Masters of Fate

By Laura Seeley

Taking the slogan “Go Green” to the next practical level, Michigan State University will extend its socio-economic, physical, and natural science—based insights to more students and to the greater community in an effort to address issues of global sustainability, supported with generous gifts from a retired professor and a former MSU Trustee.

Barbara J. Sawyer-Koch (’90, M.P.A., Social Science) and Don Koch, MSU Professor Emeritus of philosophy, have established several significant current and planned gift endowment funds, the major gift being titled Fate of the Earth.

The Koch’s share a passion for the environment and recognize the significant negative impacts that climate change and air and water degradation will have on future generations. With their Fate of the Earth Endowment, the Koch’s hope to encourage today’s students and tomorrow’s leaders to understand the critical need for societal changes and take the necessary steps to prevent further destruction of the Earth’s fragile environment.

“This is a sociological problem that requires a more informed citizenry to demand action—and to do it now,” says Barbara. “Recognizing the limited horizon within which to implement solutions, we have opted to gift sufficient cash now so that we may experience the transformative impacts while we are alive.”

The Koch’s realized that MSU’s research and outreach strengths, and opportunities for cross-fertilization of ideas among the colleges addressing sustainability, aligned with their own goals. They were especially drawn to the interdisciplinary approach of MSU’s Environmental Science and Policy Program (ESPP), a program celebrating its 10th year with Social Science as the lead college.

“The potential for collaboration at MSU is, in our opinion, a necessary prerequisite to identifying and implementing solutions,” says Barbara. “Reversing the course that we’re on, which is threatening sustainability globally, requires a coherent and comprehensive social, political and economic response.”

Having served on the MSU Board of Trustees for 16 years (1980-1996), Barbara has remained active in a number of MSU activities, including serving on the College of Social Science Alumni Board.

“The Fate of the Earth Endowment has been crafted to take advantage of the incredible interdisciplinary efforts at MSU,” she says. ESPP has begun designing the academic program, with implementation planned for spring term 2014.

“We would like to build a cadre of students involved in all varieties of sustainability initiatives who are well-informed, have inquiring minds and know what questions to ask going forward,” says Don.

Specifically, the endowment will bring noted world scholars to MSU to speak to students and faculty about sustainability, with programs taped for sharing electronically worldwide.

The endowment will also create cross-disciplinary “expert pods” of faculty members who will be called upon to provide an environmental perspective for diverse courses across campus. It will also support an annual Donald Koch Distinguished Lectureship, which will be open to the community, and a graduate assistantship to facilitate these programs.

Overall, the Koch’s cash and planned gifts total more than $3 million and will also establish endowments for the MSU Library, International Studies and Programs, the College of Osteopathic Medicine, the Ruth Jameyson Above and Beyond Staff Award and a discretionary fund available to the Office of the Provost.

“Michigan State University has a history of excellence in integrating its world-grant mission to apply its teaching, research and outreach toward improving the social and environmental condition of humanity,” says Barbara. “It is that university commitment that inspired us to select MSU as the institution most capable of proactively addressing environmental issues impacting the fate of the Earth. Moreover, we wish to pay forward our indebtedness to the university for enhancing our lives in so many varied and impactful ways.”
A Message from the Dean

The College of Social Science mission is to create, disseminate, and apply knowledge in the social, behavioral and economic sciences, and to enhance what we know through interactions with other disciplines and professions across campus and beyond. We especially focus on cooperation with the STEMM disciplines — science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine — and through these partnerships we tackle difficult problems around the world.

We are the largest college on campus with over 300 tenured and tenure-stream faculty providing instructional, research and outreach services within our eight departments, three schools and six centers and institutes. We have more than 6,300 undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in our 13 major disciplines, and our students are active participants in research and study abroad programs in all regions of the world.

To enable the faculty and programs of such a large and diverse college to connect with one another, it is important to have a vision and goals that can help us stay focused. We have learned much about ourselves over three strategic planning efforts since I became dean, and each planning process allows us to further distinguish our areas of strength. Our latest strategic planning process has led us to identify three focal areas of strength:

- **Environment and Global Change** is a hallmark of our College dating back 20 years and encompassing programs such as the Center for Global Change and Earth Observation and the Environmental Science and Policy Program.

