RARE HONOR HIGHLIGHTS
A LIFETIME OF ACCOMPLISHMENT FOR DAWES

In May, Dawes, 68, will be afforded a rare honor: The American Psychological Society will present him with a Festschrift, a collection of essays related to his work, based on a daylong discussion of his impact by colleagues from around the nation and abroad. Few people have had such a deep impact on psychology, said Joachim Krueger, an associate professor of psychology and human development at Brown University. Krueger recommended Dawes for the Festschrift.

“I have a separate drawer in my file cabinet for just Dawes papers. This is one person who clearly without doubt deserves a Festschrift,” said Krueger, who earned his Ph.D. at the University of Oregon, where Dawes formerly taught.

With characteristic modesty, Dawes said, “I was surprised at this honor. It’s nice. I guess it means I’m superannuated.”

Among the precepts Dawes has contributed to his field is that people validly tend to assume that others are just like themselves. So it may be no surprise that Dawes fails to grasp that much of the world is not quite as smart as he is.

“‘You run into him in the hall, and he starts talking to you as though you’ve been in conversation for a while. He erroneously believes people are on the same intellectual level,’” said George Loewenstein, a professor of psychology and economics in SDS.

“I’ve just gotten very blunt with him when I don’t understand what he’s saying.”

And Loewenstein is no slouch. He’s one of several groundbreaking professors in SDS, a department that has produced cutting-edge research in fields as diverse as risk assessment, economics and environmental policy. In his 19 years at Carnegie Mellon, Dawes has been one of the department’s chief architects, helping to craft a department known not only for its research but for its excellent undergraduate and graduate educational programs.

“We’ve just gotten better and better as we’ve gone along,” said Dawes, a former department head. “My philosophy has always been, you get the best people and it will probably work.”

By the time Dawes came to Carnegie Mellon from the University of Oregon in 1985, he was already one of the nation’s most acclaimed psychological researchers. (Dawes’ late father Norman taught history at Carnegie Mellon from 1936 to 1964.) Dawes was perhaps best known for his work into human cooperation, in which he turned theoretical models on their heads by demonstrating that people tend to cooperate in situations even when it would appear to be against their individual self-interest to do so.

Dawes also has found that people very quickly segregate themselves into

“It can take a bit of courage to admit to someone that you don’t understand what they are talking about. So you have to be mighty brave indeed to venture a conversation with Robyn Dawes.

Dawes, the Charles J. Queenan Jr. University Professor of Psychology in the Department of Social and Decision Sciences (SDS), is one of the most brilliant minds in his field. During a career that has spanned 40 years, he has made a significant impact on several areas of psychological science, including human cooperation, judgment and decision-making, and intuition and irrationality.

ROBYN DAWES (PHOTO BY KEN ANDREY)

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The press has been a greenhouse for literary and publishing careers

Jerry Costanzo knows a good book when he sees one—whether it’s finding a rare edition lurking in the $1.99 bin at a used book store, or spotting a potential Pulitzer Prize winner among the hundreds of manuscripts that come across his desk every year at the Carnegie Mellon University Press.

Thirty years ago, Costanzo founded the press, which has published about 500 books, including Rita Dove’s “Thomas and Beulah,” which won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1987. Two U.S. poet laureates and two other Pulitzer winners have had books published by Carnegie Mellon, and numerous Carnegie Mellon students have launched publishing careers as a result of having worked for the press.

“It’s in the best tradition of (Andrew) Carnegie’s plan for the school. The Carnegie Mellon University Press gives to select students the ability to learn a trade, and that’s what publishing is, a trade and a craft,” said James Costello (B.A. English, 1981), the owner of J. Michael Ryan Publishing.

The press publishes about 20 titles each year, and it has branched out into short fiction and recently textbooks and scholarly works written by Carnegie Mellon faculty. Each year, five to seven students from Costanzo’s editing and publishing
course intern for the press, working at every stage of the publishing process.

“We rely heavily on their expertise, and we train them pretty well. That’s why they go into publishing. They have the credentials to go into it immediately,” Costanzo said.

Like his students, Costanzo knows a thing or two about good writing. He’s authored seven poetry collections, and he has received two Creative Writing Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts; two Pushcart Prizes; a Pennsylvania Council on the Arts Writing Fellowship; and an Editorial Fellowship from the Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines.

