By day, MICHELLE BRATTAINE is the chair of the History Department. But when she fastens on her helmet and laces up to skate for the Atlanta Rollergirls, she’s No. 67, HATE ASHURY.
LEAVE A LEGACY...
SUPPORT GEORGIA STATE.

Porshea Cooper (B.S.N. ’13) was a leader in her field before she even graduated. Not only did she earn a degree with honors from the Byrdine F. Lewis School of Nursing and Health Professions, she mentored at-risk youths and served as vice president of the Softer Touch community service organization. She could devote time to these noble efforts because the Maymi Walker Chandler Scholarship, Lettie Pate Whitehead Scholarship and Lewis School Endowment meant she wouldn’t have to work long hours to pay for college.

THE GIFTS THAT IGNITED
my career

“Scholarships helped me earn my degree without working a full-time job. This gave me time to start a non-profit, volunteer and be a mentor, and I’m a better pediatric nurse and leader as a result.”

Please contact Laura M. Sillins, J.D., at (404) 413-3425 or lsillins@gsu.edu to discuss a planned gift today.
Scholarships helped me earn my degree without working a full-time job. This gave me time to start a non-profit, volunteer and be a mentor, and I’m a better pediatric nurse and leader as a result.
FROM THE PRESIDENT

RELATIONSHIPS THAT WORK

WRAS/GPB PARTNERSHIP IS ONE OF MANY BETWEEN GEORGIA STATE AND THE COMMUNITY.

Georgia State has a long history of partnerships that benefit the university, Atlanta and Georgia. There are hundreds of links among the university, its colleges and schools and organizations that are crucial to a vital and vibrant community, and to providing extraordinary experiential learning opportunities for students.

The College of Law, for example, has been engaged for 10 years with the Atlanta Legal Aid Society and Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta in the Health Law Partnership (HeLP), a collaboration among healthcare providers and lawyers to improve the health and well-being of low-income children and their families. HeLP is also an educational partnership that promotes the public’s health through interdisciplinary teaching and learning among law, public health and social work students.

Another example is After-School All-Stars Atlanta, which provides comprehensive after-school programs for at-risk students in metro Atlanta. Run through the College of Education, the program has supported tens of thousands of students at 11 sites since it was founded in 1999. Georgia State students are teachers and mentors on academic subjects, extra-curricular activities, and health and wellness. After School All Stars-Atlanta is funded by local foundations, the state Division of Family and Children Services, and private donations and gifts.

The university announced in early May a new partnership with Georgia Public Broadcasting (GPB) that drew a lot of attention and some criticism from students, alumni and Album 88 listeners. This is another example of a mutually beneficial relationship that will serve our community and provide significant new opportunities for students.

The GPB affiliation opens doors to opportunities critical to the professional development of Georgia State students aspiring to careers in the entertainment and information industries. With more than 1,650 students majoring in film and journalism, expanding course offerings, available faculty, facilities access and contact with the region’s media industries is a university priority. The GPB partnership provides the Department of Communication with much-needed access to state-of-the-art media production facilities and a regionally visible TV outlet.

The benefits to Georgia State students will be numerous and varied as a result of the GPB partnership. Access to GPB’s state-of-the-art digital studios will support significant new curriculum offerings, as well as opportunities for creating original network programming. In addition, students will participate in programming 12 hours daily on a cultural affairs digital sub-channel that Georgia State will introduce on GPB’s network mid-2015, and a growing number of students will have internship placements. The first year of the partnership will directly benefit more than 130 students, and that number will expand significantly over time. They will engage in creative projects and broadcast production in GPB’s modern, top-of-the-line facilities. Georgia State students will program and broadcast 12 hours daily on a GPB digital channel. This enables Georgia State to deliver high-quality experiential learning for about 100 students at any given time, a dramatic increase from what we have been able to support in the past. The university could not provide these extraordinary learning opportunities without GPB.

The collaboration with GPB also enables the university to serve communities across Georgia in new and significant ways. The cultural affairs digital sub-channel will provide Georgia State, as well as educational institutions and arts and cultural affairs organizations across Georgia, a means to broadcast lecture series, athletics events, and arts and cultural programming to television audiences statewide. In addition, Georgia State faculty and students will be featured across GPB’s main network on matters of public interest. These new offerings, both on the digital sub-channel and on the main network, are significant in their own right, and yet they are just a beginning. The Georgia State-GPB partnership lays the foundation on which we can build for the future as the world of information and entertainment changes and evolves rapidly.

I am proud that my Georgia State colleagues are deeply engaged in constructive partnerships that benefit our students and the community. Programs like HeLP, After-School All-Stars and the GPB partnership provide students unique educational experiences, ones that we could not offer without strong and sustained cooperation from our partners. In turn, through these educational experiences our students provide unique and valuable services to the community. Georgia State is nationally recognized as an innovative university that is creating the future for higher education, and I have every expectation our existing and future partnerships will play a major role in helping us become the very best university we can be.

Sincerely,

Mark P. Becker
President


"Awesome magazine I must say"

Justin B. O’Keefe, (B.B.A. ’82)

READERS WRITE
I may be just old and in the way, but your graphics in the magazine make it really hard to read. It is incredibly noisy and incoherent. I can’t tell where one article begins and another ends. On page 30, the word “THOSE” takes up half the page, but on page 31 you can’t even read the caption next to the cool trolley photo. I see perhaps those who have complimented on the new look aren’t actually trying to read the articles? Chad Carlson (B.A. ’99, M.A. ’04)

RADIO SILENCE
Is there coverage of the GPB/GSU takeover of Album 88? It is a poor, poor choice on the part of the administration. The university is truly losing one of its gems by wresting control of WRAS from the students. The loss of Album 88 on the airwaves is also a significant cultural blow to the region. The explanation that there will be other opportunities opened up to the student body by this move seems like self-serving rationalization to justify this myopic decision. Paul Weaver (M.S. ’09)

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PHILLIPS NAMED DEAN OF RCB

Richard D. Phillips, associate dean of academic initiatives and innovation at the J. Mack Robinson College of Business since 2012, has been named dean of the college.

Phillips succeeds H. Fenwick Huss, who resigned after 10 years as dean of the college. Huss is now the Willem Kooyker Dean of the Zicklin School of Business at Baruch College, part of the City University of New York System.

A risk management scholar, Phillips joined Robinson in 1994 as an assistant professor and became chair of the Department of Risk Management and Insurance in 2006. Under his leadership the department shifted from an insurance-centric focus to a broader study of risk dedicated to understanding, quantifying and developing strategies for managing risks faced by individuals, organizations and society. He has participated in many college-wide initiatives and was chair of the task force that laid the foundation for the college’s strategic plan.

Phillips, the C.V. Starr Professor of Risk Management and Insurance, serves on the board of the American Risk and Insurance Association, is co-editor of the *Journal of Risk and Insurance* and past president of the Risk Theory Society.