- **Human Development and Health** brings together researchers from across campus, with leadership from the Department of Psychology, to nurture intellectual networks that foster interdisciplinary collaboration in this rapidly expanding field.

- Our newest focal area, **Diverse Populations, Equity, and Security with Justice**, is grounded in past signature programs and thematic strengths and was inaugurated with our successful Anti-Counterfeiting and Product Protection Program (A-CAPPP), which is part of our School of Criminal Justice.

These strategic research emphases reflect the interdisciplinary nature of our work and strengthen our collaborative learning environment. They allow us to engage with people and communities, both locally and globally, and by doing so we support our vision, and the university’s vision, to keep Michigan State on the cutting edge of research and education.

Our alumni are important to our efforts. Engagement with the process of creating new initiatives and supporting them generously is vital as we continue to move forward. I thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Marietta L. Baba, Dean and Professor

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Alumna Funds Economics Internship Fund

by Kyle Simon, Professional Writing Senior

Like gymnasts build themselves into bridges as they work their way to back handsprings, former gymnastics champion and current marketing expert Pamela Steckroat Treadway has built a different kind of bridge through her generous gifts to Michigan State University. For the College of Social Science and the Department of Economics, the bridge is large and strong: a $900,000 bequest to create The Pamela Steckroat Endowed Internship Fund for Economics Students.

“I did not want money to deny someone the opportunity to accept an internship as this experience greatly helps to build on their college education. Internship experience provides immense value to any college graduate as well as their ultimate employer,” she explained.

Ms. Steckroat Treadway has created the fund through a bequest in which she provides a percentage of the remainder of her trust to MSU. She has also named MSU a beneficiary of her retirement accounts, which is an easy process for anyone with such assets who wishes to remember MSU in their estate plans. The endowed fund she created will match promising Economics students, regardless of their financial situation, with meaningful internship opportunities and help to spring them into the professional world.

“I wanted to give back to MSU because I felt I received great value and experience during my years as a Spartan,” she said. “MSU provided me with a great foundation in which to build a successful career. The financial rewards that were a part of my success seemed fitting to give back.”

And what a successful Spartan and professional career it has been!

Ms. Steckroat Treadway transferred as a junior to MSU in 1976 to continue competing at the collegiate-level as a gymnast. Ms. Treadway explained. "I did not want money to deny someone the opportunity to accept an internship as this experience greatly helps to build on their college education. Internship experience provides immense value to any college graduate as well as their ultimate employer,” she explained.

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Aiming Higher: the College of Social Science Launches its new Scholars Program

“Think for a moment about some of the toughest problems facing modern society. Making sense of such complex issues absolutely demands a firm grasp of the social sciences.”

These are the words of Dr. John Waller, the associate professor with an expertise in the history of medicine, who was recently hired by the College of Social Science to serve as the first director of a brand new undergraduate program called the Social Science Scholars.

“Social Science Scholars will become highly-effective thinkers and leaders,” Dr. Waller explained, “because they will study the social sciences in great depth, work in close partnership with leading MSU faculty, consult with experts in the US and overseas during study aways and study abroad, and they will apply their knowledge in internships across the country.”

The new program, brought to life by MSU College of Social Science Dean Marietta Baba with the early help of alumni donors, is a concerted effort to attract and retain high-performing students by offering a unique undergraduate experience in the social sciences. Students accepted into the program will graduate with the conceptual and practical knowledge to be able to make a positive difference whether they go on to work in industry, government, academia or the charitable sector. Few students will leave university with so much to offer their employers.

“Scholars will be challenged,” Dr. Waller said, “but they will also enjoy their time getting to know faculty personally and spending time with likeminded, ambitious and socially-conscious students.”

“What I like most about this program is the intimate approach to education at such an early stage in ones collegiate career,” explained Barbara Gerson (Psychology, ’84). Gerson and her husband, Mark, live in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and were among the first to support the new program with a generous financial contribution.

“Students in this program will be able to interface with faculty in a way that would traditionally be considered a post-baccalaureate degree approach,” she said. “They will get to interact with graduate students and faculty, and the inclusion of hands-on research at a young age provides an opportunity for a more well-rounded experience.”

