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## Graduate Gazette (GSG Newsletter)

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## The 2012-13 Graduate Gazette staff:

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**Compiled by:** Radek Glaser, Abby Jones and Peg Killian



## Your GSG: The Year in Review

by Peg Killian

The Graduate Student Government had a very busy and productive year. The Outreach and Development Officer, Jennifer Hooper, worked hard with the Social Committee to bring a lot of great activities and professional development workshops to graduates. Jennifer also created a Twitter account and added links to the GSG Facebook and Twitter pages on the GSG website. Thomas Parr, the Grants Officer, created a more consistent system to prepare, categorize and evaluate grants applications. The Grants Committee put in a lot of time to make sure grants were fairly judged and money was quickly distributed. President Maureen "Mo" Correll kept the GSG involved with relevant issues, such as graduate student insurance. A vote was held at the final GSG meeting on April 17<sup>th</sup> to continue with the current plan with CHP.

Charles Rodda stepped into the Vice President position a few months into the 2012-13 term, and did a great job organizing this year's GradExpo, moving the venue to the new IMRC building. Brianna Hughes worked tirelessly on keeping everyone informed and involved with the Performance-Based Funding situation and the K-12 Initiative. Charles "Chuck" Hastings, the Treasurer, researched GSG investments to make sure GSG funds are managed with the best care and profitability, and he will work with the incoming Treasurer, Anna Breard, so that the 2013-14 GSG can make the most informed decisions on the funds. Secretary Peg Killian headed the Constitution Committee, who updated the GSG Constitution and Standing Rules, and as editor of the GSG Newsletter, the *Graduate*

*Gazette*, worked with the Newsletter Committee to bring the GSG news and activities to all of UMaine. This year, much of the website maintenance was outsourced to the BioMediaLab, but website updates were still overseen by the Secretary. The 2012-13 GSG Senators were crucial in bringing GSG news to their department constituents, and discussed ways to improve the effectiveness of communication from them to their departments. They also brought a lot of vital insight and suggestions to GSG meetings and worked hard as members of the various committees. For more detailed information on the news and activities of this past year, please visit our website at [www2.umaine.edu/gsg/about/meetings](http://www2.umaine.edu/gsg/about/meetings) and click on the links for the agenda and minutes. Thank you!

## Thesis Crisis, Dissertation Disintegration:

Improve your writing habits with UMaine's Writing Support Resources by Aleksandra Swatek

The graduate academic work that happens in the many disciplines at this university is very diverse. If you ask a graduate student what is the most exciting work that they engage in, you might hear an answer that lists national and international trips, laboratory research, work in the fields with insects, or engineering projects that include building prototypes etc. However, one thing that all graduate students share is the act of writing. Whether we are analyzing fiction writing, doing a research project on blueberries or studying lobsters, our findings have to be written down in order for other scholars to be able to read it. I am still waiting to meet the first person who will tell me: "I can't wait to sit down to write this paper/article/dissertation/thesis! I am so excited." Especially among English grads there are voices of reluctance, litanies of odd things we do before we sit down to actually write all the great ideas we have



Photo courtesy of the Writing Resource Center

harbored and kept incubated in our minds. If you are thinking about taking on a longer writing project such as an M.A. thesis or Ph.D. Dissertation, but you know your habits of writing have been ineffective in the past, there are a few resources at the university that you

should know about.

One of the options for this is the Thesis and Dissertation Studio for graduate students, which was set up by Prof. Dylan Dryer, an assistant professor in the Department of English. The Studio is a UMaine Graduate School and Col-

lege of Liberal Arts and Sciences-supported program that engages small, interdisciplinary groups of graduate students in structured peer review and feedback on drafts of their thesis or dissertation projects. Thesis and Dissertation Studio invite applicants to join every semester. Both groups meet 4 times in the semester for two-and-a-half-hour sessions. As a faculty-in-residence in Stodder Hall, Dr. Dryer decided to support the graduate students in their struggles with writing. This was no coincidence; Dr. Dryer is a composition researcher, which means that his work is focused on how writers write across disciplines, how teachers teach writing and everything in between.