SEVEN SCHOLARS

*University boasts the most Gilman International Scholarships in the state*

Georgia State has been awarded more Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarships for the upcoming academic year than any institution in the state, the Office of International Initiatives and Study Abroad Programs announced. Awarded to under-

AN INTRO TO STATE

GEORGIA STATE’S FRESHMAN LEARNING COMMUNITIES FORM A SMALL, FRIENDLY COMMUNITY WITHIN A LARGE RESEARCH UNIVERSITY.

STAYING TOGETHER: Freshman Learning Communities (FLC) bring together 25 first-year students enrolled together in five courses centered around a field of academic interest. The program started in 1999 with 11 learning communities and has grown to include communities for each of the university’s colleges and all student majors.

MEET THE UNIVERSITY: FLCs link clusters of courses, usually four or five, with an orientation course/uni that provides students with essential information about the academic demands of the university, its rules and resources, and academic, social and survival skills that contribute to success.

WINNING FORMULA: For nine years in a row, U.S. News & World Report listed Georgia State’s FLC program among the “outstanding examples of academic programs that are believed to lead to student success.”
THE REDEMPTION OF ‘JAGS’

The coaching fates have been unkind to Jeff Jagodzinski, but he's at Georgia State with a new outlook and ready to rebuild the Panthers’ offense.

BY WILLIAM INMAN  PHOTOS BY BEN ROLLINS
More than a decade ago, when Georgia State head football coach Trent Miles and offensive coordinator Jeff Jagodzinski were young, tireless upstarts trying to carve out a name and a living on the Green Bay Packers’ staff, Miles would spend the night on the beat-up couch in Jagodzinski’s office.

“We were the young guys who got the jobs no one wanted,” Jagodzinski remembered. “Trent had to draw the playbook, and that took a long time, so instead of going home for two hours after work, he’d just crash on the couch.”

From Green Bay, each coach’s career took off. Miles’s trajectory steadily climbed. He worked as an assistant at Stanford, Notre Dame and Washington and as head coach at his alma mater, Indiana State, before coming to Georgia State in 2013.

Jagodzinski, known as “Jags” to almost everyone, quickly ascended in the profession. He spent three seasons with the Atlanta Falcons before heading back to Green Bay to become offensive coordinator in 2005. A year later he was named head coach at Boston College. He led the Eagles to 20 wins and back-to-back Atlantic Coast Conference title games, and his name was bandied about for other high-profile coaching positions.

But in 2009, he was abruptly fired for interviewing for the top job for the New York Jets without permission. Three weeks later, he was hired as offensive coordinator for the Tampa Bay Buccaneers, but was fired without ever coaching a game.

He spent a year away from football before coaching with the Omaha Nighthawks of the United Football League. From there, he joined Ave Maria University of the N.A.I.A. as an unpaid assistant. Then his old friend called to offer him the chance to build the Panthers’ offense.

“We’re very lucky to have a coach like Jeff Jagodzinski here,” Miles said. “Jagodzinski certainly has cachet. He tutored the legendary quarterback Brett Favre when he was with the Packers, and groomed Atlanta Falcons quarterback Matt Ryan while at Boston College.

“The knowledge that the kids and other coaches are getting from him, it’s invaluable,” Miles said. “He loves to teach the game.”

For Jagodzinski, the stops in those coaching outposts have given him a chance to reflect.

“When I look back at my career, I should have enjoyed it more, every place, and that’s what I’m trying to do now,” he said.

Even though the team went winless last year, he says he’s thoroughly enjoying being a Panther and is expecting a breakthrough soon.

“This program is going to turn around, and it’s going to happen fast,” he said.

This time, instead of looking for the big job in at a big-time program or the NFL, Coach Jags expects to be here when that happens.

“The way I look at now is that I’ll be here as long as they will let me be,” he said. “There’s a lot of guys trying to crawl over each other to get to places and I’m just not interested in that. I don’t need to do that anymore.

“Look what I’m doing for a living,” he said. “Sure, there are high stress times, but I’m coaching football. What a life to have!”
graduate students who might otherwise not participate because of financial constraints, the scholarship aims to diversify the study abroad student population.

The seven Gilman recipients will study in South Korea, Jordan, United Arab Emirates, and Japan. Clifton Ndubuisi, a senior in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, was also awarded the prestigious Boren Scholarship to study Arabic language in Jordan this fall. Ndubuisi received the $10,000 scholarship in addition to his Gilman scholarship, providing him with $14,000 of financial assistance toward his academic interests abroad.

**A SYSTEM FOR PREVENTION**

Georgia State’s School of Public Health has received a four-year grant from the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services totaling nearly $2 million to support programs and research related to prevention of child abuse and neglect.

The grant will support dissemination of the SafeCare model — an evidence-based child maltreatment prevention program designed by Georgia State researchers — to six new implementation sites. Daniel Whitaker, director of the National SafeCare Research and Training Center in the school’s Center for Healthy Development, will lead the project.

“Georgia State is a leader in evidence-based child maltreatment prevention research and programs, drawing some of the world’s most renowned experts in the field,” said Michael P. Eriksen, dean of the School of Public Health. “We are thrilled to continue our work in this area.”

**THE FIGHT AGAINST RSV**

**Professor receives major grant to find ways to treat the deadly virus**

Richard Plemper, professor of biology, received a five-year, $2.83 million federal grant to develop novel therapeutics against Respiratory Syncytial Virus (RSV) infection.

Infections by RSV, a respiratory virus that infects the lungs and breathing passages, are the leading cause of infant hospitalization from infectious diseases in the United States.

There is no vaccine protection available against RSV and antibody therapy used to prevent illness remains reserved for high-risk patients.

The grant from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute Of Child Health and Human Development of the National Institutes of Health will support Plemper’s goal of identifying an anti-RSV drug.

“This project will leverage our expertise in molecular virology and antiviral development with the medicinal chemistry capacity and RSV pathogenesis capacity of our collaborators at the Emory Institute for Drug Development and Emory University’s Department of Pediatrics,” Plemper said.

Assistant Professor of Geosciences Nadine Kabenga and her team of researchers are working with a grant from the Department of Energy (DOE) to research how environmental contaminants cling to certain metal oxides. Understanding how these oxides behave under different chemical and temperature conditions will support efforts to clean soil and water, Kabenga said.

Kabenga was one of 35 scientists to receive an Early Career Research Program award from the DOE.

Kabenga specializes in the science of measuring the heat changes of chemical reactions, known as calorimetry. By measuring these changes in reactions between environmental contaminants and certain metal oxides, she can predict whether an oxide could be used to clean soil and water.

“It will help us assess the effect of energy-related activities on our Earth and geological materials,” Kabenga said.

The machine Kabenga and her team will be using, a flow adsorption microcalorimeter, was designed by her Ph.D. adviser at the University of Florida, Dean Rhue. Kabenga will be designing two new models, which will allow the machine to operate in a wider range of conditions.

Much of Kabenga’s work will involve testing existing hypotheses for the first time.

“Most of the data we use are either based on pure theory or come from computational models,” she said. “We’ll be collecting experimental data that doesn’t exist in the field.”

