

Undergraduate Research Center Newsletter

July 6, 2007

We have the pleasure to announce that on June 16, 2007, Prof. Chris Craney will lead a hike in the beautiful San Gabriel mountains. An yearly organized favorite, the hike is appropriate for people at any skill level. Come enjoy the picturesque scenery while engaging in a beneficial work out (Seen the hike option on the gym machines? This is the real thing, no mercy☺) and getting to know some great people! Lunch will be provided. What more can you ask for?!

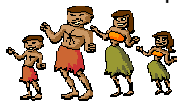
We will meet at 8:15 a.m. at the parking lot between the Biology and Chemistry buildings, and we'll be back at Oxy in the late afternoon.

So said Chris, so it be.

Calendar June 2- June 9

June 2-3, 2007

9:00 am-5:00 pm



Pacific Islander Festival: The Birth of Surfing

100 Aquarium Way

Long Beach, CA 90802

<http://www.aquariumofpacific.org/newsevents/>

June 3, 2007

10:00 am-7:00 pm



Lummis Day Festival

A celebration of the city's diverse culture and rich history presented by Occidental College.

<http://www.lummisday.org>

June 3, 2007

11:00 am-8:00 pm



Los Feliz Village Street Fair

Vermont Avenue between Hollywood Boulevard and Franklin Avenue

<http://www.losfelizstreetfair.com/>

June 6, 2007

12:00 noon



Summer Research Seminar

[A bacterial predator unleashed: Studies of Bdellovibrio bacteriovorus](#)

Megan Ferguson, Chemistry Dept.

Lower Herrick, includes lunch

June 9, 2007

9:00 am-12:00 noon



Book Sale Central Library

Pasadena Central Library east patio

285 E Walnut St

Pasadena CA 91101

<http://pasadenapubliclibrary.net>

June 9, 2007

7:30 pm

Cinespia: Harold and Maude

Hollywood Forever Cemetery

<http://www.cinespia.org/>

Megan Ferguson

This Wednesday's speaker, Professor Megan Ferguson, received her Bachelor's degrees in Chemistry and Geography & Environmental Studies from University of Maryland, Baltimore County. She received her Master's and Ph.D. degrees in Environmental Science & Engineering from Caltech. Prof. Ferguson is presently a postdoc and adjunct professor in the Chemistry Department at Oxy. She is particularly interested in applying chemistry to better understand and solve environmental problems. Her extracurricular interests include ballroom and other partner dancing, hiking, canyoneering.

Students' Corner

Starting this week, the URC newsletter will include an article describing the ongoing work and expectations of one of you, our summer researchers. This week's interview is with Gilberto Moran, a first-year student doing research in Asian Studies and more specifically, on manga.



Gilberto Moran

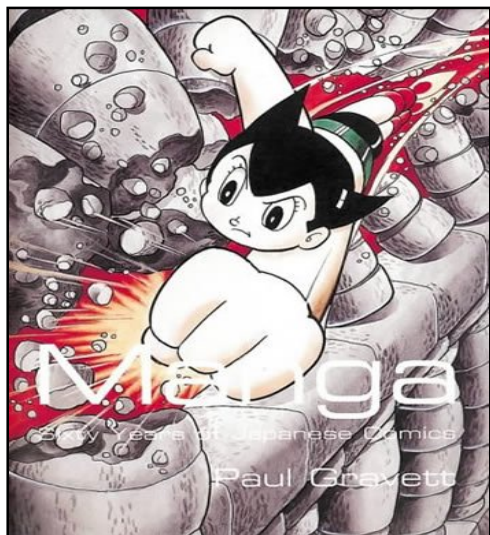
Manga: Understanding a People through Their Comics

1. You are one of the very few first-year students who applied to and got approved for the Summer Research Program. What made you willing to engage in research after just one year in college?

First semester of the past year I was able to take the course Modern Japan taught by Morgan Pitelka. I have always been a devout Japanophile, so I was eager to learn all I could about the history of Japan.

The final project of the course was an analysis of one of three anime movies using the theory on titles we had discussed and keeping in mind the history we had learnt. I was assigned Akira, one of the more important anime titles in terms of its cross-over appeal in the United States. I relished the opportunity to apply both the theoretical information I gathered from the course materials and my boosted historical knowledge. This would allow for an expansion of my understanding of anime as not only the Japanese form of cartoons, but also as one of the more important means by which the creators are able to relate issues pertaining to the Japanese people in an abstract way.

