STV Newsletter

Centre for Society, Technology and Values / University of Waterloo

Number Eight   September 1987
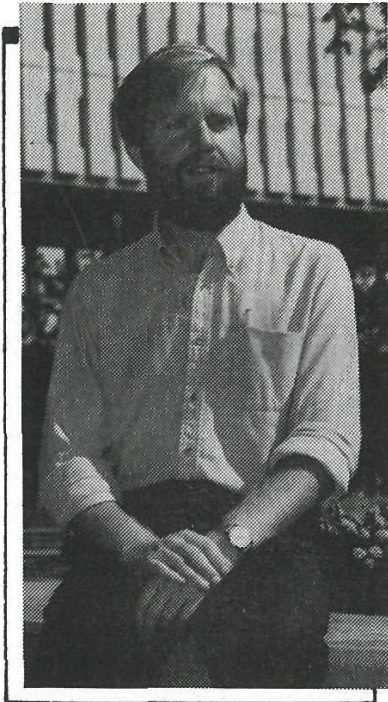
NEW CO-ORDINATOR, NEW COURSE

"Getting people to think," says Eric Higgs, is his main aim as the new co-ordinator of the STV undergraduate option. Higgs, 29, will be putting his aim into practice this fall as he conducts the first run of STV 200 (a projects course) and next winter as he oversees the 100 and 400 courses.

The fall course will rely mainly on self-directed learning and project work, says the co-ordinator, who expects about 10 - 15 students to enroll. The course will meet on Wednesdays, 7 - 10 p.m., starting 16 September, and will be open to those who have successfully completed STV 100 or its equivalent.

Students will select a broad theme from a list that may include such topics as computers in the workplace, gender and technological change, the ethics of bioengineering, technology and visions of the good society, military research and the university, and the question of whether high tech "makes people smarter."

Theme in hand, students will form small groups to focus on a particular problem and "bring it to resolution" by means of a major project. The whole class will meet weekly to discuss group progress, exchange ideas, and hear guest speakers. Later on, the weekly sessions may become optional, but throughout the term, Higgs will meet each group to help members organize and pursue their research objectives.

Success in STV 200 will depend on students' individual initiative as well as their ability to function in a group. They'll be graded on a variety of assignments, including a final presentation that will be evaluated by STV advisory board members.

The new co-ordinator is a recent student himself: he'll soon be receiving his Ph.D. jointly from the UW philosophy department and the UW school of urban and regional planning. His dissertation is on planning, technology and community integrity. Higgs has a BIS (Bachelor of Independent Studies) from UW, and an MA from Western. He has also studied at the Institute for Social Ecology in Vermont and the Hastings Center in New York.

Veteran STV instructors Sally Lerner, Russel Legge, Barry Wills and George Atkinson may participate in the fall course from time to time. In the winter, Higgs will have the assistance of TAs Jed McLean and Tim Topper.

Eric Higgs's past experience in getting people to think includes developing and teaching a "humankind and nature"

course in the UW philosophy department in 1985-6. Obviously he'll be extending that experience this year--not only as a lecturer in UW's evironment and resource studies department but perhaps even more as the STV co-ordinator.

For more details on STV 200 or the STV option, contact Eric Higgs (UW ext. 3063), Sally Lerner (ext. 3060), or the CSTV office (ext. 6215). ☐

NEWS BRIEFS

Brown Bag Lunch Series

A lunchtime STV discussion series is in the works for the fall and winter terms. The first event is tentatively scheduled for Thursday, 1 October, when Howard Woodhouse (Independent Studies) will discuss "Third World Universities and Cultural Dependencies." Exact time and location TBA. Later, Barry Wills (Sys De), William Forbes (Gerontology), William Goodman (Phil), and others will appear in the series. Additional participants are invited: call the CSTV office at UW ext. 6215.

Science Centre-CSTV Linkage

CSTV advisors George Atkinson, Sally Lerner and Russel Legge have met with Ontario Science Centre representatives Patrick Anderson and Margot Mathers, who want their staff to have CSTV input on society, technology and values issues. CSTV has agreed to act in a consultative capacity for a series of five presentations the Science Centre will offer this fall on "Toronto and Technological Change." The Science Centre has received an Ontario government grant to assist its continuing education activity.

New Advisory Board Members

Keith Warriner of Sociology and Jay Thomson of HKLS are their respective Department's and Faculty's new representatives on the STV advisory board.

CSTV Office Move

The Centre's office is now located in PAS 2061, despite what the masthead of this Newsletter says (we're using up the old stationery!). The phone number remains the same: UW ext. 6215. Working with Director Russel Legge are Steve Jones (Executive Administrator) and Bonnie Kent (Administrative Assistant for the U of T/UW Co-operative on Information Technology). ☐

SDI SOFTWARE IS FAULTY, SAYS PARNAS

At an evening lecture on 24 June, Dr. David
Parnas of Queen's University explained to
about 80 UW students, faculty and community
members why he claims SDI software is not
trustworthy.

