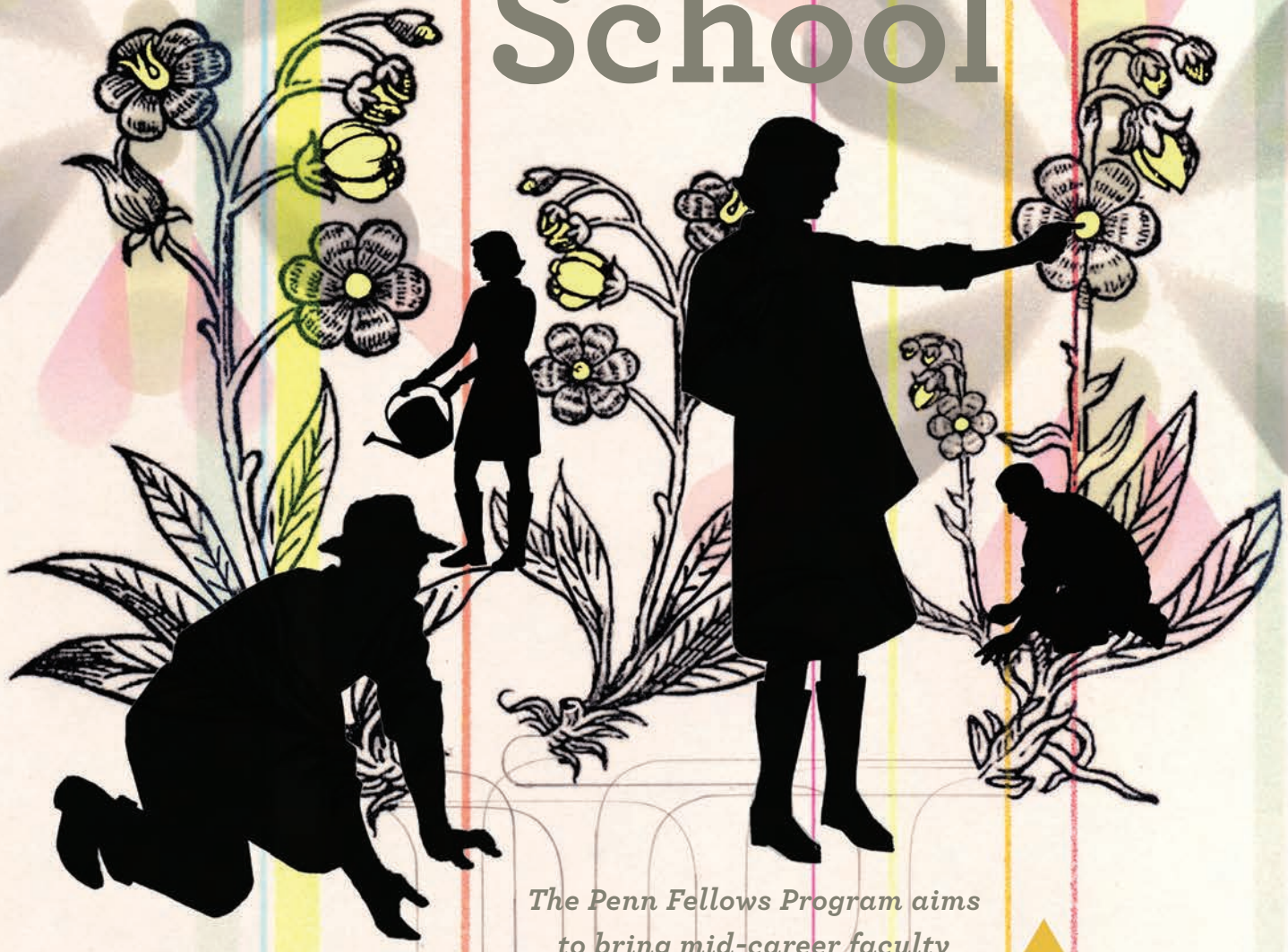
Finishing School



The Penn Fellows Program aims to bring mid-career faculty into full bloom.