**SCRUBBING THE SURFACES**

Researchers study how environmental contaminants may “stick” to metal oxides in order to keep soil and water clean

**CREATIVITY**

**AHEAD OF THE CURVE**

New visualization technology enhances interactive learning experiences

Jeffrey Glover, Georgia State’s “Indiana Jones,” spends his...
GREAT ESCAPES
CARSON TORTORIGE, COORDINATOR FOR TOUCH THE EARTH — GEORGIA STATE’S OUTDOOR RECREATION PROGRAM — CONNECTS PANTHERS TO NATURE

What is Touch the Earth?
Touch the Earth is an outdoor recreation program that provides users with the ability to scale vertical indoor climbing walls, get outfitted with outdoor rental gear to head out on your own, strengthen groups and unfold participant dynamics through exciting teambuilding. Participants can travel the world on a variety of domestic and international adventure trips.

Can Georgia State alumni participate?
You bet. Alumni and their guests can participate on any trip at the guest rate or freely reserve the Challenge Program for their group. By purchasing a Graduate Membership to the Student Recreation Center, degree-holding alumni will receive member pricing on any trip and receive the benefit of renting any item of gear available. In addition, they’ll receive all the perks of utilizing the recreation center for their workout — which includes access to the Climbing Wall and Bouldering Cave.

What’s the Challenge Program?
Well, you may have heard the term “ropes course” and wondered just what it meant. Georgia State has its very own “ropes course” out at the Indian Creek Recreation Area. The ropes course is within a large teambuilding program we call the Challenge Program.

Individuals face obstacles, seek solutions, deal with the concepts of risk and as a result, learn, change and grow. These activities increase personal self-confidence, trust in others, mutual support for effective teamwork, good communication skills, leadership and new friendships. Just imagine all that and a lot of fun, too!

Read more at magazine.gsu.edu

ATHLETICS
LEVICK STEPS DOWN
Search is on for new athletics director

After five years at the helm of the Georgia State University Athletics Department, Cheryl Levick resigned as director of athletics on July 1.

CONT’D ON P12
A HEALTHY GIFT

Former Bank of America CEO Ken Lewis (B.A. '69) donates to the school bearing his mother’s name to strengthen nursing education

BY DOUG GILLETT PHOTO BY BEN ROLLINS

When it comes to hard work and dedication, Ken Lewis (B.A., '69) had a superior role model in his late mother Byrdine. A divorced mother of two, she supported her family with a career as a bedside nurse that lasted 46 years.

Byrdine Lewis’ name has graced Georgia State’s nursing school since her son made a major gift to the school in 2003. This past summer he honored her legacy once again with his biggest gift yet, a $5 million pledge to the Byrdine F. Lewis School of Nursing and Health Professions.

“I know firsthand how hard nurses work and how important they are to their communities,” said Lewis. “The many excellent caregivers, therapists and scientists who’ve earned degrees from Georgia State are making that legacy stronger. I’m proud of what they’re accomplishing, and I know my mother would be, too.”

Margaret C. Wilmoth, dean of The Lewis School, said Lewis’ pledge will strengthen the school’s ability to attract and retain top-quality faculty at a time of critical change in the health care industry.

“We are preparing the leaders in nursing, nutrition, physical therapy and respiratory therapy for the 21st century,” Wilmoth said. “That’s not a responsibility we can afford to take lightly. Mr. Lewis’ gift will help us ensure that our students get the most comprehensive education possible, which will make a tangible difference in our nation’s health.”
to accept a role as special assistant to President Mark Becker.

Under Levick’s leadership, Georgia State won five Sun Belt Conference championships since entering the league in 2012. Georgia State student-athletes have been successful in the classroom, earning at least a 3.0 grade-point average for the past 12 consecutive semesters, and have the highest Graduation Success Rate in the Sun Belt Conference.

Bharath Parthasarathy, deputy general counsel at Georgia State, is serving as interim director of athletics. Parthasarathy has extensive experience with athletics operations and programs. Georgia State hired Parker Executive Search to lead the search for the next athletic director, and one is expected to be named by the end of August.

IN THE BIGS

Former star pitcher David Buchanan shines as a rookie starter for the Philadelphia Phillies

Starting pitcher David Buchanan is the first former Georgia State player to reach the major leagues. He started on the mound for the Philadelphia Phillies on May 24 and earned a victory against the Los Angeles Dodgers.

Wearing No. 55, he pitched five innings, leaving with the Phillies ahead 5-2 after allowing two runs on five hits with two strikeouts and no walks. The Philadelphia bullpen preserved the lead, and Buchanan was credited with the win.

“A dream,” Buchanan told mlb.com. “Just to be out there, have my family out there and to do it in front of the home fans. I’m overwhelmed with emotion right now. It was an experience of a lifetime.”

A native of Fayetteville, Ga., Buchanan pitched for the Panthers in 2010 before he was selected by the Phillies in the seventh round of the 2010 First-Year Player Draft.

The 25-year-old right-hander was 5-1 with a 3.98 ERA for AAA Lehigh Valley before he was called up.

Georgia State head coach Greg Frady, who recruited and coached Buchanan, flew to Philadelphia to attend the game and support his former player.

“To watch David play today in the major leagues is every coach’s dream,”

IN THE CITY

LAND-USE POLICIES and preferential tax treatment for housing — in the form of federal income tax deductions for mortgage interest and property taxes — have increased carbon emissions in the United States by about 2.7 percent, almost 6 percent annually in new home construction, according to a new study. Economist Kyle Mangum, assistant professor in the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, measures the effect of housing policies on energy use and carbon output. Policies that affect the amount of housing per capita and housing density are the two major drivers of carbon savings, he found. His research suggests removing federal tax subsidies for housing and updating land-use regulations to encourage higher density in higher energy-use locations would lower the country’s overall energy use.

TOTAL CARBON USAGE BY ATLANTANS

Compared to other cities
(annual rate in 1000s of lbs. per person)

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PROJECTED CARBON USAGE BY ATLANTANS
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Data are available for single family homes in the 49 largest metro areas of the continental U.S. 2011 usage rates

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Current carbon usage per person by Atlantans

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Frady said, “We’ve had a lot of great players at Georgia State, and David has set the high-water mark. This says if one can do it, others can, too. He got his start at Panthersville and found his way to the big leagues.”

AN ATHLETE UNDAUNTED

After a severe spinal injury, former triathlete Brad Smith (M.Ed. ’13) gets back into action at the Peachtree Road Race.

The Peachtree Road Race attracts athletes from all across the state each year. Brad Smith was no exception, though his story is exceptional.

In 2010, Smith suffered a spinal cord injury — an event he feared would halt his athletic pursuits. Prior to 2010, he was a physical education teacher and an endurance athlete, training in running and biking and regularly competing in triathlons. Smith’s injury brought significant changes to his life, including the necessity to reevaluate his career path.

Fast-forward to July 4th, 2014 — Smith had a goal in mind and a Peachtree Road Race number plastered to his chest. “I was an athlete before my injury. That didn’t go away just because my circumstances changed,” he said.

After Smith’s injury in 2010, he and his wife moved to Atlanta to be closer to the Shepherd Center. He is now part of the Shepherd Center Wheelchair Racing Team and the 2014 Peachtree Road Race was his third race competing in the wheelchair division — and this year was his best race yet.