There are various reasons why Ph.D. candidates decide to join the Dissertation Studio: they might have lost their enthusiasm for the subject they are writing about, they don't know how to get unstuck at a certain point in their writing, or they simply need support. This support, as Dr. Dryer says, is es-

(Continued on page 6)



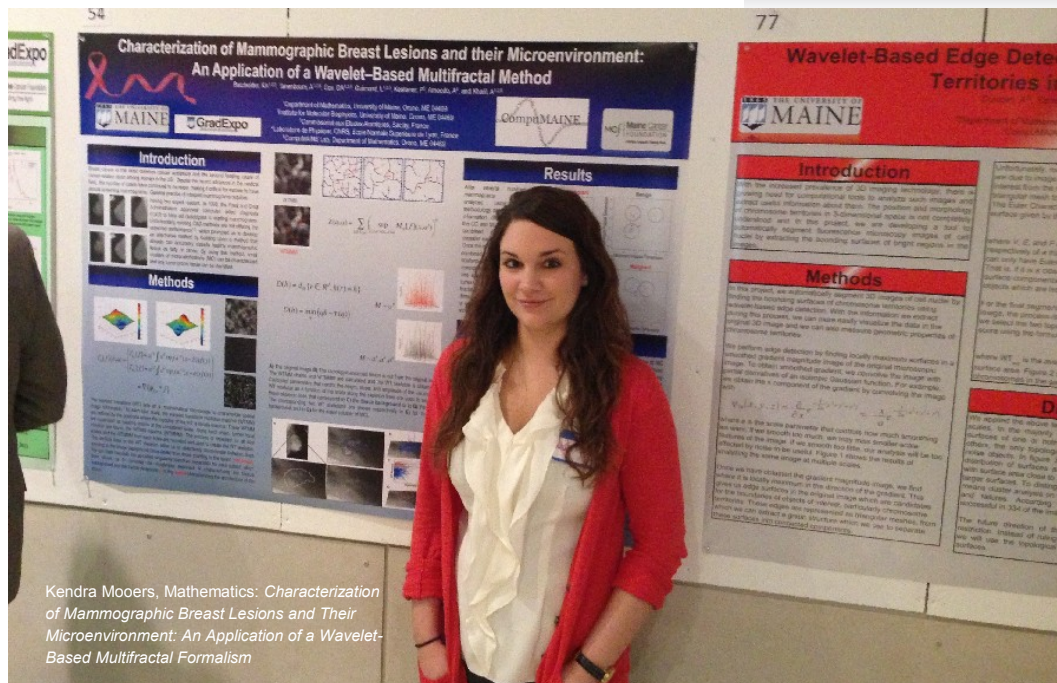


## 2013 Graduate Research Exposition

by Heather Parry

This year's new venue, the newly-remodeled IMRC building, gave us an exciting showcase of the graduate studies at the University of Maine. The Expo began Thursday morning with the oral sessions in Natural Sciences and Physical Sciences. The maze of Intermedia displays and science posters had visitors curious to see what was around the next corner. Posters presented in Social Sciences included research in Human Development by Meagan McCready: "Building on the relationship between mindfulness and couples' satisfaction." Meagan's research looks into the theory that mindfulness can improve a couples' romantic relationship satisfaction by encouraging the creation and maintenance of healthy relationships. Social Science poster presentations also included the disciplines of Psychology, Communications and Journalism, Economics, and Higher Education.

The new venue gave the Expo a great setup to display the graduate work by our Intermedia students. Many different projects filled the Expo, bringing a different experience with each artist. Using the mediums of watercolor and photography, S Julie Riley's "Silent Communication" showed the emotions associated with human gesture. "fourSQUARE: Death by Pop Song" was an interactive display that visitors were allowed to enter a black lit room and play a game of foursquare. Players beware; too much time in this room could cause some damage, thanks to Sally Levi and Johnny Sullivan.