BY MOLLY PETRILLA

A doctor, a statistician, and a sociologist stop by Penn President Amy Gutmann's house for dinner one night. What happens afterward is anyone's guess. One of them might become the next provost, another the head of a large-scale research program, and one might ultimately wind up the next University president. At least, that's what the masterminds behind the Penn Fellows program are hoping.

Launched by the Provost's Office in the spring of 2009, the Penn Fellows initiative was created for mid-career faculty who show promise of becoming academic or administrative leaders in the future. Each spring, a new "class" is added, about a dozen strong, and for the next two years they meet for informal monthly dinners with administrative leaders—Gutmann, Provost Vincent Price, Executive Vice President Craig Carnaroli W'85, and Vice President for Development and Alumni Relations John Zeller.

"The idea is for [our Fellows] to gain a more general understanding of how the University operates so they can think more broadly about faculty governance," Price says. "Often, excellent potential leaders never step into those roles because they know so little about them." And for those who do make the leap, he adds, "the learning curve is steeper than it has to be."

There are some impressive resumes gathered around those dinner tables. There's John L. Jackson Jr., an expert on racial identity who is the Richard Perry University Professor of Communication and Anthropology ["Proof of Concept," Sept|Oct 2008]; Sharon Thompson-Schill, the Class of 1965 Endowed Term Associate Professor of Psychology and Neurology, who specializes in the neurological basis of memory and language; Charles Branas, an associate professor of epidemiology who is an expert on improvements to public health; and the list goes on. Intellectual diversity is part of the point. Meeting some of Penn's most luminous rising stars, many of whom he might never have crossed paths with otherwise, has been a highlight for Fellow Randall Mason, an associate professor of city and regional planning in the School of Design who is an expert on historic preservation in American cities. "The School of Design is like a small neighborhood in the big city of the University," he says. "I'm getting to explore the 'big city' through interpersonal relationships with other Fellows. That's a great opportunity."

Rebecca Bushnell, dean of the School of Arts and Sciences, said it would have been "fascinating and delightful" to have had access to such a program during her pre-administration days at Penn. "I can't emphasize enough how important it is for our faculty to get out of the small communities they're in and find ways to connect with larger University missions."

The Fellows aren't the only ones benefiting from the program. They frequently have the chance to bring scholarly companions to these monthly dinners, so the advantages spill over. "It's a wonderful opportunity for their guests and consultants," Price says, adding that it "confirms my faith in the extraordinary ability of Penn's faculty to choose outstanding researchers, scholars, and leaders."

On that note, here a few of the 2009 and 2010 Fellows.

The Past, present, and Future of HBCUs

If you've read an article, book, or blog post about historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) any time in the last decade or so, odds are Marybeth Gasman was somehow involved. She may have been quoted, she may have been consulted for background, and she may very well be the author. In the first two weeks of March alone, Gasman—an associate professor of higher education in the Graduate School of Education—wrote a series of blog posts for the *New York Times* about HBCUs; appeared on NPR's *Tell Me More* to discuss Spelman College's financial challenges; posted to her own blog, Access Granted, about HBCUs in the Obama era; and continued work on several of the five books she is due to put out in the next academic year. As GSE Dean Andrew Porter puts it, "Marybeth is so darn productive that when I read her list of accomplishments, it leaves me breathless."

Considering her status as a go-to source on HBCUs, many people are surprised to hear that before graduate school, Gasman had never met an African American. She grew up in an all-white community in the upper peninsula of Michigan, and black institutions were about as far off her radar as, well, African Americans. "I used to watch *A Different World*"—a TV show set at a historically black university—"but I didn't know there were real places like that," she says. At the same time, her mother, who had been raised in an integrated neighborhood of Flint, Michigan, "always told me that equity was important and that equality was something you should fight for."