Dr. Waller explained that recruiting is now underway, and the focus will be on high school students from diverse social, economic and ethnic backgrounds. Students must be deeply interested in current issues, eager to make a difference in their future career, and have a genuine thirst for knowledge.

Mrs. Gerson’s passion for the new Social Science Scholars program stems from a belief that social science, and specifically the College of Social Science at MSU, incorporates all of the sciences and connects them with human beings and the very real issues we face every day. Sharing that belief with the Gersons are other alumni who have agreed to financially support the new program as well. More support is needed over time to ensure the continued growth and improvement of the program.

“The students in this program will make a difference,” Mrs. Gerson said. “Whatever they do, they will succeed.

All Roads Don’t Lead to Starbucks

As social scientists, we’ve got our own bag of tricks and fancy footwork, but the bottom line is that our style of science forces us out into the world as naked as newborn babes, typically to an unpleasant part of that same world because answers to our questions aren’t found in places where there’s a Starbucks on every corner.

Tropical forests disappear because of human behaviors, the first of which is typically the building of roads, in advance of agriculture. Thus, in order to understand forest disappearance one must find individuals knowledgeable about road building in frontier settings. This is what I’ve been doing the past few years with my Brazilian colleagues in an effort to understand forest fragmentation in the Amazon Basin.

Is it science? Well, yes it is science, but science of a “social sort,” which is to say we’re not the ones who roam the misty dawn like forest sprites, nets in hand, in pursuit of lovely tropical birds to tag so that we can learn how far they now have to fly in search of food because the forest is disappearing. We’re not the ones who study the scat of charismatic animals--jaguars, tapirs, forest sloths--in order to understand the perils presented by habitat fragmentation, by encroaching human settlements following in the wake of road building and the ecological disruption that results.

In a logical sense, our work comes first, in that the why of road building happens before the roads do damage, and roads don’t build themselves.

The funding agencies like the National Science Foundation want research design and experimental control. We’re happy just to survive. Sure, we have our own cool implements--satellite images, GPS devices, laptop computers--but they’re really just props for our piece de résistance, which is talking to people, not as easy as one might imagine given the downright omeniness of homo sapiens, a primate peculiarly suspicious of strangers albeit a social animal, absolutely convinced that the world is the way he or she sees it.

To gather our data, we sit on rickety chairs or against sacks of rice, smiling, asking questions when the conversation lurches in the right direction, trying to stay conscious as heat numbs our brains, tangible diseases only a handshake away. Sometimes we get to raise our hands in the presence of firearms, assuring suspicious hosts that all is well. It’s only after we’ve established good intentions that we spread our maps and satellite imagery onto hardpan floors, sweeping off chicken droppings, explaining physics to people with little or no formal schooling. To maximize sample size, we dispense candy to children covered with bug bites. To ensure our information is collected without bias, or in a hasty manner, we carefully push away the curious animals without a fuss, the domesticated wild boars, the capybaras, the stentorian macaws.

As a note to our sympathetic stake in the community of our human condition, we show no consciousness of odors that are sharp enough to bite, the full weight of poverty’s enduring fragrances, the seasonings of a year’s worth of dried sweat on clothes that have never been washed, the fermentation of the rotting fruit laid out for an evening meal beneath a massing cloud of flies, the vagrant breezes blowing in from the outskirts.

Yes, our work is scientific, but it also humanistic and practical -- and it gets results.
Your Future Gift Planning

The College of Social Science is dedicated to helping you explore and execute your charitable intentions in the most efficient and satisfying manner for you, your heirs and MSU. Through the creative process of having charitable giving strategies incorporated within your estate plans, you may fulfill philanthropic goals, reduce income taxes, avoid capital gains and possible estate taxes, retain a life income, increase spendable income, and/or reduce costs of a settlement, all while enjoying the satisfaction of providing significant future financial support for your college. Call or write Nick McLaren toll free at 866-761-4199 or mclarenn@msu.edu to discover the possibilities.

