Greetings from campus

It has been a pretty cloudy spring so far this year, however when sunny days do come our way we take full advantage of the beautiful weather: lunch by Sunset Lake, studying on the quad, Frisbee in Noyes Circle…

The big excitement this semester was the visit paid to campus by members of the Westboro Baptist Church. They came to denounce Vassar’s open acceptance of students of all sexualities, but students, faculty and administrators turned out full force to turn that message of hate into a day that reinforced the inclusive community we share.

This issue of the STS newsletter is particularly special because it contains a high concentration of material submitted by STS alums! It was great to hear from so many colleagues across distances in time and space and know that we all have certain experiences in common whether it be our freshman dorm, reading Thomas Kuhn, or taking a class with Jim Challey 😊.

As always, we hope you enjoy reading what we have to share!

Alumnae/i Updates
Thank you to everyone who wrote in!

“I've escaped the northeast winter for the first time in my life. I finished my PhD in STS at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute this summer and taught a couple classes there in the fall, one called a Century of Environmental Thought was actually designed by fellow Vassar STS grad and current RPI prof Abby Kinchy. My dissertation focused on innovations in the communication of the environmental sciences and how interdisciplinary collaborations can be created and sustained. On new years day I hit the road and have made it to La Paz on the southern tip of Baja where carnivale just started last night. Looking forwards to spring in New York when I plan on focusing on growing food, teaching, job applications and getting into the Adirondacks as much as possible.”

Brandon Costello-Kuehn ‘06

“After working for three years at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Breast Cancer Center, I moved to Baltimore to attend law school. I graduated with honors and certification in Health Law from the University of Maryland School of Law in 2011. I am currently working as a Health Care and Life Sciences associate in the Washington, D.C. office of Epstein, Becker & Green, P.C. On a more personal note, I married one of my law school classmates, Saul Ehrenpreis, in March 2012.”

Serra Schlanger ‘05

Continued on page 2
Studying Abroad in Jordan by Eleni Macrakis ‘14

مرحبا يا شباب! (Hey guys!). I'm currently abroad in Amman, Jordan where I am studying Arabic, living with a Jordanian host family, and traveling around the country when I can get away from the endless vocab and complicated grammar that is the Arabic language. My program is located in the University of Jordan which is great because it means we interact a fair amount with actual Jordanian students and get to learn about the culture from our peers (like the way the library works, food schedules/habits, and playing pick-up soccer). I am, however, one of the only American students who is not some sort of history/political science/international relations major which makes for interesting conversations as I tend to observe my surroundings in a very different way. My STS classes at Vassar follow me around as I try to understand how people think about technology and science here and the various internal structures that exist within the country.

For instance, I am taking a class on water politics where we talk about the existing technologies in Jordan that try to deal with the water crisis (Jordan is one of the most water poor countries in the world—some say 4th most, others say 10th most) and just last week we got to go on a field trip to see various water technologies in the northern part of the country. After passing through many military checkpoints because of our proximity to the Israeli and Golan Heights borders, we went to the King Abdullah canal, which carries water from the Yarmouk River and Lake Tiberius (located in Israel) to Amman and the Jordan Valley which is the main area of agricultural production in the country. Our professor told us that the water from Lake Tiberius is provided by Israel due to a peace treaty between the two countries but that in the past water the canal has received sewage water which then contaminated the entire canal. There are now measures in place that test the water in the canal however the sensors are located within the canal however after taking the Infrastructure class with Professor Challey last semester I can’t understand why they aren’t within the pipe that feeds the water into the canal. In addition, in a country with so little access to fresh water access and a severe shortage in the very near future, it doesn’t seem to make sense in terms of sustainability to divert 70% of water usage to agriculture (a very inefficient use of water when water is scarce) as produce in the end needs to be imported because domestic agriculture can nowhere near support the needs of the country.

While my classmates were more interested in the geography and history of the region, I was more interested in the mechanics of the technologies and the problems that Jordan has faced with the water shortage. Many people have asked me why I am studying abroad in Jordan with a program that has little to nothing to do with my major but in the end, STS provides us with an excellent framework with which to observe other societies and in return we gain a better understanding of where our undergraduate studies can translate into a professional career.