“I beat my previous time by four minutes,” he said. “I also had a goal of finishing under 30 minutes. My final time was 29:54.”

As for next year, Smith will approach his fourth race with a goal to keep going faster and continuing to push himself to the limit, no matter what he might encounter.

INKY INGREDIENT

Scientists put antimicrobials in sea slug ink to work for the healthcare and shipping industries

Georgia State researchers have discovered that the powerful antimicrobials in the ink of the sea slug Aplysia californica, a slimy creature found at low tide along the California shore, can serve the medical and shipping industries.

The scientists are using the ink’s active ingredient to promote better healing of wounds and prevent barnacles from attaching to the hulls of ships.

They’re using the antimicrobials to fight biofilms, populations of cells that grow on a surface and are tightly connected, making them difficult to remove and sometimes allowing infections to take hold.

“There’s a huge interest in developing products for that,” said Charles Derby, Regents’ Professor of Biology.

The researchers want to coat the surfaces of ships and piers to prevent and break down barnacles and worms, which begin to grow after biofilm has formed. In the shipping industry, studies have found the drag created by barnacles growing on ships’ hulls can increase fuel costs by 40 percent.

The paints now used to prevent biofilms contain heavy metals, making them toxic to humans who could absorb the toxins by eating tainted shellfish. In healthcare, the researchers hope to prevent and break down biofilms on human tissue, such as wounds, possibly embedding the active ingredient in a bandage or applying it with a spray.

Antimicrobials that work in new ways are needed because the overuse of some bacteria-killing products has led to drug resistance. Derby said the group’s new product could also be used for treating tableware and medical and cleaning supplies.

by LaTina Emerson

SHARE YOUR SUCCESS

Class Notes are shareable through Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter! Post your good news and share with your network by visiting magazine.gsu.edu/add-class-notes.
ENTREPRENEURIAL

EATS

Marisa Moore (B.S. ‘01, MBA ‘09)
is raising America’s health I.Q.

BY WILLIAM INMAN    PHOTO BY RYAN HAYSLIP

The business of healthy living keeps Marisa Moore busy. Very busy. As one of just 30 registered dieticians who are spokespersons for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, Moore is in constant demand. She’s a regular contributor to HLN, CNN, the Huffington Post, the Wall Street Journal, the Washington Post, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, Food and Nutrition magazine and has even made an appearance on the Today Show.

She writes, does on-camera interviews and cooking demonstrations, cultivates healthy menu items for restaurants and works with individuals to improve their health through better nutrition. She even teaches a class, fittingly called Nutrition and the Media, at Georgia State and is the consulting dietician at Spelman College.

“All of it keeps me on my toes,” she said, laughing.

Before becoming a food industry entrepreneur, Moore managed the nutrition worksite wellness program for the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and was the corporate nutritionist for Atlanta Bread Company, where she worked in research and development and marketing.

When it comes to living and eating better, Moore has some rather simple advice.

“Eat well, move more, get plenty of sleep,” she said. “Oftentimes, people just need a simple shift in what they’re doing to get into healthier lifestyles.”

Visit magazine.gsu.edu to read Marisa set the record straight on five nutrition misconceptions.
A NEW EARTH
Andy Hickman (B.A. ’99) builds a model for large-scale, sustainable homes

As 2008 was drawing to a close Andy Hickman was successful but not satisfied, and he wasn’t sure why. He was co-owner of a successful spray-foam installation company, but the slowing economy was making construction-dependent businesses less lucrative. It was deeper than that, however. He just wasn’t fulfilled, and it was obvious to his girlfriend, artist Rosemary Kimble. “She could tell I was unhappy,” said Hickman, who earned an MBA from Mercer University after graduating in international finance from Georgia State.

Kimble made him quite a compelling offer. She suggested he sell his half of the company and put the proceeds in the bank, then take a year off to figure out what really makes him happy. She would pay his bills while he was focused on this passion project. He took her up on it, though he admits it was hard to let go.

About three months in, Hickman watched the documentary “Garbage Warrior,” which highlighted the work of architect Michael Reynolds, founder of a company called Earthship Biotecture. Reynolds created a model for sustainable homes that exist “off the grid,” meaning they don’t rely on municipal utility services. “Within the first five minutes, I knew right away, then and there, that’s what I’m going to do,” he said.

After interning with Earthship Biotecture in April 2009, he returned invigorated. He told Kimble, “We’re going to build one, but we’re going to do it differently.” Reynolds’ model used old tires filled with earth, which Hickman knew wouldn’t fly with building inspectors, meaning it wasn’t really accessible to the masses.

Hickman was inspired to make a similar structure that would still use harvested rainwater, wind power, solar energy and edible landscapes, but would also be building-code permissible and less radical in that it wouldn’t have to be devoid of modern comforts or conveniences.

Hickman started his new company, New Earth Homes, on seven acres of “completely raw” land in Royston, Ga., just outside Athens. He is 85 percent finished with his first home he calls the Northeast Georgia Earth Home.

The scope of Hickman’s goal has expanded to a flexible approach that makes his designs sustainable on a large scale, and more apt to be adopted by greater numbers of people. The goal is to design homes that are “as sustainable as possible, relative to where you are, while playing by the rules,” Hickman said. The model may vary depending on location, because building codes vary. Contrary to what one might imagine, Hickman’s home has all the technology and modern appliances most conventional homes have, and that might make the model more attractive to the generation he hopes will eventually see this as a regular way of life.

“I want children to grow up in these homes so the next generation will be more evolved,” he said, “thinking that everyone gets water from the sky and electricity from the wind.”

—Tor Rodriguez (B.A. ’99)

Got a promotion? A new addition to the family? Go ahead, brag a little. Visit magazine.gsu.edu for news from your classmates and fellow Georgia State alumni.

4,161
Driving miles to reach six Georgia State football road games this fall, ranging from 122 miles to Clemson, S.C., to 2,637 miles to Seattle, Wash.
By day, Michelle Brattain is the chair of the History Department. But when she fastens on her helmet and laces up to skate for the Atlanta Rollergirls, she’s No. 67, Hate Ashbury.
She was in the arena at the Yaraab Shriners Temple on Ponce de Leon Avenue, cheering on the Atlanta Rollergirls, the local flat-track roller derby team, and from her trackside seat she could have sworn she recognized one of the skaters zipping by.

That looks just like Dr. Brattain!

Graves’s former history professor at Georgia State and the “jammer” in question did share the same compact build — muscular shoulders squared atop a petite, wiry frame. The dark brown hair creeping from beneath the rim of the skater’s black helmet matched as well. Still, the idea that the same sweet woman who had once lectured Graves on Nixon and Kennedy and the Vietnam War and gently nudged her to pursue a master’s degree would be spending her Saturday nights gliding around in circles, exchanging elbows and body checks with sweaty, tattooed women twice her size seemed, at best, far-fetched.

The program offered little help — the “67” written in maker on the jammer’s arms was registered to Hate Ashbury, a skater alias.