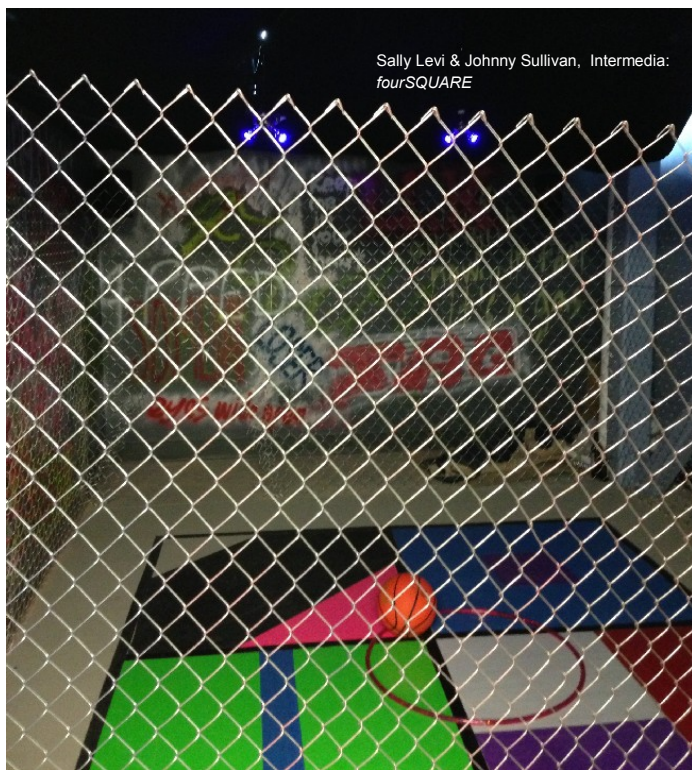


Kendra Mooers, Mathematics: *Characterization of Mammographic Breast Lesions and Their Microenvironment: An Application of a Wavelet-Based Multifractal Formalism*

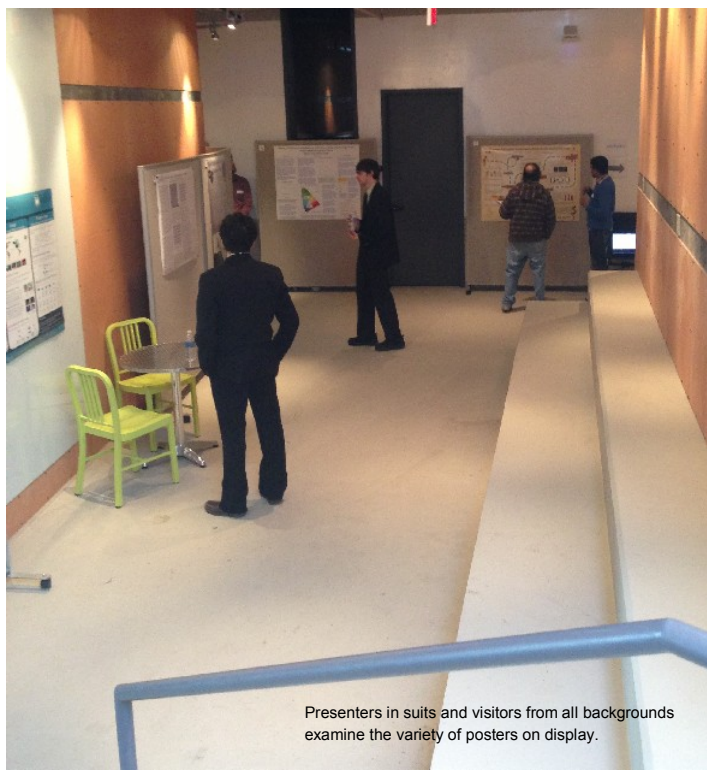
The oral presentations in Natural Sciences had speakers on the drying processes of nanocellulose and insulating nanofoams. Yucheng Peng presented "Drying Nanocellulose: In Search of a Suitable Method." This presentation focused on four different drying processes for cellulose nanofibrils it is a challenge is to obtain dry cellulose nanofibrils while maintaining their nano dimensions. Recommendations were

made in favor of spray drying to dry the cellulose nanofibril suspensions. "Nanofibrillated Cellulose (NFC) Insulating Foams," presented by Nadir Yildirim discussed using nanofibrillated cellulose for insulating buildings. As the cost of energy increases, the benefits from this research can be great. Thursday afternoon held poster sessions which included research topics from "Abnormal Cardiovascular De-

velopment in Cofilin Morphant Zebrafish," by Vanessa Beck to "Preparation and Characterization of Electrically Conductive Papers with Bacterial Cellulose" by Esra Erbaş Kızıltas. Oral presentations in Natural Sciences and Physical Sciences continued and the evening ended with a showing of the movie *PbD Comics* along with popcorn and tasty cotton candy.