After earning an undergraduate degree in political science from St. Norbert College, Gasman went into college and university administration, focusing on higher-education marketing and student life. With an eye on becoming a dean of students, Gasman enrolled at Indiana University to pursue a Ph.D. in higher education. That plan changed shortly after she arrived on campus and experienced two major awakenings: "I was exposed to all these different people and ideas, and instead of hating it and recoiling, I loved it," she says. Second, one of her professors suggested she read James D. Anderson's *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1860-1935.* The book was "enlightening, almost mesmerizing," Gasman recalls. She read it twice while on a cross-country trip.

Feeling inspired, invigorated, and even a little starry-eyed, Gasman approached her advisor about focusing her studies on HBCUs. He asked if she was crazy. As a white woman, could she really gain complete access to the communities she proposed to study? "He said, 'You're not going to be able to do this,' but I had already overcome quite a bit," Gasman says. "I grew up incredibly poor. Like, outhouse poor. Like, no-running-water poor. My mom has an eighth-grade education, and my dad graduated high school in the military. I'm one of three [among my nine siblings] who went to college."

Even with a new advisor and course of study in place, she still faced some of the obstacles her original advisor had predicted. "Initially, it was hard to form relationships" in the HBCU community. In fact, it took seven trips to the first historically black university she visited before its archivist

acknowledged that she was worth showing "the really good stuff," as Gasman puts it. "She wanted to see if I was serious, because there are a lot of white scholars who just want to use this work to bolster their careers." (On the contrary, Gasman's connection runs deep, Porter says: "She works with these institutions and advises them on fundraising and all kinds of things. She's not just a scholar at a distance. She's someone interested in making a difference.")

As something of a media darling, Gasman receives about a half-dozen calls per week from reporters writing about HBCUs and the issues they face. And every month, at least a few reporters ask the question that irks her most: Why do historically black institutions still need to exist in an integrated society? "Nobody ever asks that about white institutions," she says, her frustration evident. "I can think of a lot of white institutions that aren't [racially] diverse at all, so why do we need them?"

When it comes to those reporters, "I try to school them all," she says. HBCUs "are educating 20 percent of African Americans and graduating 24 to 25 percent of African Americans at the undergraduate level, yet they make up only three percent of colleges and universities. [Also], aside from the black church, they're one of a very few institutions that is a mecca of black culture. I think their accomplishments and contributions are very important."

The five books forthcoming in the next year reflect much of what Gasman has discovered about HBCUs over the years. They include a history of higher education with ample attention paid to HBCUs, a history of the Morehouse School of Medicine, a book focusing on Booker T. Washington, and a volume on race and gender in nonprofit and foundation leadership.

"I've had a lot of people say to me, 'Isn't there something else? Haven't you studied those institutions enough?'" Gasman says. "I'll say, 'My Gosh, I still have so many questions! There's still so much more that I want to know.'"

Statistics For Polymaths

Had you wandered into Eric Bradlow W'88's seventh-story Huntsman Hall office on a sunny afternoon in early March, you might have mistaken the popular K.P. Chao Professor of Marketing, Statistics, and Education for some sort of psychic. A row of framed photos was lined up before his seat, with only their velvet backings visible to a visitor. "We're trying to assess whether people go through a slow death or more of a sudden death," Bradlow said. "And whether people come back from the dead."

If you'd stuck around a little longer, you would have discovered that the "people" he was talking about were Hulu.com users, and "death" was their departure from the streaming-video website. It's the latest corner of the world that Bradlow is attempting to understand using statistical methods, and he says it's also one of the trickiest. As co-director of the Wharton Interactive Media Initiative, he's been working with "the Hulus, ESPN.coms and Facebooks of the world" to make mathematical prediction models of what their users will do in the future: who will friend whom, who will Tweet whom, who will "die" on Hulu, and who will come back from the dead to use it again. "In essence, we have corporate partners who want academic brainpower thinking about the kinds of data and problems they're facing today," he says.