There was only one way to be certain. After the final buzzer had ended the bout, Graves worked her way through the scattering crowd to the floor, toward the home bench where Hate Ashbury was greeting fans, grinning, celebrating her team’s victory. Even as she drew closer, Graves couldn’t shake her uncertainty. But by the time Graves was within shouting distance, before the former student could work up the courage to say anything, Michelle Brattain spun around on her skates, eyes widened with pleasant surprise and cried, “Kristina! Oh my gosh, you’re here!” Teacher hugged student and asked what she thought of the bout.

A few years prior, it was Brattain sitting trackside, wondering if she could see herself out there on eight wheels.

The year was 2008. She was at the roller derby to support a friend, her husband’s coworker — skater name: Deaths-kull. Brattain saw up close the speed and size of the skaters, felt the floor tremble as bones and flesh careened off each other and crashed onto concrete. The sweating, the shouting, the screaming. Brattain was an academic, a history nerd and non-athlete who had only started running in grad school and had never participated in a team sport. Not knowing the rules, she had no idea what was really happening. Yet, she was drawn to derby.

First, the professor who had written about race and gender equality in 20th-century U.S. saw how the sport empowered its female participants and encouraged them to be aggressive. Also, as Brattain went to more and more bouts, she got to know the skaters, whose day jobs ranged from accountants and lawyers to graphic designers and cat groomers. She also saw that beyond the violence there was real strategy — the four blockers working together to clear a path for the jammer, who had to finesse as much as force her way through the scrum, collecting a point for each opponent she was able to pass.

Perhaps a bit small for a blocker, Brattain felt she had the speed and agility and toughness it took to be a jammer. And with the encouragement of Deaths-kull — a high school teacher named Shannon Nowlan — Brattain decided to try out for the Atlanta Rollergirls.

“She was an avid runner,” says Nowlan. “She already had the endurance and the athleticism. She just needed to learn how to skate.”

Not having laced them up since elementary school birthday parties, Brattain borrowed a pair of skates from a colleague in the College of Arts and Sciences who also played derby. She taught herself to pivot step and the derby stance — slightly crouched, back bent forward to create a low center of gravity. In the summer of 2009, she aced her initial tryout, becoming “fresh meat,” a rookie who has yet to be corralled by one of the Atlanta Rollergirls’ four squads separated by level of skill and competitiveness. At the top are the All-Stars, followed in descending order by the Rumble Bs, The Jukes of Hazard and, lastly, the Denim Demons. That December, Brattain was drafted by the Rumble Bs.

Now that she was officially a Rollergirl, it was time for Brattain to buy her
own skates and, more important, choose her own skater name — a rite of passage, the sanctity of which is matched only by its complexity. A good skater name is both clever and menacing, and the best also contain an element of the skater’s personality. There are a lot of puns, like Touretta Lynn or Splatty Hearst. The name also has to be unique because once a name is registered it can never be used again. There is an online database of more than 40,000 names belonging to skaters in the more than 200 flat-track derby leagues in the U.S.

So when Brattain went looking for a bone-cracking, speed-skating alter ego she dug into her popular course on the 1960s, to a street in San Francisco that spawned the counterculture that came to define the decade. Hate Ashbury was born.

The History Department Chair’s office is on the 20th floor of the high-rise at 34 Peachtree St. After 12 years teaching at Georgia State, Brattain was named to the department’s top job in fall 2011, but the corner workspace betrays little of the person behind the title. Nearly every square inch of wall space is fortified with shelves of books and bound volumes of periodicals. The only personal touches are the family photos, a husband and young daughter smiling on the desk, and a patch of wall above painted purple and lined with antique starburst clocks from the 1950s and 1960s.

On a typical day, Brattain arrives around 8 a.m., unless she has an early morning class, in which case she punches in even earlier. She walks to and from her lectures on campus, grades her students’ papers, and attends to her own research, while also navigating the bureaucratic responsibilities of an administrator. At the end of the workday, around 5 or 6 p.m., when the last paper is graded, the last student or faculty member met with, Brattain turns out the florescent lights and locks the door behind her. She passes the nameplate, which has been covered by a business card modified in the shaky black-ink script of her nine-year-old daughter. It reads: “Michelle Brattain aka Hate Ashbury; Department of History and being Awesome; Georgia ‘Skate’ University.”

Many workdays February through September, Brattain takes the wheel of her Mini Cooper and jams her way through I-85 rush hour to Norcross, to a vacant, un-air-conditioned warehouse at the end of an industrial park. She sheds the skirt and blouse for shorts, tank-top, knee- and elbow-pads, and a chunky black helmet. At tonight’s practice she suits up alongside Shovely Rita. Once the gear is donned, it seems the women are called solely by their skater names. They usually know each other’s real names. Rita remembers a road bout two years ago in which a teammate, Hurty Gertie, broke her leg. After the bout, when she and some teammates went to the hospital to check up on their fallen colleague, they had trouble remembering a real name to give the front desk. Rita joined the Rollergirls about four years ago, thanks in part to Hate Ashbury, who was already a member.

“When you’re going through as fresh meat, it can be intimidating,” says Rita. “Hate was warm and welcoming. She wanted me to make it. You didn’t get that feeling from everyone.”

The two are mothers, and as they warm up, skating leisurely around the oval track outlined on the concrete floor in yellow tape, they chat through their mouth guards, catching each other up on what’s going on at home and in the news as women trickle in through the warehouse door, discarding their civilian uniforms and taking on their alter egos.

Wednesday-night practices are a league-wide scrimmage for members of all four Atlanta teams who want to get in extra work or who may not have been able to attend their individual team practices because of busy schedules. By the time the coaches call the group to order, there are about three or four dozen skaters on the floor.

Once the scrimmage starts, the friendly banter ceases. When it’s Hate’s turn to skate, she pulls on the spandex helmet guard stitched with a pink star to indicate the jammer, and she heads to the line. In...
front of her are four teammates in red practice jerseys and four blockers in blue matching that of the opposing jammer beside her. When the whistle blows, this mass of legs and arms lurches forward, both jammers trying to use their blockers to get past the wall of enemy jerseys. Hate is pushed, shoved, intentionally and unintentionally elbowed and tripped, but manages to stay on her wheels and wend her way through the pack. She now emerges as “lead jammer” and leans forward to stride swiftly around the track and lap the gaggle of blockers, which she will again try to pass. This time through, Hate will score a point for each opponent she passes until she calls off the bout, ideally before the other jammer catches up and starts scoring points of her own.

Tonight’s hodge-podge of talent levels provides a wide range of results. During one jam, Hate seems to vaporize, slipping through the scrum and around the track three times, scoring 15 points, before the two-minute time limit mercifully expires on the opposition. In another, Hate shoulders vainly against a rolling barricade of sweat-drenched flesh, thrown down on her rear. She pops up only to get knocked down again. But she always gets back up. “I’ve never seen Hate give up,” says Shovely Rita, looking on. Hate is lucky she is able to get up. At every practice and bout, there seems to be at least one fall, sprain or break that stops the action dead until someone is either helped or carried off.