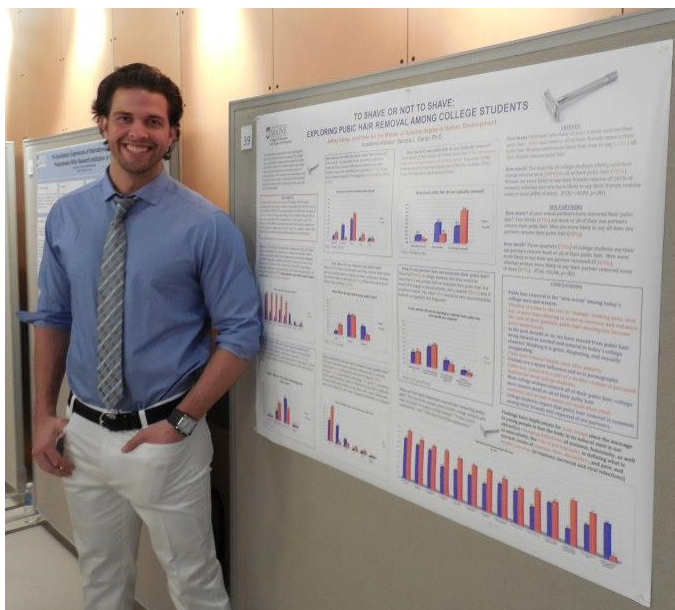


Sally Levi & Johnny Sullivan, Intermedia: *fourSQUARE*



Presenters in suits and visitors from all backgrounds examine the variety of posters on display.





**Expo Student Highlight:  
Jeff Falvey,  
Human Development**

Q: How did you choose your research subject? A: Dr. Sandy Caron specializes in sexuality. One day the concept of body hair removal just got brought up. She didn't believe young people remove it at the rate they do. She suggested a research project., so I interviewed 350 people, 295 of whom responded. The poster does make some people uncomfortable, but more people have been interested than I thought. Q: How much longer do you have in your program here? A: I have another year. I hope to go to law school after graduation. I am interested in family law, though I am not yet sure what my focus will be. Q: How will you integrate your studies in Human Development with law? A: I've done a lot of peer education activities where I've seen how legality is everywhere. A law degree is diverse and this program has opened that door for me.



*The graduate assistant in my office, who also serves on the Graduate Student Government, invited me to be a judge at the recent GradExpo. And I'm grateful that she did. I had the pleasure to attend five presentations in the social sciences, and each one served as a vivid reminder of just how special UMaine graduate students are. - Ted Coladarci, Director, Office of Institutional Research*

**2013 GradExpo Award Winners**

President's Research Impact Award: Alison Mitchell, student, and Jennifer Middleton, teacher, *What happens next? Examining child protection outcomes for a cohort of opioid-exposed infants*

Dean's Undergraduate Mentoring Award (two recipients): Katharine Ruskin, *Testing for Stability in the Sharp-tailed Sparrow Hybrid Zone: 130 Years of Plumage Comparisons*; and Alper Kiziltas, *Natural Fiber Blend – Nylon 6 Composites*

Graduate Dean's Photo Contest - Research Category: 1<sup>st</sup>, Mariusz Potocki. 2<sup>nd</sup>, Bridie McGreavy. Tied for 3<sup>rd</sup>, Luke Groff and Bjorn Grigholm.

Dean's Photo Contest - Graduate Student Life: 1<sup>st</sup>, José Carrasco. 2<sup>nd</sup>, Amy Pierce. Tied for 3<sup>rd</sup>, Jocelyn Runnebaum and Jincy Joseph.

Foster Center for Student Innovation Commercialization Award, Intermedia: Heather Perry.

Foster Center for Student Innovation Commercialization Award, Science & Technology: Hari Prasanth Palani.

PechaKucha Competition: 1<sup>st</sup>, Amy Pierce, *12 Steps to Planning the Perfect Wedding*; 2<sup>nd</sup>, Hollie Smith, *Intersections of Higher Education, State Policy, & Economic Development: Understanding the Connections in Maine Communities*; 3<sup>rd</sup>, Jessica LeClair, *Be Prepared*.

Intermedia Competition: 1<sup>st</sup>, Heather Perry, *Queen for a Day*; 2<sup>nd</sup>, Benjamin Burpee, *Spaz:lab*; 3<sup>rd</sup>, Tara Law, *Enchanted*.

Humanities/Social Sciences Poster Competition: 1<sup>st</sup>, Stacy Doore, *Movement Matters: Using state longitudinal mobility data to improve school policy, intervention and academic outcomes*; 2<sup>nd</sup>, Bridie McGreavy, *Resilience in Collaboration*; 3<sup>rd</sup>, Chris Bennett, *Non-Visual Graphical Accessibility*.