In 1984, Bradlow was just another Wharton freshman strolling down Locust Walk when a flyer caught his eye. In big, bold letters, it promised "Statistics and Baseball" in a lecture by University of Chicago professor Edward I. George (who has since joined Wharton as the Universal Furniture Professor of Statistics). A fan of mathematics and baseball who knew almost nothing about statistics, Bradlow figured he'd stop by to see how the two could be linked.

As George discussed shrinkage estimation—a technique that can come in handy for adjusting, say, a batting average based on a small number of at-bats—Bradlow found himself thinking, *Man, this is what he gets paid to do for a living? That sounds like a lot of fun to me.* In other words, he was hooked.

He transferred from his freshman-level statistics class into an honors course, and from there, moved on to graduate-level classes. Master's and doctoral degrees in statistics from Harvard University came next, and by January of 1995—less than a year after receiving his PhD—Bradlow had already returned to Penn as a lecturer. He became a full professor the following year, but even now, 14 years later, still feels grateful for the way things shook out. "My dad went here, my uncle went here, all my cousins went here," he says. "Penn is my home, and I'm lucky to be here."

Over the years, he's created statistical models to forecast the answers to all sorts of questions: Where is a song likely to appear on the Billboard Top 40, and how long it will stay there? How will a shopper's path through the supermar-

ket influence his purchases? And, most recently, how often will a user log on to interactive media sites like Hulu.com?

He has worked with Penn faculty members from a range of departments: education, psychology, medicine. "The good news about statistics is it never goes out of style," he says. "People need statisticians all the time, and it's not discipline-oriented. I like being able to take my skill set and apply it to different problems. The methods are common, but the problems are different. It's almost like you're starting over again each time, and that's something that drew me to this field."

Bradlow has proven himself inside the classroom as well, winning more than 20 Wharton teaching awards, all of which are lined up neatly on the windowsill behind his desk: an undergraduate excellence in teaching award; several "Goes Above and Beyond the Call of Duty" awards; the Miller-Sherrerd MBA Core Teaching Award. "I try to see things as simply as possible, so that's the way I try to teach: What is the fundamental concept [a student] needs to learn to understand this topic?" he says. Pedagogy isn't something he takes lightly. For his first few years as a professor, Bradlow videotaped his lectures, then sat down with a teaching expert to review the footage. "I was naturally a fairly good teacher," he adds, "but it's also something I've worked at quite a bit."

While Bradlow says he's "tremendously honored" to have been selected as one of the first Penn Fellows, "I keep telling them I'm way too young to be mid-career ... They don't know that I'm working 'til I'm 90."

The (Medical) Resident Sleep Expert

Picture Lisa Bellini Res'93 as that protective mom who always wanted to make sure her kids got enough sleep—a modern-day Carol Brady in charge of her daughters' big sleepover, if you will. Only in this case, the "kids" are 20- and 30-something Penn medical residents, and their "mom" is the vice dean for resident and faculty affairs in the School of Medicine.

Bellini's belief in well-rested residents is so strong that she's currently running a study on mandatory naps, similar to that lights-off "quiet time" in pre-K, but again, with much older subjects. It's the only study of its kind in the country, and requires residents who work extended shifts, which can last up to 30 hours, to take a five-hour overnight nap. "Our residents are thrilled when they're part of 'the nap rotation,'" Bellini says, and in the next year, she hopes to discover whether it's a feasible (and worthwhile) strategy to mitigate some of their persistent fatigue—without exacerbating the risks involved when patients are "handed off" from one physician to another.

So why all the fuss over how much sleep residents—a notoriously sleep-deprived bunch—are getting? That's another question for Bellini, who's been studying the effects of residents' sleep deprivation for the last decade. "Our research has shown that the more sleep deprived [residents] are, the more likely they are to become depressed, feel burned out, and have less empathy for their patients," she says. In short, "fatigue is a major issue."

According to School of Medicine Dean Arthur Rubenstein, Bellini's research on sleepy residents is not only "a very important topic in terms of patient safety" but also illustrates her status as "a very important role model" in the medical school. "She's a terrific leader in terms of balance, support of faculty, and mentoring young people," he says. "She also advises me on a range of things, and gives me a lot of good advice in terms of recruitment and retention."