Professor Pitelka suggested that I consider summer research soon after I finished the course due partly to my grade in the course, but also because of my overall understanding of the subject matter. I decided to do it mainly because of the chance to study basically anything I wanted, in depth and independently. Also, I dreaded the prospect of a 9-5 mundane job more than anything.



2. Explain the topic and nature of your project in a few sentences.

My topic focuses on one of the most widespread forms of expression in Japan, the Japanese comic, or manga. Being as obsessed with the medium as I admittedly am, it seemed natural to explore the most important question in relation to manga: why? Why are the Japanese so interested? Why am I so interested? What is uniquely Japanese about these works of fiction? I want to explore the deeper-lying, basic questions raised and answered by these comics. I also want to find out how these authors can be extremely abstract, even nonsensical, and at the same time touch upon many different social, political and cultural phenomena.

4. As a dilettante fan of manga and anime, I am aware of the ongoing debate as to whether their universal appeal is a result of their distinctive Japanese-ness, or, quite contrary, to a certain deterritorialization of plot, themes, and characters. What is your point of view? Why do you, personally, like manga and anime?

I think the appeal of manga and anime lies somewhere in between. For most fans of anime and manga, one of the main appeals of the media is that they are both definitively Japanese. There are mannerisms, art styles, characters, scenery, cultural practices and so forth that are alien to the average fan's sensibilities. I think this points to a rather ancient exotic quality applied to the entire region of Asia.

However, at the same time, there is certainly an aspect of familiarity that is not accidental. A lot of the characters are of questionable origins; the locales many times are nowhere specific and often in an alternate universe. For many fans, both Japanese and otherwise, manga offers the ability to connect with the characters because they could be anything to anyone. Still, there does remain a rather strange, even disturbing, tendency to lean towards a more European sensibility while at the same time being grounded firmly in Japanese-ness.

Why do I like anime and manga? It's a question that I probably don't know the answer to. So far, I have just liked them without questioning myself WHY. I am aware that I like the frenetic action and quirky characters found in many series, the story telling of the authors, and the artwork itself. I also like the fact that there isn't a single type of manga or anime. It is both for adults and children, so as I get older I can just shift series to the more adult ones. I remember waking up some 10 years ago (wow! its been that long...) at 6:00 am to catch the newest episodes of Dragonball Z and Sailor Moon with my little brother. Here comes yet another aspect of anime that I like. It is very much a communal experience. I have made friends online as a result of anime and manga. My best friend is a Japanophile like myself. My little brother and I can talk about it. There are groups at many campuses devoted to these media. Contrary to popular belief, anime and mangaphiles are not the solitary, socially inept nerds who live in their parents basements.

5. The topic of your research suggests that you see manga as a cultural window to Japanese collective identity. What is, then, the American equivalent of manga (a cultural form which represents "American-ness")?

At one time, it probably would have been comic books as well. In the 1940s, one could find Batman, Superman, Wonder Women and so forth battling Hitler, Mussolini and Hirohito, all in the same issue. It was all as American as apple pie. However, I think the common perception is that they never evolved past the 'this is for kids' phase. This, of course, couldn't be further from truth, especially in the wake of Marvel Comics' recent yearlong event 'Civil War', in which the various series ask the very timely questions, "How important are your civil liberties and would you sacrifice them if it meant a safer world?"

In my opinion, today's America is far too complex to have a single, all-encompassing media that represents all that we are about. Honestly, I have never really given it much thought. Perhaps, Rap music? Now, in order to arrive at that conclusion one would have to sift through a lot of complex issues that mire the art form right now but at its heart, rap is an American style that focuses on the individuals' ability to express themselves in a meaningful way, however they choose to do it. One can rise from abject poverty through hard work and perseverance and become "the biggest thing ever." The best rappers rhyme about coming from nothing and making it big for both himself and his people. What could be more American than pulling oneself up by the boot straps and becoming the modern day Carnegie or Rockefeller based entirely on your individuality?

(Ivelina Georgieva)



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