Humanities/Social Sciences Oral Competition: 1<sup>st</sup>, Karen Hutchins, *Improving Links between Knowledge and Action by Identifying Factors that Influence the Structure of Municipality-University Partnerships*; 2<sup>nd</sup>, Rebecca White, *The Ragged Edge of Motherhood: Mothers' Allowances in Policy and Practice, 1924-1960*; 3<sup>rd</sup>, Ian Jesse, *Bad Men and Horrible Bosses: Masculinity and the Folksongs of Larry Gorman*.

Physical Sciences & Technology Poster Competition: 1<sup>st</sup>, Abolfazl Razi, *Delay Optimal Packetization Policy for Wireless Sensor Networks*; 2<sup>nd</sup>, Hannah Breton, *Mechanically Fastened Fiber-Reinforced Polymer (FRP) Flexural Retrofit Systems for Reinforced Concrete Flat-Slab Bridges*; 3<sup>rd</sup>, Samuel Roy, *The influence of tectonic strain on landscape evolution*.

Physical Sciences & Technology Oral Competition: 1<sup>st</sup>, Silas Owusu-Nkwantabisah, *Novel approach to controlling layer-by-layer polyelectrolyte multilayer (PEM) formation & application as sensor*; 2<sup>nd</sup>, Bess Koffman, *Centennial-scale shifts in the position of the Southern Hemisphere westerly wind belt over the past millennium*; 3<sup>rd</sup>, Delia Massey, *Use of Diffusive Gradients in Thin Films (DGT) as an Assessment Tool for Bioavailability of Mercury Species in Sediment*.

Natural Sciences Poster Competition: 1<sup>st</sup>, Richard Luc, *The Role of Caveolin in the Toll-Like Receptor Signaling Pathway*; 2<sup>nd</sup>, Brianna Hughes, *Effect of Rigor Status during High Pressure Processing on Abalone Texture and Color*; 3<sup>rd</sup>, Luke Groff, *Hibernation ecology of Lithobates sylvaticus in Maine's montane landscape*.

Natural Sciences Oral Competition: 1<sup>st</sup>, Nadir Yildirim, *Nanofibrillated Cellulose (NFC) Insulating Foams*; 2<sup>nd</sup>, Katharine Ruskin, *Testing for Stability in the Sharp-tailed Sparrow Hybrid Zone: 130 Years of Plumage Comparisons*; 3<sup>rd</sup>, Anna Breard, *Comparison of the Effect of Peroxyacetic Acid and Lactic Acid Washes on the Removal of Toxoplasma gondii Oocysts from the Surface of Blueberries*.

People's Choice Award - Overall Winner: Roghaiyeh Ebrahimi Kalan, *Surface Modification of Mesoporous Silica in Supercritical CO<sub>2</sub>*.

***Congratulations to all of this year's winners!***



## Expo Student Highlight:

### Andrej Favia, Physics & Astronomy

Q: What are your general thoughts about the Expo? And specific thoughts on how it relates to your research? A: I am a 6th year graduate student in the Dept. of Physics and Astronomy at the University of Maine. Q: When will you be finished, and do you have specific plans for after UMaine? A: At the moment I do not have a definite graduation date. After I earn my Ph.D., I expect to work as a Post doctorate with researchers in astronomy education. The Graduate Exposition provides a unique experience for graduate students to present their work in a variety of forms, including poster presentations, oral presentations, and through various showcases special to the event. Much like several of the projects presented at the Graduate Exposition, my research project is rather unique. By presenting my poster, I received encouraging feedback from faculty and staff at the event who found my research subject matter interesting. Q: Can you describe your specific research areas a bit? A: I am looking at some groundbreaking statistical techniques used to analyze astronomy misconceptions held by college students, including how much the misconceptions persist with the students.

From the analysis, I am determining optimal orders to teach the associated topics. Q: Are there any professors here you would like to give credit to, regarding mentorship? A: Neil Comins is a professor of introductory astronomy

here at the University. His research interests include studying misconceptions about astronomy. His insights, along with the analytical techniques that I have learned through professor Geoffrey Thorpe in the Depart-

ment of Psychology, have provided me with substantial experience with studying the persistence of astronomy misconceptions held by college students.

