companies, doing that kind of job. I’m always the person to organize meetings for my friends, and things like that, so I think I would do a good job.

PLB: OK, final question: translation is one of the notorious problems in language. Have you had any difficulties with expressions that work in English, but not in Chinese, or vice versa?
JH: I heard a saying in China, about translation: translation is like a woman. The beautiful is mostly not faithful, and the faithful is mostly not beautiful. I’m not sure it’s such a good metaphor (especially not fair for women). But the meaning is, if you translate the content very specifically, you lose the air or feeling. If you translate the feeling, you can’t do words one by one!

From English to Chinese, one word is very hard, and that is artistic. It’s a word to describe a kind of person. In China, there’s no word of that kind, to describe people. So I don’t know how to translate that word! The first time I heard that word, it took me some time to understand what features it described.

Comparing Chinese to English, there’s another word that is about characteristics of people. Maybe a similar word I can find is “sophisticated.” This word, shigu, in Chinese, describes people that are very sophisticated in dealing with interpersonal things. But sophisticated should be a good word here. But in China, shigu is a bad word. It’s when people are TOO sophisticated, and it’s not your true heart. You don’t treat everyone sincerely. It’s more like you’re wearing a mask. I can’t find an English word for this!
February’s meeting (2/15) had a light agenda. We voted on the representation amendment to our constitution for a final time. I talked about it last month (reducing the size of Staff Council to 2 reps per campus unit, plus some at-large seats). I voted “Nay” (again); it passed (again). Apparently, this means it now will be put into the constitution. The vote count was not announced to us. If I remember to, I’ll ask our president why vote counts aren’t routinely announced in our meetings, put on the website, or preferably both. A glance around the room told me there weren’t a lot of nay votes. At a meeting last year, I actually overheard one of my fellow representatives say (in response to being asked what exactly we were voting on at that moment), “Oh, I dunno, I just vote ‘yes’ to everything”. I sincerely hope that she is not among the folks who will be angst-ridden next year when there are fewer Staff Council members, and only 3 committee members show up to run an campus event or to label envelopes for a mailing to thousands of people.

We also listened to brief statements by candidates for Staff Council offices (VP, treasurer, secretary). Voting takes place at our next meeting on 3/15.

We also had a visiting speaker (whose name eludes me) who briefed us on an upcoming (April 11th) meeting about a new deliberative polling project having to do with campus art proposals. People participating in this process would take part in online and on-campus activities, possibly in the evenings. Hardcopy materials explaining the new project will be placed online and on tables in the library about 2 weeks before the meeting.

Speaking of the online world, a recent visit showed that several important pages have not been updated on Staff Council’s website since 2004, including “Annual Reports” and “Meeting Minutes”. “Committee Membership” pages were updated more recently, but apparently not since the elections in summer 2006 or so. If one of Staff Council’s self-identified goals is to heighten its transparency and accessibility to staff, a no-brainer way to help achieve it is keeping the website current. Vote count totals and meeting agendas (including special speakers, if any, scheduled to appear at the next meeting) should be introduced onto the website. All of this would help engage staff and perhaps even entice them to come to our meetings if it’s about a topic of concern or interest to them. After the meeting, I approached the woman who has updated the site in the past and offered to help out. We’ll see if she takes me up on it.

PLB Shout-Out!

This month’s PLB Shout-Out goes to 4 people who helped make another fantastic prospective graduate student recruiting weekend happen: Erin Donahoe, Lori Holt, and Ken and Avis Kotovsky. Erin and Lori did most of the heavy lifting for scheduling, organizing, and planning, so that I could show up and have great meetings with interesting students, and plenty of free food. And speaking of free food, Ken and Avis’ work as hosts at the party that evening was fantastic. I think Avis’s work making sure everyone ate more dessert is going to get us at least one more graduate student than we would have otherwise gotten!
Now that CMU has branches in Qatar, California, Athens, Japan, and Australia, Drs. Holt and Rakison have suggested that the time may be right for CMU to expand to South Park, Colorado. Before presenting their plan to the administration, they developed some mock-ups of what the personnel at such a location might look like, as you can see below:

The Cognitive Group at CMU-SP. Look like anyone you know?
The plan includes a fully stocked Social/Health/Personality group (above) and a fine looking Developmental group (below).