In 1972, Costanzo started Three Rivers Poetry Journal, which was the brainchild of the late Gladys Schmitt, the distinguished poet and novelist who founded the university’s Creative Writing Program. The journal folded in 1992, as the press consumed more and more of Costanzo’s time.

During the 1970s, Costanzo learned how to set letter presses from Edward Fischer Jr., a professor of design, and he began publishing a series of poetry chapbooks. Costanzo formally launched the press in 1975 with grants from the NEA and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts.

“Jerry gives you as much responsibility as you can handle. I wasn’t sure at the beginning that I was up to the task. My first tour of duty through he put me in charge of a manuscript, and I was corresponding with the author. Seeing a book through from manuscript to printed product was a pretty rare opportunity for a 21- or 22-year-old,” Silbert said.

Among the first books the press published was “In the Face of Descent” by Alan Broughton, now a retired English professor from the University of Vermont. Carnegie Mellon has published six books by Broughton, loyalty that he said is nonexistent among commercial publishers.

“I’m a very grateful person in terms of my connection to the press. ...I don’t know what I would have done without it,” he said.

Costello recalls that the early days were rather primitive: Each manuscript had to be typed into a machine that recorded it onto a tape cartridge—similar to an eight-track cassette—which was then fed into a typesetting machine. By the time Jack Silbert (B.A. Creative Writing, 1991) graduated, the press was using a Macintosh computer to design and lay out each book.

Silbert, who now works for Scholastic Inc., remembers thinking that he had no business deciding whose manuscript deserved to be published.

“The Carnegie Mellon University Press has served two important roles for the college and university. First, it has forged a close link between Carnegie Mellon and some of the best writers in the nation,” said David Kaufer, head of the Department of English.

“Second, the press has significantly added to the distinctiveness of the Creative Writing Program by providing undergraduate majors an opportunity to learn about every aspect of publishing and editing poetry or short fiction. This experience is extremely valuable and rare,” Kaufer said.

In 1989, the press inaugurated the Carnegie Mellon Contemporary Classics Series, reprinting the works of poets whose books originally had been published elsewhere. Books like “The Lady in Kicking Horse Reservoir,” by Richard Hugo and “The incognito lounge” by Denis Johnson, which commercial publishers believed no longer had a market, have been big sellers for Carnegie Mellon.

“I think it’s what gotten us known in the literary arena,” Costanzo said.

The press also publishes the Series in Short Fiction, launched in 1997 by Sharon Dilworth, an associate professor of English and creative writing, and the Poets in Prose series. The latter includes books written about poetry or poets’ memoirs.

“With us, it’s publishing the best collection of poems we can find, and in befitting a university press, publishing new writers,” Costanzo said. “Still for me it’s just so much fun after all these years.”
The National Science Foundation has awarded Carnegie Mellon and the University of Pittsburgh a five-year, $25 million grant to establish the Pittsburgh Science of Learning Center (PSLC), which will sponsor rigorous research into how people learn and develop technologies and approaches to teaching that will foster consistently high achievement in the nation’s classrooms.

The core of the PSLC is a research facility called LearnLab, where education researchers can create, run and analyze experiments on how people learn. LearnLab will address what has long been a dilemma for education researchers: Experiments conducted in the artificial confines of the laboratory produce results that are not broadly transferable to schools, while studies conducted in classrooms have tended to be less rigorously controlled and do not provide sufficiently trustworthy results that can be used by others. Thus, education research has lacked the kind of rigor that can be found, for example, in medical research, a problem policymakers are eager to correct. Under the federal No Child Left Behind Act, schools must demonstrate yearly progress through standardized tests, requiring teachers and school administrators to make data-driven decisions.

Although Carnegie Mellon has no education school, it is fast becoming a major national center of K-12 education research, and H&SS has been an integral part of that research.

The codirectors of the PSLC are Kenneth R. Koedinger, associate professor of human-computer interaction and psychology at Carnegie Mellon, and Pitt Computer Science Professor Kurt VanLehn, senior scientist in Pitt's Learning Research and Development Center.