Alums, cont’d from pg 1

Abby Kinchy (’96) completed graduate school at the University of Wisconsin and is now Assistant Professor in the Department of Science and Technology Studies at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. She is coeditor of Controversies in Science and Technology: From Maize to Menopause and author of the book Seeds, Science, and Struggle: The Global Politics of Transgenic Crops (look out for the full profile in the next Vassar Quarterly). Ms. Kinchy visited Vassar this past October as a member of the alumnae/i panel for the inaugural Conference on Food and Agriculture. She illuminated the issues surrounding the green revolution and the various political struggles around the world using information she had gathered on agriculture, genetic engineering, and social justice.
There and Back Again: A Post-doc’s Tale
by Andy Fiss ’05
Mellon Post Doctorate Fellow

Ten years ago, I signed up for Professor Challey’s “STS 202: History of Modern Science and Technology.” It’s a cliché, but the class changed my life. As a sophomore, I knew I had to decide on a major but I was torn between chemistry, physics, and mathematics. I thought STS 202 would help me decide which intellectual passion I wanted to pursue. It certainly did, but not in the way I expected. Little did I know that Professor Challey’s class would be the beginning of a career in STS.

Now I’m on the other side of the classroom, and I have been surprised to learn how much work goes on behind the scenes. Running a multidisciplinary program is not just about teaching classes. It’s also necessary to recruit students to take them and faculty to teach them – nearly all of our instructors have appointments in other departments. While potential majors learn about the program in pizza parties, potential STS instructors have conversations over coffee with Professors Challey or Gray. These prosaic interactions tell the story of STS at Vassar, its web of people growing amid the sounds of sips and chewing. I am grateful to the STS faculty not just for leading me on my current wending path but also for showing me the importance of food and good cheer in building a successful community.

Why I study STS by Sam Brucker ’14

I recently switched majors to STS even though I have no idea what I want to do after college. What I know is that the kind of things I think about in my free time and talk about with my friends is how important of a force technology is in our lives and how much it impacts the ways we relate to one another. While from its inception the field of STS has studied the interrelationship of society and technology, theories become even more complicated and fascinating when they are applied to the technology of socializing.

Online socializing is such a game changer. On one hand, a lot of social media sites seem to encourage narcissism. People who you barely know all of a sudden feel it socially acceptable to update you on where they are eating, and with whom. But on the other hand, there are examples of social media sites fostering remarkable interactions. For example, a US resident recently posted on a Reddit thread asking if any Scottish users who lived near a certain cemetery could find and photograph his grandfather’s grave, previously far too distant to see, and was responded to with pictures within the week.

For better or for worse technology is altering fundamental notions of how and with whom we can communicate and changes in the basic ways we communicate with one another surely will lead to reflected changes in the social systems and institutions we take part in. In studying theories of technology’s relationship to people I believe we can preempt and shape the kinds of online social systems that emerge, structuring them to encourage productive discourse.
Senior Theses 2013

Nature's Dualisms: Wilderness and the American Environmental Imagination
Olivia Arnow

No Compunction Whatsoever: An Examination of the Institutional Norms of Science at the MIT Radiation Laboratory During the Second World War
Alaric Chin

Unrolling the Roll: Toilet Paper as a Socially Constructed Symbolic Artifact
Elizabeth Edgaro

Message in the Bottle: The Consumption of Private Water
Melina Harris

Positive Transitions in a Changing World
Keiko Kurita

Genetically Engineered Food and Labeling
Henry Liang

Urban Agriculture in Detroit: Sustenance, Security, and Sovereignty
Amanda McCarthy

Vehicle to Grid: Plugging in the Electric Vehicle
Sean Morash

A Multifaceted Comparison of Concentrated and Distributed Solar Power
Nicolas Michel

The Unintentional Consequences of the Smartphone
Michael Perrone

Tuberculosis in the Modern Era and the Public Health Catastrophes that Lead to its Resurgence
Caroline Picher

Evolutions of popular music production and distribution technologies in the twenty-twenty-first centuries
Aaron Steinberg

Evaluating Technology in the Classroom: Secondary Schooling, iPads, and Implications of Actor-Network Theory
Sam Wagner

Thanks to our wonderful faculty readers!!!
We’ll miss you, Professor Challey!!!