Project ImPACT: A Success Story for MSU Psychology

by Kyle Simon, Professional Writing Senior

Imagine loving your child deeply yet not being able to communicate or predict their behavior. That was the challenge Ketzi faced with her son Sebastian when he was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Today about 1 in every 88 children born in the United States will be diagnosed with ASD making it the fastest-growing developmental disability at 1,148% growth and an estimated annual cost of $60 billion. Early identification and intervention has been linked to better long-term outcomes in individuals with ASD, but the growing numbers of young children with ASD and their significant educational needs make it challenging for schools and public agencies to provide needed services.

Parent training is a cost-effective approach that can increase intervention hours and may be essential for improving long-term outcomes in children with ASD and family functioning. Although parent training is now considered an essential component of successful early ASD intervention programs, it is rarely provided in community-based early intervention settings.

In order to address this significant service need, MSU psychology professor Brooke Ingersoll and a colleague developed Project ImPACT (Improving Parents As Communication Teachers), a parent training curriculum for young children with ASD that teaches parents to promote their child’s social communication. This innovative program was developed within community settings with the expressed purpose of identifying program elements that would assist community providers in implementing parent training.

Sebastian is four years old, and his mother, Ketzi, is a participant in one of the Project ImPACT studies being conducted in the Department of Psychology. “Outside of therapy, it was really hard for us to connect with Sebastian,” Ketzi recalled. She attended private play therapy for eight months and tried to reproduce some of the things she had learned and observed. The task was overwhelming and successful only a few times.

“By following the training from the Project ImPACT team, and ‘following Sebastian’s lead’ and imitating my son, I can see how he feels and sees the world. This is very important, because this is where I believe I’m developing a connection with my child that is beyond words. It truly is the foundation.”

“Our initial evaluations of this program have indicated that parents increased their understanding and use of the intervention techniques, were highly satisfied with the training format, and their children improved their social communication skills,” said Dr. Ingersoll.

Now, Sebastian is actually coming to look for his mother, asks to play games, maintains eye contact more frequently and has increased his ability to use spontaneous language. “We have seen Sebastian bloom at home, in therapy and at school,” his mother said. “We feel very fortunate and thankful to the Project ImPACT team and for the amazing lessons and coaching work.”
Alumna Funds Economics Internship Fund

After earning her degree in Economics, she completed her MBA in 1982 and began a successful marketing and brand management career with Proctor & Gamble. Today, she is known as a successful and dynamic marketing executive, venturing in a myriad of areas from research and product development to social media marketing as a managing director of Moon & Stars Consulting.

She looks back fondly on her experiences at MSU, especially as an Economics undergrad. “The caliber of the professors, the classes and course content were stellar,” she recalled. For her, they were building blocks to later success, providing immense value and future opportunity.

Her appreciation for the university extends well beyond Economics, which has led her to create three other endowed funds as well, one for student-athlete support services, one for an MBA endowed scholarship, and one for Women’s Gymnastics at MSU. In total, her future gifts will total $3.75 million.

“Making the decision to give financially, I believe, is a very personal matter,” she said. “Anybody who identifies with being a Spartan and feels their years and experience at MSU contributed to their life and successes, in any way, should consider giving back. I feel good about what my contributions will do for the university and future generations of Spartans. It has given me a strong reconnection to Michigan State University and the foundation that was created for me as a Spartan.”

Kreinin Retires

After more than 50 years as a professor at MSU, Mordechai (Max) Kreinin is retiring. A University Distinguished Professor of Economics at MSU, Dr. Kreinin’s history with the university is legendary, with hundreds of economics classes taught to thousands of students. In addition to his influence in the classroom, he has made enormous contributions to international economics. He is a past president of the International Trade and Finance Association and a Fulbright Senior Specialist. He has been a consultant to the U.S. Departments of State and Commerce and many other institutions, and he has been a visiting professor at universities in the U.S., Canada, Europe and Australia. Further evidence of his impact is the fact that international economics experts from all over the world attended an event held in his honor several years ago. As a researcher, writer and teacher, he excelled well beyond the time by which most faculty retire, in part because, as he once said, “I like what I’m doing.” Always regarded as a great friend and colleague, Dr. Kreinin has influenced many alumni and faculty over the years, and the Department of Economics and the College of Social Science thank him.