“This is an idea whose time has come,” Koedinger said. “We are not getting the high-quality, useful research we need to meet federal goals to improve education. LearnLab will provide a much-needed infrastructure to produce such research.”

LearnLab scientists initially will use seven high school and college-level courses as a basis for their research—two high school mathematics courses; two college science courses; and three college language courses. The PSLC will invite schools in the Pittsburgh area and across the country to participate as “research schools” and serve much as research hospitals do for medical research. LearnLab, functioning in conjunction with the schools, will enable scientists to conduct research that is as rigorous as traditional laboratory studies and test their results in real classroom settings. In addition to being a center for research in education, LearnLab also will be a repository for education data.

LearnLab draws upon the combined strengths of Carnegie Mellon and Pitt in cognitive and developmental psychology, human-computer interaction, and intelligent tutoring systems, matching learning and language technologies. Researchers at Carnegie Mellon, for example, developed the popular Cognitive Tutor®, a computer-based tutoring program that includes a comprehensive secondary mathematics curriculum that has been commended by the U.S. Department of Education and is in use in 1,500 schools nationwide.

The Humanities Center is a collaboration of faculty members from all four humanities departments: English, History, Modern Languages and Philosophy. Its goals are to strengthen research and teaching in the humanities; to foster collaborations among the humanities faculty and between departments; and to provide support for the humanities curriculum, interdisciplinary humanities research, and community and campus outreach.

“It’s hard to underestimate how important this is. It will provide the center with permanent financial support. It is significant that the NEH has recognized that the humanities at Carnegie Mellon are worthy of support,” said David Shumway, the director of the Humanities Center.

Under the terms of the grant, the Humanities Center will receive $500,000 from the NEH contingent on the center raising an additional $1.5 million by 2008. Alumni can help the Humanities Center meet this challenge by designating their gifts for “The Humanities Center Challenge” or “The NEH Challenge.”

Income from the endowment will, among other things, fund research fellows who will bring new areas of expertise to humanities students, support for the humanities curriculum, interdisciplinary humanities research, and community and campus outreach.

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By Christina England

(Editor’s note: Christina England (MDes Communication Planning and Design, 2001) is the director of the Writing Center at Carnegie Mellon’s campus in Qatar.)

When people ask me what it’s like to live in Qatar, I answer, “It’s the same, but different.” I know that’s not much of a response, but it’s true! I get up in the morning, get my older daughter ready for school, go to work at the university, pick up my daughter from soccer practice, come home and help with homework, shop at the grocery store or the mall, and have dinner.

But I also leave my 5-month-old daughter with our live-in nanny/housemaid, who will clean the house and possibly cook dinner for us. I’ll go to the Souq (traditional market) to shop for many things I don’t want to pay overblown prices for, especially if I’m in the mood to bargain. On the weekends we might go dune-bashing and ride up and down 4-story high sand dunes along the coast to the Inland Sea for a picnic and a swim. And did I mention the weather? Right now, in January, it’s fabulous, in the 70s and sunny. Of course, that will change dramatically in May and June when it will heat up. In August temperatures can reach up to 120F!

Is it what I was expecting? Well, I’m not sure. I was seven and a half months pregnant when we moved, so I didn’t really have any expectations. I wasn’t worried about many of the things that people have been concerned about, terrorists, war, car bombs, and kidnappings; because I knew this is a safe place – safer than the U.S. in many ways. But I have traveled a lot and know that you can’t come into a new situation with strong expectations because you will miss out on a lot. To be honest, I was much more concerned with the fact that I was having a baby regardless of the location.

What do I miss about Pittsburgh? Not counting family and friends, I think the thing I miss most is trees. I have never been one to shy away from an adventure and we have certainly found one here!

Most people who ask about Qatar really want to know about the people. To borrow a phrase from a student, all Arabs do not live in tents and drink petrol. They do not hate Americans and not all women cover their faces. People are very friendly and helpful, most speak English and are well educated. While many people wear the traditional robes, they are not required and there are many people who do not to wear them (although I believe that this may be dictated by families, and different countries have different rules regarding this). And what do women wear under the abaya (the long black robe)? Arab women are really into high fashion! This fashion is not wasted, however, since the abaya is only worn in public or in the presence of men who are not related. When women get together, they shed the robes and love to look great! I have confessed to some of the students that if I had the opportunity to wear the abaya, I would just go around in my pajamas!