The remaining pages of this edition of the newsletter will be a send-off dedicated to the most delightful professor. We are all lucky to have known Prof. Challey and to have learned about STS under his tutelage. Thank you to everyone who contributed.
Mr. Challey taught STS classes with great enthusiasm. His lectures were incredibly engaging. It is hard to imagine the STS program without him, but I wish him the best!

Sara Bodach ‘04

It has now been about 9 years since I graduated from Vassar and, in my case that length of time is long enough that many of my classes and teachers have faded to a happy but blurred amalgam of education. Not Professor Challey; he is still a vivid memory because of his passionate lectures, kind heart and particular talent for elucidating complex topics and philosophies. He is a truly exceptional educator who sparked my passion for the subject of STS. I thank him for his exceptional work and wish him well in his retirement.

Bonnie Blass ‘04

Jim Challey inspired me to explore all aspects of learning. He was a wonderful professor. I truly enjoyed my time in his class. I am disappointed that my daughter will not be able to experience his teaching when she comes to Vassar.

Patricia Jacqueline Cooper ‘78

Congratulations to Professor Challey! He is an incredible teacher and adviser and helped me truly love the work of writing my thesis. He leaves quite a legacy!

Brandon Costello-Kuehn ‘06

I can safely say that were it not for Jim Challey, I would not have graduated from VC. At the end of a particularly turbulent semester, I was in his office with my dog trying to figure out how I was going to write the last four papers I owed him, I was exhausted and in a ragged state of mind. He turned to my dog and said "I don't think Richard is doing too well, better take him home and put him to bed". He then explained to me what I needed to produce and sent me on my merry way. In the years that followed, Professor Challey helped me find my passion in STS which as it happens was a focus on sustainability that has shaped my life and now that of my children's. He was instrumental in teaching me to think critically and to be willing to examine the world through any and all perspectives, which is the basis of having an open mind.

Richard Heller ‘82

I send my regards to Mr. Challey. He was one of the most approachable, kind, supportive professors I had at Vassar. The STS program truly made my time at Vassar meaningful. I continue to take a multidisciplinary approach in my life and career. Whether STS shaped me or it was an expression of who I am, I am forever grateful for what I learned in the STS program and especially from Professor James Challey.

Warmly,
Andrea Schreibman Rudolph ‘88

Professor Challey is the reason I declared STS as my major. After a few discussions in Professor Challey's basement office, I realized that STS provided the perfect combination of science and liberal arts. Professor Challey provided guidance and support throughout my three years as a STS major which helped me become the professional I am today.

Congratulations and thank you Professor Challey! You will be greatly missed at Vassar.

Serra Schlanger ‘05

Jim Challey is one of my favorite professors at Vassar College. He is extremely knowledgable on just about anything. When I was undecided as a major, I took an STS course with him as a sophomore, and he single handedly may have captured my interest in the major. As my advisor, Professor Challey never steered me wrong, always had great advice, and always had time to speak. I appreciate professors like Mr. Challey, and he will be missed by the STS department.

Mike Perrone ‘13
I enjoyed being in his class and enjoyed that he encouraged intellectual curiosity. Heck, he plowed through some 40 pager I wrote regarding how the car and tire companies, while encouraging road building and car manufacturing, bought the holding companies for the subway and trolley systems and choked them almost into oblivion. Heck, anyone that could read that and stay awake is somebody special!!!! Wish him well, I'll be on campus for my 35th in June. He is a good man and that is most of what I recall about him. He was curious and helped me be curious.