Bellini came to Penn in 1990 as, you guessed it, a sleep-deprived medical resident. "I always wanted to be a doctor, and it's all I ever talked about doing since I was a little kid," she says. "I just like to take care of people, so it's sort of a natural extension of that."

At the time of her own residency, there was not yet a cap on the number of hours residents could spend on the clock. "It wasn't uncommon to work 100 or 110 hours per week," she says. "I was definitely burnt out." She persevered through those sleepless years, and in 1996 joined the School of Medicine faculty as program director of the internal medicine residency program. She's continued to climb the ranks from there, and now serves in both her vice dean role and as vice chair for education and inpatient services in the Department of Medicine.

As a result of her sleep-deprivation research, Bellini has helped institute a number of policy changes: a peer-support network for residents, schedules and staffing models that minimize fatigue, and keeping the school's staff aware of the signs and symptoms of depression among their residents. While medical residents have been the focus of much of her research, teaching, and policy initiatives, Bellini is equally aware of the patients she's helping, both indirectly and as a still-practicing doctor in Penn's pulmonary outpatient practice. "The whole goal is to provide the highest quality of care that we can, so working on things like fatigue-mitigation strategies ultimately helps decrease errors and adverse events and improves patient safety," she says.

The Science of Divination

It's not often that an expert on ancient texts has occasion to spend time at a place like Stanford's Center for Advanced Studies in Behavioral Sciences. Sociologists, psychologists, biologists, and anthropologists? Sure. But Peter Struck CGS'06, associate professor and undergraduate chair of the Classical Studies Department? Not so much.

Yet that's where Struck has been hunkered down this year, using an academic fellowship to explore ancient intellectuals' views of divination through the lenses of anthropology, cognitive psychology, evolutionary biology, and contemporary semiotics. So far, he's discovered that the intellectuals of yesteryear explained the process of divination in much the same way *New Yorker* essayist Malcolm Gladwell explains snap judgments: intuition. "That tells me that these ancient practices of divination aren't the way we've understood them—they aren't strange or radical," Struck says. "I think that's an entirely new take." (Look for that take in the form of a new book sometime in the next two years.)

Struck's zeal for classics began when he was a University of Michigan undergraduate. "I was totally floored by the poetry of Homer," he says. "When I read that, I knew I wanted to live in that world." But don't misunderstand him. When he says "live in that world," he doesn't mean freezing the past in amber to relive or venerate it. "What we do with the past is learn from it," he says. "I think the past saves the future for the benefit of the present."

That forward-looking orientation has led Struck to co-found and direct the National Forum on the Future of Liberal Education, funded by the Teagle Foundation. Between his work there and what SAS Dean Rebecca Bushnell describes as his efforts to "remake the Benjamin Franklin Scholars program," it's clear, she says, that Struck is "someone with a passion for making a difference, particularly institutionally."

He's also "one of our most imaginative teachers," adds Bushnell—a compliment Struck credits largely to serving as a faculty fellow in Rodin and Stouffer College Houses. "It's easy to go on that old person's jag about how we were so virtuous and curious as students," he says. "Living in the college houses cleared up any lingering doubts I had about what my students were like. By living with them, I realized how much I admire Penn students."

That admiration extends to the classroom, where he's earned multiple teaching awards. "There are always moments in my mythology class where a student will come up with something that's utterly brilliant," he says. "There are 250 people out there in the audience, so you're basically crowdsourcing an ancient text. It's wonderful to see that brainpower get directed onto something I care so deeply about."

Like the other Fellows, Struck says he looks forward to what will unfold over his next two years in the program. "Penn is a large and complex organism," he says. "The Penn Fellows program gives us a chance to learn about all the other pieces of the University, which is wonderfully enriching for me. It's a really impressive thing to sit in a room with someone who has studied a topic for years and can bring you up to speed on it in 20 minutes. That's the thrilling part of being in an academic environment."◆