There are actually more expatriates in Qatar than Qataris, I think. Many are Arabs, but there are people from all over the world working in stores, as housekeepers and in construction. I have met people from the UK, Australia, France, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and all over the Arab world. And I have never met anyone who disliked Americans or questioned my politics.

After a trip to Pittsburgh in November, I asked my students what they would have wanted me to tell people when they asked about my life in Qatar. The overwhelming response was: “We are just like them!” They have access to Western media and feel that they are portrayed unfairly, hence the living in tents and drinking petrol comment. They like clothes, movies, music and one student in particular loves Oprah. The girls giggle in the hallways and the boys look cool. They are concerned about their grades and want peace. And they are students at Carnegie Mellon University.
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groups. Historically, of course, the human tendency to form groups—based on race, religion or nationality—and to protect the group’s interests has been the source of most of the world’s conflicts. But what intrigues Dawes is that people form these associations rapidly, even under the arbitrary conditions of a social science experiment.

“Even with the most meaningless categorizations, you get this effect...People will cooperate because of us versus them,” Dawes said.

Dawes, a Harvard graduate who earned his master’s and doctoral degrees from the University of Michigan, laid early groundwork for the study of decision-making by proving that even the crudest mathematical models could outperform human judgment in a variety of fields. Throughout his career, he’s been a skeptic of human intuition, demonstrating how people fail to think rationally and believe things that aren’t true. He explores this in his book “Everyday Irrationality: How Pseudo-scientists, Lunatics, and the Rest of Us Fail to Be Rational,” and it is also the subject of a freshman seminar he teaches.

This skepticism has carried over into his critiques of clinical psychology. He laid out these criticisms in his book “House of Cards: Psychology and Psycho-therapy Built on Myth,” in which he calls out mental health professionals for ignoring empirical research in favor of techniques that do not hold up to scientific scrutiny.

Colleagues say that Dawes’ work in debunking popular myths and the views of so-called experts is motivated by a broader concern for humanity that animates much of his research. He is a member of the National Research Council’s Committee on AIDS Research, which succeeded during the late 1990s in convincing President Clinton to allow needle exchange programs to stem the spread of AIDS among intravenous drug users. Dawes and fellow advocates of such programs had to fight baseless misconceptions that needle exchanges would promote drug abuse.

“His work is not only technically brilliant but it’s also strongly motivated by ethical concerns. Robyn’s work has a very obvious moral compass that one sees in the problems he picks and the way he approaches them,” said Baruch Fischhoff, the Howard Heinz University Professor of Social and Decision Sciences and of Engineering and Public Policy.

Fischhoff was lured to Carnegie Mellon by Dawes, who knew Fischhoff from their days at the Oregon Research Institute. Said Fischhoff, “He’s just incredibly smart. He’s as smart as anybody I know.”

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humanities faculty and faculty in other disciplines; and to nurture a greater role for the humanities in an increasingly technological and global society. The center will bring to the humanities at Carnegie Mellon the university’s traditional focus on multidisciplinary research and education.

“The Humanities Center will focus on themes that are of broad social and cultural relevance, and out of which can come knowledge that may contribute to the solution of problems facing contemporary society,” said Shumway, a professor of English at Carnegie Mellon. “The center is committed to the proposition that traditional knowledge in the humanities is relevant to such problems.”

The Humanities Center is part of Carnegie Mellon’s Humanities Initiative, a bold program to strengthen and broaden the humanities at Carnegie Mellon. The initiative also includes the Humanities Scholars Program and the Center for the Arts in Society.

Carnegie Mellon Names Scheines Head of Department of Philosophy

Carnegie Mellon has named Philosophy Professor Richard Scheines the head of the Department of Philosophy effective July 1, 2005.