Tonight, a woman returning from a broken ankle was able to dust herself off and gingerly skate to the bench. No skater escapes the scratches and bruises of the full-contact sport, but in five years, Hate has been lucky to have only torn a tendon in her hand and broken a couple fingers, injuries that don’t affect Hate’s jamming on the weekends as much as they inhibit Brattain’s ability to type during the week.

Despite the chance of injury, the toughest part of being a Rollergirl for working mothers like Brattain is the massive time commitment. From February into September practices are on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, bouts on Saturdays and some Sundays, and the Rumble Bs spend time on the road and in airports travelling to face teams throughout the region and as far away as Philadelphia. Travel, hotels and meals come out-of-pocket, along with the annual derby dues just to play, to say nothing of the cost of buying and maintaining skates and equipment.

Brattain’s family has helped ease the pain of time away by being supportive and active in the matriarch’s consuming hobby. Her husband attends as many bouts as he can and is even letting Brattain teach him how to skate. Their daughter Tui, aka Cat-a-gory, is a member of the Atlanta Derby Brats under-18 junior league team.

“There aren’t many sports for girls that encourage them to be physical and aggressive and confident in their bodies no matter what shape,” says Brattain. “And they are surrounded by great role models.”

Being one of those role models is Brattain’s reward, what makes all the sacrifice worthwhile. And the gratification of nurturing and encouraging young people, from derby brat to fresh meat, is the nexus at which the seemingly contradictory personas of Hate Ashbury and Professor Michelle Brattain meet.

Just ask Kristina Graves, who now not only spots her mentor on the track, but can sometimes be found trackside holding a glitter-painted sign that proudly reads: “I am Hate Ashbury’s GRA!” After nudging Graves to get her master’s degree, Brattain is now helping her obtain her doctorate and has taken Graves on as a graduate research assistant. Hate is also tactfully pushing Graves, the longtime derby fan, to lace up her own skates and take to the track.

“She inspires me to want to try it,” says Graves. “She’s taught me not to worry about what stands in your way.”

TONY REHAGEN is senior editor at Atlanta magazine. His work has also appeared in Men’s Health.
“There aren’t many sports for girls that encourage them to be physical and aggressive and confident in their bodies no matter what shape.”
The GSU-62 program provides free tuition to students nearing retirement age and older, and invites them to rediscover the power of education.
Temme Barkin-Leeds (MA ’78, BFA ’09)
FOR ALL OF ITS 100 YEARS, Georgia State has been a destination for what college admissions offices call non-traditional students, those who hold down jobs, have kids or went to work after high school, then decided on college later in life. Or, in some cases, such as with the 205 students at Georgia State using the GSU-62 program, much later in life.

In 1978, the Georgia Legislature passed a bill allowing Georgians over the age of 65 to attend colleges and universities in the University System of Georgia for free. In 1993, the law was amended and reduced the minimum age to 62. Since, 790 students over the age 62 have enrolled at Georgia State and were eligible to continue or begin their college education for free.

For these three program participants, all of whom achieved remarkable professional success before returning to school, their experiences in higher education at Georgia State have taken each down a new, unexpected path.

AN ARTISTIC STATEMENT

ARTISTS ARE KNOWN for being nonconformists. Temme Barkin-Leeds (M.A. ’78, B.F.A. ’09), for example, earned her Bachelor of Fine Arts degree from Georgia State after she got her master’s in art history — a long time after. About a quarter-century, in fact.

“When I went back to Georgia State, people said, ‘You’re gonna be 72 years old when you graduate,’” she says. “I said, ‘You know what, I’m gonna be 72 anyway, whether I graduate or not! So why not go and do the things I feel like I have a passion to do?’”

In Barkin-Leeds’ case, that passion had been incubating for a long time. She’d wanted to be an artist since she was a teenager, but when she started graduate school in the 1970s, she was a recently divorced mother who knew she’d need a stable career to support her three kids. Her art history degree from Georgia State helped her get a job as the High Museum’s associate curator for education, then embark on a 21-year career running a successful art consulting firm.

The whole time, though, “I secretly made art on the side whenever I could,” she says. When she found out about the GSU-62 program, she decided it was time for that creative side to get its moment in the limelight.

Barkin-Leeds says she wasn’t nervous as she returned to the Georgia State campus to pursue a bachelor’s degree in fine arts.

“Frankly,” she says, “I found that it was really enriching to be around younger people, because they had ideas about things that, in many cases, I might not have thought of. I was really learning from them all the time, and I hope they were learning something from me as well.”

Her confidence wasn’t misplaced.

“It was really a wonderful program,” she says. “The faculty never showed any bias toward the older students or toward the younger students. I was always treated completely fairly and treated very much the way the other students were in terms of expectations and demands.”

Since her return to Georgia State in 2005, Barkin-Leeds has participated in more than 40 exhibitions all over the eastern United States. She also earned a master’s degree in fine art (MFA) from American University in 2012. Her most recent solo show, called “Interference,” exhibited at Atlanta’s Callanwolde Fine Arts Center throughout the spring. It involved a series of paintings and animations representing Barkin-Leeds’ reaction to violent shooter-style video games.

Her GSU-62 experience, she says, not only put her in position to pursue an MFA but showed her how her experience as an art historian could enrich her work.

“As an art historian, you see art in the context of its era and its environment, its social and political context, and you realize that it is a reflection of that society,” she explains. “There was a very well-known African-American artist named Benny Andrews who was head of the artists’ program at the National Endowment for the Arts for many years, and I was lucky to know him. He said to me, ‘If you’re going to make art, have something to say.’ So I’ve always had this passion for making work that has a certain kind of message to convey.”

FROM STUDENT TO TEACHER

RICK TIGNER is a man with a taste for adventure. The longtime financial planner, former Air Force Officer and world traveler — he’s been to 52 countries and all seven continents — was on one of his jaunts on the other side of the planet when he decided he’d embark on what might be his biggest adventure yet.

In 2009, Tigner remembers being atop a 150-foot cliff near the town of Katoomba, New South Wales, Australia. The then-61-year-old was learning how to abseil — an Australian style of rappelling.

“This Australian fellow just kept saying, ‘back up, back up, keep your legs under you,’” he says. “And I thought right then, if I have the guts to lower myself over this cliff, then I have the guts to come back and tell my business partner that I’m coming back to retire.”

He was true to his word, came back and drafted retirement plans on March 1, 2010. A few days later he had an epiphany of what to do with his newly found freedom.

“I sat straight up in bed and said, ‘I can go back to school!’”

“I had no idea I’d get so much satisfaction interacting with my fellow students.”
My children have been encouraging me all along,” he says. “This has been such a rewarding experience. Georgia State is a fascinating place.”

THE AVERAGE STUDENT takes a little more than four years to graduate from college. For ROBERT BRENNAN (B.A. ’14), it took longer. A lot longer.

“I left college in 1959,” says Brennan. “I picked up where I left off.”

The 85-year-old Brennan served in the Korean War, earning a Purple Heart, a Battle Star and several campaign ribbons. When he returned home, he went to college on the GI Bill.

