



Plants and the Man

Tim Allen encourages students to give him something to chew on.

Some may say the title of Botany 240, *Plants and Man*, is outdated. The class, which debuted in 1971, is about how plants and humans have affected one another throughout the ages.

But if the title is supposed to reflect what students learn during the semester, then *Plants and Humans* wouldn't be suitable. Students learn the most from the latter part of the course name: the Man. Professor **Tim Allen**.

The first page of Allen's forty-five-page syllabus discusses the title, which in the past, the university has asked him to change. But the class and its name are iconic. In spite of the title's possible sexism, hundreds of students continue to enroll each fall on the recommendation of their peers.

Plants and Man focuses on the evolution of the biological, sociological, and political interaction between people and plants in the twenty-first century. The course specifically studies aspects of agriculture — including plants associated with historical wars and human migration, modern agriculture, economic plants, and sociology and ecological crisis.

Still, there's more to the class than that. Allen also tries to make his students more mindful about their relationship to the food in their lives. Students need not write term papers on plants and the effects of the Industrial Revolution. Instead, they have the option of brewing and bottling their own beer or making dinner for their teaching assistant.

But do not be fooled. No ramen or Kraft macaroni and cheese will be served.

The dinner "is a reflection of personal standards," says **Molly Mogren x'05**, who took the class in the fall.

Allen is quick to note that the dinner should not be a special occasion and is not just an excuse for him and his teaching assistants to be fed a delicious meal. The dinner should show how well the students understand the food they consume.

"Do you have high personal standards? That is what this is all about," Allen says. "I am very tough on them," he admits.

"I have never put more thought or time into a project for a class," senior **Maggie Stack** says as she chops vegetables and throws them into a pan. She and Mogren are conducting a practice run of their meal before they have their TA over for dinner in a few nights.

"Is there too much rosemary in this?" Mogren asks Stack as she tastes a red pepper from their roasted vegetable dish.

This is the last dinner Stack and Mogren will make before their final presentation. The menu tonight consists of mahi mahi, roasted vegetables with olive oil and rosemary, squash, Irish soda bread, and a caesar salad. For dessert: chocolate ice cream with a raspberry puree. But in a few days, it could all change.

"We will have to wait and hear what Sue recommends," Stack says. Sue is the local fishmonger, and Stack and Mogren have become well acquainted with her since signing on for the project. Allen advised anyone cooking dinner to get to know local food providers in order to get the best produce. Stack and Mogren plan on calling Sue the night before their dinner and asking what will be fresh the next day.

"We don't want to end up with farmed salmon," Mogren says, and both she and Stack laugh at the absurdity of the idea.

The dinner, like the rest of the course, isn't meant to be easy. Allen's exams are difficult, with a page of instructions on how essays should be written. No one recommends the class because it is a breeze.

"But it is a spectacular course," Allen says. "I don't know a teacher better than me."

CLASS NOTE

Library Liberty

Library and Information Studies 645: Intellectual Freedom and Libraries

Change is afoot in this venerable library school offering: there's a new lawman in town. The voice telling the next generation of librarians about the rights and responsibilities of intellectual freedom belongs to **Anuj Desai**, a Law School professor. And though he's an expert in First Amendment law, copyright, and international issues regarding intellectual property, he isn't a librarian.

"Because I'm a lawyer, and I don't have an LIS [Library and Information Studies] background, I have a different perspective," he says. "I suspect this course has a different look when I teach it than it might have had before. It's more theoretical and historical."

The course, which includes twenty LIS graduate students, discusses the meaning and importance of intellectual freedom, as well as its limits and its relationship to other values that are important to American society. Students gain a knowledge of the philosophical issues surrounding intellectual freedom, and then apply them to current and historical issues, such as whether libraries have a duty to allow or restrict access to sexually explicit materials.

Desai hopes that his position as a lawyer will make the class more informative — for himself, as much as for his students. "There are some things that are well known in the library community that I don't know," he says.

— J.A.



BARRY CARSEN

Professor Gordon Smith is encouraging Law School students to exercise their legal minds in the public sphere with the launch of **Law & Entrepreneurship News**, a Web log (or "blog") that tracks developments related to launching new businesses. Sixteen student-editors are responsible for the research and writing that is posted on the site, which can be found at <http://entrepreneur.typepad.com/news/>.

The Sloan Consortium named UW-Madison's **Master of Engineering in Professional Practice (MEPP)** degree plan the 2004 Most Outstanding Online Teaching and Learning Program. Sloan granted the honor in December. MEPP was launched in 1999, and aims to give engineers the tools and capabilities to be more effective leaders.

Steroid use, total body makeovers, obesity surgery, limb lengthening — are they unethical or simply ways to use science to make people healthier and happier? Students in the fall medical history course **Body Modifications: Biology, Culture, and Technology**, taught by Linda Hogle, discussed these very topics. As a bonus, they heard from Stelarc, an Australian performance artist who's experimented with extreme body modifications, including a third ear, a robotic third hand, and a sculpture implanted in his stomach.

In December, students in the biomedical engineering department showed off the real-world application of their academic skills at **From Bench to Bedside: The Biomedical Engineering Student Design Expo**. More than a hundred undergraduates participated and created some twenty prototypes for devices ranging from a disposable drug-delivery system to a more ergonomic ultrasound probe.



Professor of botany Tim Allen teaches about the chemical composition of spices and the history of the spice trade while simultaneously making a caesar salad and cooking bananas Foster for his students. "Lecturing should be theater," says Allen. Students "are numbed by music television stations. I have to get them to respond some way." His popular class *Plants and Man* feels like an intellectual cooking show, and students may forgo a term paper and instead try a culinary project, such as bottling their own beer or cooking a meal for their teaching assistant.

His lectures are sometimes compared to a theater production. In one well-known session, Allen makes bananas Foster and a caesar salad while simultaneously giving his lecture. Students, he says, "are numbed by music television stations. I have to get them to respond some way."

Their response is nothing short of an acute understanding of his message.

"He is trying to inspire our generation," Mogren says. "People are so lazy. No one takes the time to prepare and enjoy food anymore. Our society is obsessed with fast food."

Stack and Mogren are now taste-testing wines to judge which one will fit best with their meal, while constantly checking the oven to monitor the mahi mahi.

"Do you think this is going to detract from the taste of the dinner?" Mogren asks, wincing at one wine's too-sweet taste. "Because I think it is a hangover waiting to happen." Stack agrees, and they quickly make a note to find a replacement.

Soon the students' roommates begin to follow the aroma of rosemary and fill the kitchen, waiting to be served.

Homemade dinners are now standard fare at their house. "I love when you guys study for this class," one of them says with a smile.

Stack and Mogren begin serving the food to their eager friends, and all of them spoon heaps of squash and vegetables onto their plates. Etiquette is not a part of the course.

"This is not about the seven forks," Stack says. "It is about the quality of the food."

Just like Botany 240 — it's not about the exams, it's about the lessons learned from the Man.

— Joanna Salmen x'06