Scheines has been at Carnegie Mellon since 1988, and his work both as a researcher and an educator typifies the university’s multi-disciplinary approach and focus on real-world problem solving. His research focuses on causal discovery from a philosophical, statistical and computational perspective. It led to the development of the TETRAD Project, a suite of computer programs for causal modeling that has been applied to many important scientific questions, including whether low levels of lead produce cognitive deficits in children. Scheines is now serving on a National Academy of Sciences committee investigating the influence of food marketing on the diets of youth and children. He has co-authored four books, published nearly 80 articles and technical papers, and has developed several state-of-the-art educational technology applications. He is one of the founders of Carnegie Mellon’s Open Learning Initiative (OLI), a program to develop a series of web-based, interactive, demonstrably effective university-level courses, and a faculty member in both the university’s Center for Automated Learning and Discovery and the Human-Computer Interaction Institute, where he directs the undergraduate major.

“Richard Scheines is a perfect person to lead the Department of Philosophy. He is internationally recognized for his research on causation, and he is deeply committed to education,” said H&SS Dean John Lehoczky.

“He is playing a leading role in improving the delivery of instruction and measuring its effectiveness. The breadth of his engagements across campus and his experience as associate department head will serve the Philosophy Department and H&SS well,” Lehoczky said.

Scheines earned master’s and doctoral degrees in the history and philosophy of science from the University of Pittsburgh and a bachelor’s degree in history from Hobart College in New York.

“The professors in philosophy are spectacular, so I’m truly honored to be chosen as the next
America is the land of opportunity, where everyone has the chance to strike it rich and where every child can grow up to be president. Or so we are told.

But for every Rockefeller and Carnegie, for every person who hits the jackpot—through talent, hard work, luck or all three—there’s plenty of others who crap out. Their stories, the stories of failures and dreams deferred, are rarely heard, as if the subjects’ bad luck might be transmitted in the telling.

These are the stories that Scott Sandage, 40, an associate professor of history at Carnegie Mellon, tells in his book “Born Losers: A History of Failure in America,” which was published in January and won the Thomas J. Wilson Memorial Prize from Harvard University Press. The award is given every year to a first-time author whose book is deemed outstanding in content, style and presentation.

The book, which was reviewed favorably in The Atlantic Monthly and Esquire, among others, was an outgrowth of Sandage’s doctoral dissertation at Rutgers University. Sandage, who has been at Carnegie Mellon since 1996, specializes in U.S. cultural and 19th century history.

“I think of myself as a historian of identity, which means I’m interested in how different ways of thinking of ourselves have changed in the past 200 years,” Sandage said.

“Born Losers” is a study of how Americans define failure and how that definition has changed over the past 200 years. In particular, Sandage examines how the growth of capitalism during the 19th century fostered the idea that every part of a person’s life could follow a business model, thus precipitating a transformation in how society regarded failure.

During the 18th century, according to Sandage, society viewed failure as something that happened to people in their careers because of errors in judgment or external events. Now, people blame failure on character flaws, and failure has become part of the individual’s very identity.

“This book tells the story of America’s unsung losers: men who failed in a nation that worships success. ... Businessmen dominate this story because their loss of money and manhood drove legislative, commercial and cultural solutions that redefined failure: from the lost capital of a bankruptcy to the lost chances of a wasted life,” Sandage wrote in the book’s prologue.

Sandage said he first struck upon the idea for the book after noticing the myriad self-help and get-rich-quick books on display at any bookstore. He discovered a robust academic literature on success but relatively little on failure.

“The Library of Congress doesn’t go around asking bums to donate their papers,” Sandage joked.

Nonetheless, Sandage’s research yielded a treasure trove of material, from personal journals to letters written by ne’er-do-wells to Congress members and to rich people, begging for money. Once he started digging, he found plenty of material—and plenty of so-called failures.

“Every family has a black sheep,” he said.

Sandage’s next book is tentatively titled “Half-Breed Tract” and examines a reservation established in Nebraska for mixed-race American Indians. The book will explore American racial identity as well as the system of American Indian reservations, which Sandage said were created by Congress and the courts to turn Indians from communal farmers into capitalist landowners.

That book converges with Sandage’s interests in anthropology, cultural history, and history and policy—which happen to be the History Department’s strengths and among the reasons Sandage came to Carnegie Mellon in the first place.

“Carnegie Mellon is good at encouraging young scholars to write about topics that have broad significance in society,” Sandage said.
H&SS has launched a monthly email newsletter, the H&SS eNews. If you would like to receive the eNews, please send your name and email address to Jonathan Potts at: jpotts@andrew.cmu.edu.