But a good job offer lured him away from campus and put him on a path to an impressive career in the media industry.

“I started out doing TV newsreels for movie theaters that would play before the movie started,” he says. “I worked at CBS, and then I became a producer in New York.”

Before long, he became the southern bureau manager for CBS, based in Atlanta during the tumultuous 1960s. When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was shot, Brennan covered the story.

“We got the call, and we were there as soon as we could be,” he says. “We were there that night and we were there for the funeral.”

His close ties to the political community in Atlanta led to a position in the Chamber of Commerce in 1976, where he met a visiting Olympic athlete.

“He was on the Olympic handball team that had played in Montreal and Munich. He said to me, ‘You know, Atlanta should host the games.’ And I thought it was a great idea. I did the research and I found out that we could do it, but nobody bought it,” Brennan says. “It just seemed too expensive.”

He didn’t give up. Almost a decade later, he sat on the committee that put in a bid to host the Olympics. When Atlanta won, he was made press chief.

After the Games ended in 1996, Brennan retired, spending the next decade volunteering with Atlanta organizations, including the Atlanta Botanical Gardens.

“Then I heard about the GSU-62 program,” he says. “That was very attractive to me. It gave me the idea that I could go back to school.”

Despite failing eyesight, Brennan persevered in his studies. For his final project, he worked with English Professor Pearl McHaney and lecturer Dan Marshall in a two-semester directed reading focusing on contemporary memoir and autobiography, while at the same time writing a memoir of his remarkable life. His working title is “Splits: The Times of My Life.”

This past summer, he graduated summa cum laude with his English degree.

“My children have been encouraging me all along,” he says. “This has been such a rewarding experience. Georgia State is a fascinating place.”

McHaney, who is also associate dean for the fine arts, was one of the first to read his life stories.

“I am a lucky reader,” she says. “Bob is a wonderful person with so many stories to tell.”

For Brennan, the fact that McHaney is still offering her support and advice is a telling trait of his alma mater.

“That’s what I find so remarkable about this school,” Brennan says. “They’re sticking with me even after I graduated.”

TELLING THE STORY OF A LIFE WELL LIVED

The Robinson College typically only invites alumni to become mentors but made an exception in Tigner’s case.

“He is passionate about helping students succeed. We knew immediately he would be a great mentor for our students, and he has been,” says Monica Scarborough, senior director of development, who manages the program for the college.

For two semesters, Tigner mentored Dylan Crumbly (B.B.A. ’15), an Honors student majoring in managerial science with a minor in Spanish, and will be paired with another student this fall.

“Rick and I have continued our relationship past the required meetings for the program,” Crumbly says. “Our mentoring period ended a year ago, but we still meet up, text and email. I am happy to not only call Rick a mentor, but a friend as well.”

The Robinson College of Business.

“I’ve been a businessman for 40 years, so I didn’t want to study business,” he says. “I wanted to do something that I developed an interest in later in life.”

He signed up to audit classes in astronomy, geology, anthropology and modern art history.

“That’s when an admissions counselor told me about the GSU-62 program,” he says. “And it was another one of those moments. ‘You mean I can do this for free?’”

Tigner dove headlong into “subjects that I never got to really enjoy as an undergraduate,” he said. Being back in an academic environment was invigorating for Tigner.

“I had no idea I’d get so much satisfaction interacting with my fellow students,” he says. “I was really impressed by the student body. They were there to learn. They really wanted to know what they were studying, not just get a piece of paper.”

Around that time, Tigner was thinking of how to give back, how to cement his legacy, and began to look into becoming a mentor to students. Tigner went back to Duke, his alma mater, and began mentoring recent graduates.

“Georgia State appealed to me the most because of the kind of students I met in my classes,” he says.

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More than one in three American adults is considered obese. Georgia State’s new Center for Obesity Reversal is tackling the epidemic by investigating what might be making us fat: our brains.

BY SONYA COLLINS PHOTO BY RYAN HAYSLIP
Jane Fonda’s Workout Video was released and would go on to become the top-grossing home video of all time. “Introducing Diet Coke” was the commercial jingle in everyone’s head that announced the zero-calorie soft drink’s arrival on the market. And fitness celebrity Richard Simmons hosted a top-rated talk show. Fitness was in fashion, but Americans just kept getting fatter. In the 1980s, Americans underwent their greatest weight gain in recorded history. And we haven’t taken the weight off since.

For 20 years, from 1960 to 1980, the nation’s obesity rate held steady at 13 to 15 percent of the adult population, according to the Centers for Disease Control. But from 1980 to 1988, nearly 10 percent more American adults became obese to include 23 percent of the population. Ten more years added another nearly 10 percent. In 1999, 30 percent of American adults were obese. And the number has steadily risen since then. Today, more than one in three Americans over age 20 is obese. The weight-loss industry is valued at $20 billion. And 108 million Americans are on a diet at any given time.

So why aren’t we getting any thinner?

Because diet and exercise just aren’t enough, says Timothy Bartness, the Regents’ Professor of Biology and director of Georgia State’s new Center for Obesity Reversal.

“Eat less and exercise more,” Bartness said. “If you’re going to lose weight, that has to happen. That’s the tried and true. But the tried and true thing simply hasn’t worked.”

Bartness doesn’t seek an alternative to diet and exercise, but rather a way to trigger the biological processes that would boost the efficacy of diet and exercise. The Center for Obesity Reversal will conduct research that explores these processes. Days before the center became a university research center in June, Bartness won a $2.5 million renewal of the MERIT award from the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases to study how the body breaks down fat.

“The idea here at the center is to try to identify these underlying mechanisms that promote the reversal of obesity when we exercise more and eat less, and the mechanisms that impede obesity reversal,” Bartness said.

He hopes the research will reveal ways we can trick the brain and shut off those systems that cause the body to cling so tightly to fat.

Survival of the fittest. It’s the key principle of biology, and it governs the life course of all living things. For humans, this means the body does what it must to stay strong enough to reproduce and carry on the species. When you take action to lose weight — by cutting calories and increasing exercise — your brain gets the message you’re wasting away and does what it must to hold onto weight.

“If you don’t have energy, you don’t reproduce,” Bartness said. “So if you try to lose weight, your metabolism decreases. If you affect one system that’s involved in body weight, another one will just kick in to compensate for it.”

Simply put, losing weight through diet and exercise alone is really hard. A man who eats 3,200 calories a day would have to run a marathon to burn it off. That’s 26.2 miles. At that rate, a 30-minute go on the treadmill wouldn’t even burn off a meal. And the uphill battle doesn’t end when all the weight comes off. Studies show that in order to maintain weight loss, an obese person who becomes thin has to take in 25 to 30 percent fewer calories for the rest of his or her life than someone of the same weight who has always been thin.

Bartness’s work focuses on how the brain gets the message you’ve begun to lose weight, and how it sends the body the message to hold onto the weight. And, perhaps more important, how can science be used to manipulate that message?
“If the brain thought that you were fat, but you were really thin, then it wouldn’t engage these other compensatory systems to try to make you fat again,” Bartness said. “So maybe we could trick the brain.”