Gar Winkeller ‘78

Professor Challey has played a big part in my academic career during my four years at Vassar College. I have taken four courses with him and have come to appreciate more and more his profound knowledge in the history of science. Each class he surprises me with a relevant fact or story, connecting it perfectly with the lesson plan while simultaneously adding a bit of the experiences of his life; something I thoroughly enjoy. Equally memorable is his warm smile and approachability; I never once hesitated to visit his office hours as he is genuinely interested in the well-being of students and always ready to engage in a good discussion. Professor Challey will surely be missed and I hope he has a wonderfully relaxing retirement!

Aaron Steinberg ‘13

I believe that the honor of working with Professor Challey is an honor that stands on its own merits. Beyond that, I am sure that the campus will miss Professor Challey's great wealth of knowledge of energy technologies and energy policies, especially as they become the central issues of the 21st century. I wish all the best to Professor Challey in his retirement!

Alaric Chin ‘13

I sort of lucked into STS as a major. When the deadline approached I couldn't make a decision, and my choice went down to the wire. So part of the reason I became an STS major is because Professor Challey had office hours on Friday. He was a very accommodating advisor. For example, he signed my approval to go off on a junior year abroad junket to Tibet without any hesitation, even though it had almost nothing to do with my academic plan, and he added some nice words of encouragement to boot. This was before we really knew each other. In fact, if memory serves, I had him sign my paperwork the same afternoon he agreed to let me into the program.

I would visit around noontime, and I have strong memory of sitting in that hard wooden chair in his office while he heated up his lunch, usually a bizarre can of commercial chili, over a Bunsen burner that was built into the counter below a window. I thought that was the, nerdiest coolest thing ever.

In our correspondence after I was graduated, Jim Challey was always prompt and respectful in his replies to me. Much prompter than I’ve ever been. He helped me get my first job, as an environmental advocate, and we exchanged interesting letters about the human connection to chainsaws.

My favorite memory of Professor Challey is something I stumbled upon. One afternoon as I visited his office a strange man was just leaving, clutching a packet of papers under his arm. I must have looked after him quizzically, as Jim explained that he was helping to provide science curriculum materials to Poughkeepsie public schools. I thought Wow, what a great thing to do...and how does he make the time? To me this exemplifies, and typifies, his core quality as a quietly, genuinely, caring man. His public service in Poughkeepsie, and of course his dedicated encouragement of all sorts of students across many years, is an outgrowth of that quality of character.

Chris Young ‘91
Professor Challey is a joy to learn from and to get to know. His genuine kindness and dedication are rare, as is his knowledge of an incredible breadth of topics. I greatly enjoyed his stories about the people and the history of this or that doodad that I use without thought every day. (I, and many other STSers, can never look at a bicycle in the same way.) He will be sorely missed!

Amanda McCarthy ’13

Professor Challey is a treasure, a patient teacher who puts the person before the student, a man rich in experiences and knowledge, a role model for the ever-curious-never-to-be-quenched mind, the best storyteller. Involved on campus as well as in the city of Poughkeepsie, Professor Challey is an exemplar of how to take the knowledge and skills we accumulate and use them to help the communities in which we live. I am so grateful that my time at Vassar overlapped with his last four years of teaching. Best of luck, Professor Challey! I’ll think of you often.

Liz Edgaro ’13

This photo was taken in Munar, India which is a stunning city in the mountains of the southwest state of Kerela. In this picture I am absorbing in the beauty of the rolling tea plantations, misty white sky, and cool air; an unexpected pocket of calm to contrast the bustling cities of Chennai and Delhi.

Margaret Kwateng ’14
Taken by Emily Norman ’14.

One last travel-inspiring JYA photo...

Things to look forward to in the next issue:

• New selection of classes for 2013-2014
• Welcoming Jose Perillan to the STS department
• Decisions made during the 2013 STS Pedagogy Workshop at Vassar

Come visit us on campus, sit in on a class, let us know what you have been up to 😊

If you would like to contribute to the Science, Technology, and Society newsletter, or if you have any questions, comments, or feedback please contact the 2012-2013 Science, Technology, and Society academic intern, Liz Edgaro, at eledgaro@vassar.edu

Enjoy your summer