Story Time

“Professor Rieber was a professor in the history department whose lectures were legendary; he just made the stuff come alive,” explains Budd Mishkin, C’81. “People would come to his lectures who weren’t even in the class. If you heard that the ‘Hitler lecture’ or the ‘Stalin lecture’ was being given that day, people would show up.”

Experiences like this are what make up the fabric of Penn history. Thanks to Penn Back Then, an audio scrapbook maintained by the School of Arts and Sciences, there is a place to record and enjoy stories from all generations of Penn students. Modeled after StoryCorps, the national oral history project, Penn Back Then captures slices of campus life and presents them in an online archive. At campus celebrations each year, alumni from all decades can contribute anecdotes and remembrances to teams of mobile Penn Back Then recorders.

Though the college experience varies from one generation to the next, every Penn graduate is linked by the history and traditions of a common campus. Penn Back Then is a chance to learn about University life across several decades, as told by the people who know it best. To access the archive, go to www.sas.upenn.edu and click on the Penn Back Then link.

Farewell to a Friend

The Penn community mourned the loss of one of its most esteemed scholars when psychology professor John Sabini died on July 15 at the age of 58. A member of the psychology faculty for nearly three decades, Sabini chaired the department from 1991 to 1996. He also chaired the psychology graduate group and directed graduate studies in psychology from 1984 to 1991 and from 2003 until his death. Noted for his study of the moral dimensions of social interactions, he won the 2003 Dean’s Award for Mentorship of Undergraduate Research.

“I had a close-up view as John mentored dozens of graduate students, many dozens of undergraduate students and at least a dozen assistant professors – myself included,” says Robert DeRubeis, the associate dean for the social sciences and a psychology professor. “John was everybody’s uncle, or perhaps big brother.”

Sabini’s published works include the textbook Social Psychology and Moralties of Everyday Life and Emotion, Character, and Responsibility, which he co-authored with Maury Silver. The psychology department gathered on Dec. 2 to commemorate his many contributions to science, education and the community.

“Although John’s formal commitment was to graduate education, I believe that in fact he made a greater contribution to undergraduate education than anyone else in our department,” Professor Robert Rescorla said at the event. “Where this showed up most clearly was in his contributions to teaching the logic and love of research to our undergraduates.”

The John Sabini Memorial Prize Fund has been established for senior psychology majors with an interest in social psychology. To make a donation, contact Elizabeth Caimi at ecaimi@sas.upenn.edu or 215-898-5262.

Humanities Hero

For more than 35 years, Alan Kors has defended free speech on the Penn campus and at colleges and universities across the nation. In November, the eminent professor of European intellectual history was awarded the National Humanities Medal to recognize his dedication to scholarship and activism.

Kors, the George H. Walker Endowed Term Professor of History, was among 11 individuals to receive the prize. The medal is given annually to those whose work has deepened the nation’s understanding of the humanities, broadened citizens’ engagement with the humanities or helped preserve and expand America’s access to important humanities resources. The medal is awarded in a White House ceremony.

In addition to the national prize, Kors has been honored at Penn for his commitment to teaching excellence. He has been recognized with the Christian R. and Mary F. Lindback and the Ira Abrams Memorial teaching awards, as well as a faculty award from the Friars Senior Society. His colleagues at Penn have elected him four times to University and School committees on academic freedom and responsibility.

Kors established the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education in 1998, which aims to protect the intellectual freedom of professors and students. That same year, he co-authored The Shadow University: The Betrayal of Liberty on America’s Campuses.
Oxford Calling

Two College and Wharton seniors have punched their tickets to the graduate program at Oxford University after winning a pair of Britain’s most prestigious scholarships. Brett Shaheen, an international relations and economics major from St. Louis, Mo., is the 18th Rhodes Scholar from Penn and its third since 2000. Aziza Zakhidova, a student in the Huntsman Program in International Studies & Business, also will study at the esteemed British institution after netting a Marshall Scholarship. She is the eighth Marshall winner from Penn and the University’s fifth in the last six years.

Shaheen is editor-in-chief of Penn’s Undergraduate Journal of Economics and worked as a consultant for the Association for Rural Community Development in India last summer. He has plans to go for a master’s in international relations. Zakhidova, an international studies and finance major from McKinney, Texas, will pursue a master’s in development studies. This is the second time that Penn has had a Rhodes and Marshall winner in the same year.

The Rhodes Scholarship, the oldest international fellowship, was initiated after the death of British philanthropist Cecil Rhodes in 1902. The value of the award varies depending on the academic field, degree level and Oxford college chosen. It covers all costs and averages about $40,000 per year. The Marshall Scholarship was created by Parliament in 1953. Its aim was to extend the idea of the Rhodes Scholarship to all British universities.

India’s New Entrepreneurial Classes

Francine Frankel (left), director of the Center for the Advanced Study of India, speaks with Sunil Bharti Mittal, one of India’s leading entrepreneurs, who delivered CASI’s annual lecture in November on sustaining India’s high-growth economy. Daughter Eiesha Mittal (center).

Classes in Session

Fisher-Bennett Hall has emerged from its tarpaulin shroud in time to host classes for the spring semester. After months of silence, the cornerstone of liberal arts education on campus is filled with the sounds of students discussing literature, practicing concertos and dissecting screenplays. The $23 million project has brought state-of-the-art computer technology, soundproof classrooms, modern performance spaces and advanced instructional tools to the new humanities corridor on 34th Street.

Faculty members already have begun taking advantage of the options that Fisher-Bennett Hall present. For example, Associate Professor of Music Emma Dillon utilizes an advanced multimedia classroom to bring the history of opera to life for her students. “My class requires that I use all types of media, including DVDs, CDs, laserdiscs and computers,” she explains. “The technology lets me use different media simultaneously and switch from one to another quickly and simply. Now I can move through the course material at a much faster pace. Plus, the room’s stadium seating and film screen allow students to focus on minute details in the operas we are studying. It’s truly spectacular.”