**Are you there, Brain?**  
**It’s me, Fat.**

The brain gets the message as to whether the body has enough fat stored to carry out the strenuous requirements of reproduction, such as puberty, pregnancy and lactation, through the hormone leptin, which was discovered in 1994, Bartness said. Fat cells release leptin in proportion to the amount of fat stored in these cells. The more fat in the body, the more leptin. When you start to lose fat through diet and exercise, leptin levels drop. When the brain catches wind of this, it activates responses that help hold onto remaining fat. But how did the brain get the message the body was losing fat?

Until recently, experts believed the brain took stock of body fat by monitoring leptin levels in the bloodstream. Though this is one way, leptin in the bloodstream doesn’t reveal information about fat distribution. Leptin is evenly distributed throughout the body, but fat is not. And fat’s location in the body makes a difference. Fat in the trunk around the organs is a risk factor for many chronic diseases, while excess fat on the hips or thighs, for example, is not. Bartness’s lab recently found a path by which the brain gets the message as to fat’s location. When his team injected leptin directly into the fat of hamsters, the sensory nerves in that particular fat deposit were activated.

“Because the sensory nerves start firing, this means that they’re active,” Bartness said. “They’re sensing something. They’re telling the brain something.”

Years before this experiment, it was Bartness who helped convince the obesity research community of the sensory nervous system’s role in the regulation of body fat in the first place. The sensory nervous system is the part of the nervous system that conveys messages from the body to the brain, such as sensory nerves in the fingers that send the sensation of heat, cold or pain to the brain.

In the 1980s, when Jane Fonda and Richard Simmons were trying to help Americans shed all those extra pounds, Bartness was engrossed in seemingly esoteric research he thought had nothing to do with weight loss. He wanted to know how animals whose bodies respond to the seasons know what time of year it is. Take Siberian hamsters. The not-always-tiny creatures are naturally obese in the summertime, making them shorter and the hamsters began to take on one side of the body in a group of hamsters. When his team injected leptin directly into the fat of hamsters, the sensory nerves in that particular fat deposit were activated.

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To test the hypothesis, Bartness and his colleagues shut down the nerves on one side of the body in a group of Siberian hamsters. When the days got shorter and the hamsters began to take on their wintertime appearances and behaviors, they only lost fat where their nervous system’s role in the changing seasons and triggered the nerves in individual fat locations.

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Confirming the concept, Bartness found melatonin receptors in brain cells involved in the sympathetic nerves connected to the fat. Melatonin receptors are sites in the brain that respond to the presence of melatonin. During the long nights of winter, melatonin is present for longer periods at these receptors and triggers the break down of body fat in the areas where the corresponding nerves are located.

Bartness only wanted to know how the body knows it’s wintertime. But then the obesity crisis hit. And Bartness thought these hamsters might hold useful information.

“The idea was that they naturally go from a fat state to a thin state in an effortless way,” Bartness said, “but for us to lose weight, it’s very effortful. So if we could understand how they can go from this is one way, leptin in the bloodstream doesn’t reveal information about fat distribution. Leptin is evenly distributed throughout the body, but fat is not. And fat’s location in the body makes a difference. Fat in the trunk around the organs is a risk factor for many chronic diseases, while excess fat on the hips or thighs, for example, is not. Bartness’s lab recently found a path by which the brain gets the message as to fat’s location. When his team injected leptin directly into the fat of hamsters, the sensory nerves in that particular fat deposit were activated.

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fat to thin effortlessly, maybe we could make our way a little easier, too.”

Much research in the years following Bartness’s experiment has found that in fact the nervous system triggers fat loss in all mammals, not just Siberian hamsters.

“So it turned out to be a real basic, fundamental, biological property,” he said.

**Foraging for facts**

**While the nervous system** tells the brain to hold onto fat or let it go, the brain may be simultaneously setting us up to keep feeding our fat, too.

“You and I forage for food in the grocery store and we hoard food,” Bartness said.

He notes the trends towards buying in bulk and stocking second refrigerators and freezers in our homes. Over time, as we’ve gotten bigger, so have our refrigerators. Bartness believes as our bodies acquire more fat, our brains are triggering behaviors to keep it there.

“It’s been studied now. Obese people bring home more food than thin people,” Bartness said. “Because if there’s not ice cream in the house, you probably won’t go out and get it. So we try to always make sure we have more ice cream than we need.”

Bartness doesn’t chalk this up to simple love of ice cream. He suspects there are concrete processes in the brain that make heavier people stock up on more food. Studies have shown the food-hoarding habits of overweight people are similar to those of people who are voluntarily fasting.

In experiments with hamsters, Bartness found that after a brief period of food deprivation, hamsters hoard more food rather than eat more food. When humans, as well as lab rats and Siberian hamsters, fast for a couple of days, their stomachs secrete a hormone called ghrelin. Knowing this, in a later experiment, Bartness injected ghrelin into hamsters that had just been fed. Though they were not hungry, the hamsters began to hoard food as if they had been starved.

Bartness wondered, if an animal’s hoarding instinct can be turned on, couldn’t it be turned off?

“If you could figure out the systems that are involved in hoarding,” he said, “then maybe you could stop animals — including us — from bringing home more food and storing it.”

**Can I stop exercising now?**

Even if Bartness has begun to crack the code behind the yo-yoing waistlines of Siberian hamsters, what does that have to do with us?

As what’s called a basic scientist, Bartness is part of the first step in answering that question. Basic scientists perform experiments — on rodents and other non-human subjects — to discover the concepts that lay the foundation for future human applications.

His Center for Obesity Reversal is taking a multipronged approach to identifying any and all of the biological processes that help keep us fat.

“When we start to lose weight, all of our physiology works against it,” he said.

The aim is that potential human applications of the research would come at the problem from all angles.

Researchers at the center are working to uncover all of those angles through exploring obesity’s relationship with breast cancer risk, diabetes and memory, among other topics. When it’s time to translate research findings into potential human applications, the Center for Obesity Reversal will call on its partners at Emory University School of Medicine, Morehouse School of Medicine, Medical College of Georgia at Georgia Regents University and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The center’s work could lay the groundwork for medical treatments that will one day kick-start our diet and exercise routines. But Bartness isn’t going to put today’s Jane Fonsas, people like Jillian Michaels, out of business.

“Exercise is great,” he said. “It will always be great. For stress reduction, for putting off heart disease, for blood sugar control, blood pressure control. It’s crucial for reducing disease risk in people who are overweight and obese.”

SONYA COLLINS is an Atlanta-based independent journalist who covers health, health policy and scientific research. She is a regular contributor to WebMD Magazine, Pharmacy Today, Yale Medicine and Georgia Health News.
CITYSCAPE  Georgia State’s presence in downtown is growing. From atop the university’s 10-story One Park Place building, Georgia State’s three new additions to the Atlanta skyline are prominent: from right are the SunTrust Building, 55 Park Place and the new law school building, under construction and scheduled to open next May. Visit pantheralumni.com for a dynamic new video documenting Georgia State’s expanding downtown footprint.
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