Parnas, fomerly a consultant with the
US Navy, described how he got involved with
SDI research and why he left, discussed
counterarguments to his own position, and
delivered a "commercial" at the end.
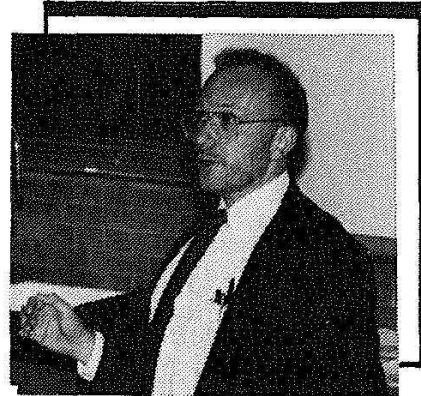
An engineer and not a mathematician, Parnas confessed
to having no faith in perfection in the abstract, and
noted that software is a field "where we produce tremen-
dously untrustworthy products." He outlined nine areas
where SDI software is vulnerable, including the lack of
reliable models, the problems of distributed computing
systems, and the difficulty of debugging in actual as
opposed to theoretical situations.

"If the first use of anything (including SDI) has to
be successful, you can't use it," is Parnas's contribu-
tion to the law of prototypes.

The commercial was simply "what you do makes a diff-
erence." The speaker urged the audience to discuss SDI
with friends and colleagues and said that because SDI is
"so stupid" it can at least produce a climate for public
discussion of claims made by defence industry supporters.

On the general issue of SDI, said Parnas, who is not
anti-military per se, Canada should side with New Zealand
rather than the US.☐

STV 100--SEMINAR STYLE

In contrast to the first, full-size STV 100 class last winter,
which saw 35 students enrolled, the (originally unplanned)
spring '87 version of the course was a down-sized model.

It had six participants--three women, two men--who, with
one exception, were all third year students in either computer
science, engineering, biology or political science. The except-
ion was a first year systems design student.

The six had been away on co-op work terms when STV 100 ran
in the winter, and thus requested that it be offered in the
spring. Instructor was CSTV Director Russel Legge, who says
the seminar-lecture format of the small class "created a context
for great involvement on the part of highly motivated students."

Information technology, bioethics, and technology transfer
were chosen as areas to study. Once into their research, the
students were "amazed as how much material was available," says

Legge.

The six performed well enough in the course, says their instructor, but because they were all in "high pressure" UW programs, they had difficulty finding enough time to adequately prepare their work. "This is an area where our Faculties will have to make adjustments," Legge notes.

Student Mark Anderson wrote in the Iron Warrior (UW's Engineering paper) that the course provided a way to deal seriously with value-questions, contrasting it with courses stressing only technique and data.

Four of the students are expected to sign up for the complete STV option. □

CSTV ACTIVITIES ROUND-UP

CONNECTIONS

The popular Connections BBC/Time-Life film series, organized by Dr. Carl Thompson (Civ Eng), again played to large, enthusiastic lunchtime crowds of 100 or more every week from mid-May to early July. Screenings were held in EL 101.

Israel Scheffler   (23 - 24 May)

In late May, CSTV co-sponsored with St. Jerome's College and the UW departments of philosophy and sociology the campus visit of Dr. Israel Scheffler of Harvard. Scheffler discussed "Computers at School" and "Making and Understanding."

The speaker's discussion of computers in schools was perhaps of the greater interest. The Harvard education professor attacked "the illusion of givenness" which implies that schools must reflect the leading technology of the day. Nothing is "fated" this way, he said, and there are good reasons for not absolutizing any particular means or tools. Among much else, Scheffler suggested that we are shrinking our vision of the world to suit our present technologies, and that "interactive technologies," whatever their virtues, are only "the tiniest sliver of interactive life."

Katharine Tait   (4 June)

"Bertrand Russell and the Beacon Hill School" was the topic of a paper given by Russell's daughter, Katharine Tait, who visited UW on 4 June. Her visit was co-sponsored by CSTV, Philosophy, and Independent Studies.

<u>Alexander King</u> (5 June)

On 5 June, the Centre co-sponsored the campus visit of Dr. Alexander King, co-founder of the Club of Rome. King spoke on "The Great Transition," the social trends he sees as "pervasive, profound, and likely to continue." He stressed the world population explosion and the positive possibilities of science and technology, as well as his early and more recent experiences with the USSR. Other sponsors: Environment and Resource Studies and the Sandford Fleming Foundation. □

CSTV IN 1987-8: CONSOLIDATING AND BROADENING

"This year my primary emphasis will be on continuing to consolidate the STV program within the University and to broaden the Centre's influence across the campus," says CSTV Director Dr. Russel Legge. "Probably our major achievement last year was getting the STV option launched, and I want to see that process completed--with the first offering of STV 200 and 400, and with Eric Higgs being brought on as faculty."

The CSTV Director expects the Centre's March 1988 conference, "Professionals and Social Responsibility: Conflict or Congruence?" to be a highlight of the year's activities.

"This conference is the first, as far as we're aware, to offer people concerned with their respective profession's social responsibilities an opportunity to discuss, not only professional responsibility as such but also their common objectives and frustrations," says Legge. The three-day event will draw about 75 to 100 participants from Canada and the US. (See story this issue.)

One of the aims Legge had for the Centre last year was for it to increase its impact on the "external" world outside the UW campus. "This wasn't as successful as I'd hoped," the Director acknowledges.

But external connections are developing, though slowly. The Ontario Science Centre (see story in this issue) and the Canadian Association for Advanced Technology (CATA) are among recent CSTV contacts. In fact, CSTV will be UW's representative at CATA's "Educating for the Knowledge-based Economy" national roundtable conference in Toronto later this month.

Another goal still to achieve, that of establishing more connections on the "internal" level at UW, will get more attention this year. Legge plans to make direct personal contacts with many UW departments, something that calls for a significant time-commitment from him as well as from STV advisory board members.

The Centre will continue to act as a catalyst, the Director says. As in the past, it will handle inquiries about graduate study in STV areas, for instance, and pass them along to appropriate UW departments. Says Legge: "We hope to have more involvement with this in future--by helping arrange interdis-

ciplinary study programs, negotiating joint departmental efforts, or facilitating student projects."

Other CSTV traditions will return this year. A brown bag lunch-discussion series is slated to start this fall, partly in response to a survey which showed that more people want to discuss STV issues in such a setting. CSTV co-sponsorship of public lectures and other activities will also continue.

In addition, the Centre will be exploring "the beginnings of ideas" for STV research projects.

But in order to achieve his goals for the Centre in 1987-8 as well as to see the Centre fulfil its general mandate, the Director says he'll be urging the University to recognize that what's really needed are full-time--not merely part-time--staff resources. □

PROFESSIONALS AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY:

CONFLICT OR CONGRUENCE?

The headline you've just read is the official name of CSTV's spring 1988 conference. Conceived by consultant Kelly Gotlieb, the unique event will take place at UW on 16 - 18 March (note slight change in dates from those previously announced).

Organizers expect about 75 to 100 participants from various professional and scientific constituencies--law, engineering, medicine, environmental studies, nursing, computer science, etc.--to attend.

Major themes will be ethical codes, global peace and human rights, and activist groups within professional bodies. Keynote speaker will be Prof. Jack Stevenson of U of T (philosophy), who is noted for his work in this field.

CSTV advisory members are working in committees to assemble the various components of the event. They expect a publication to emerge from the conference, either a book or a special issue of an appropriate journal.

More news will be available later this fall and in the next CSTV Newsletter. □

CALENDAR   September - November 1987

16 Sept.   STV 200 PROJECTS COURSE starts
7-10 pm   Location TBA
               Details: Eric Higgs, UW ext. 3063

CALENDAR   September - November 1987

26 Sept.   REFUGEES: AN EDUCATIONAL SYMPOSIUM
1-4:30 pm
                Organized by UW PACS, Global Community
                Centre, WPIRG, and other groups.

                St. Matthews Lutheran Church, Kitchener

                Details: Global Community Centre 746-4090

29 - 30 Sept.   EDUCATING FOR THE KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY

                National Roundtable. Organized by the
                Canadian Advanced Technology Association
                (CATA). Westin Hotel, Toronto.

                Details: Roy Woodbridge, CATA President,
                          Suite 803, 275 Slater St., Ottawa
                          K1P 5H9. (613) 236-6550

1 Oct.   THIRD WORLD UNIVERSITIES AND CULTURAL
Noon   DEPENDENCIES

                CSTV Brown Bag lunchtime discussion with
                Howard Woodhouse, UW Independent Studies.

                First of series. Exact time and location TBA.

                Details: CSTV office, UW ext. 6215.

21 - 23 Oct.   GALAXY '87: LIFELONG LEARNING FOR THE
                21st CENTURY

                Continuing education conference hosted
                by the Ontario Association for Continuing
                Education (OACE). Harbour Castle, Toronto

                Details: OACE, 175 St. Clair Ave. W.,
                          Toronto M4V 1P7. (416) 924-2275

22 - 23 Oct.   CANADIAN SOCIETY FOR THE HISTORY OF
                SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

                Conference in Ottawa.

                Details: Richard Garrell, Dept. of Natural
                         Science, Atkinson College, York U.

2 Nov.
4 pm

LITERACY AND COMPUTING SEMINAR SERIES
The Devanagari Writing System: Structural
and Processing Considerations

P. G. Patel, University of California
Center for Health Sciences

First of a series of 8 monthly free seminars
organized by the U of T McLuhan Program in
Culture and Technology.

Details: McLuhan Program in Culture and
Technology, 39A Queen's Park Cres.,
Toronto M5S 1A1. (416) 978-7026

NEWSLETTER PRODUCTION

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News items are eagerly solicited
for the next issue. Call the
CSTV office at UW ext. 6215.