## Student Misconceptions About Astronomy and the Best Order of Teaching Astronomical Concepts

Andrej Favia, Neil F. Comins, and Geoffrey L. Thorpe

University of Maine, Orono, ME 04469



### Abstract

My (Andrej Favia) Ph.D. thesis involves quantifying the "difficulty" of learning common astronomy misconceptions. I do this by applying factor analysis and Item Response Theory (IRT) to a retrospective survey of when, or if, college students dispelled the misconceptions under consideration. Our survey covers 235 misconceptions identified over the span of 10 years of teaching the college astronomy lecture course at the University of Maine by NRC. The analysis yields logical groupings of topics (e.g., teach one planet at a time rather than use comparative planetology) and the "order of difficulty" of the associated topics. We have results for about one fourth of the survey, and our results quantify the relative difficulty of different concepts. The analysis further suggests the most effective order in which to present topics. We also find that the order of teaching concepts is sometimes different for high school and college level courses.

### Background

Our study examines common astronomy misconceptions that are either dispelled during various times in one's life or are retained through adulthood, and sometimes persist even after instruction. A total of 310 college students in the introductory astronomy lecture course at the University of Maine responded to a survey with 235 common statements administered on the last week of class. We withheld from the students that the statements are all misconceptions. Students affirmed each statement or indicated approximately when in their lives they rejected it. The survey responses indicate relative degree of misconception retention and were scored, for each misconception, as (1) if it was dispelled prior to college, (2) if it was dispelled as a result of instruction in college, and (3) if it was retained even after this instruction. Measures of "easy" and "hard" topics were then determined by subjecting the data to principal components analysis and item response theory tests.

- Bailey, J. M., & Slater, T. F. (2003). A review of astronomy education research. *Astronomy Education Review*, 2, 39-45.
- Favia, A., Comins, N. F., & Thorpe, G. L. (2012). The elements of Item Response Theory and its framework in analyzing introductory astronomy college student misconceptions. *J. Geophys. Res.* <http://www.org/doi/10.1029/2012>

### Goal

- Our goal is to improve astronomy instruction, which we begin doing by
- grouping common misconceptions, such as those related to the Moon, those related to the Sun, and those related to black holes, among others,
- determining measures of "easy" and "hard" topics associated with each of the survey misconceptions, and
- synthesizing optimal orders to teach the associated topics.

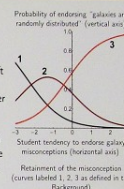
### Principal Components Analysis

- Principal components analysis (PCA) finds which misconceptions are correlated with each other, thereby creating "orthogonal" groups of misconceptions. For the galaxy misconceptions under consideration, PCA does this by calculating the tendency for students who endorse a particular misconception to endorse another misconception related to galaxies. Likewise for each topic in the survey.
- PCA indicates that galaxy misconceptions should be grouped into three categories, their visual properties, their distribution throughout the universe, and our location in the Milky Way.
- We performed PCA on 18 planet statements and the software grouped them together by planet, rather than by their features. **PCA indicates that planet misconceptions are more effectively dispelled by teaching one planet at a time.**
- About one quarter of college introductory astronomy textbooks group all planets together and compares their common features, one at a time. Comparative planetology is motivated by constructivism (Bailey & Slater 2003) and the solar system origin (Taylor 2011).
- Our study, however, suggests that comparing planet features is less conducive to student learning than studying each planet separately. **This grouping indicates that comparative planetology is less conducive to student learning than teaching one planet at a time.**

- Taylor, F. W. (2011). *Comparative planetology: climatology and biology of Venus, Earth and Mars*. Planetary and Space Science, 58, 889-895.

### Item Response Theory

- Item response theory (IRT) independently evaluates the difficulty of a group of items (determined by PCA) and the difficulty students have ridding themselves of the misconceptions under consideration. From left to right, the curves labeled "1" to "3" indicate probabilities of responding with higher degrees of misconception retention (as described in the Background). The misconception endorsement axis in this graph indicates the tendency for students to endorse galaxy misconceptions, which IRT normalizes to a z-score metric. In this graph, students who generally do not endorse misconceptions (negative score on the misconception endorsement axis) retained this misconception even after instruction, indicating that this is a "hard" item. Hence, IRT predicts measures of "easy" and "hard" items.
- We found that the galaxy misconception "the galaxies are randomly distributed" is the hardest for students of all ages to dispel (as shown in the figure).
- We also found that the order to teach the remaining galaxy topics sometimes differs between high school & college courses.



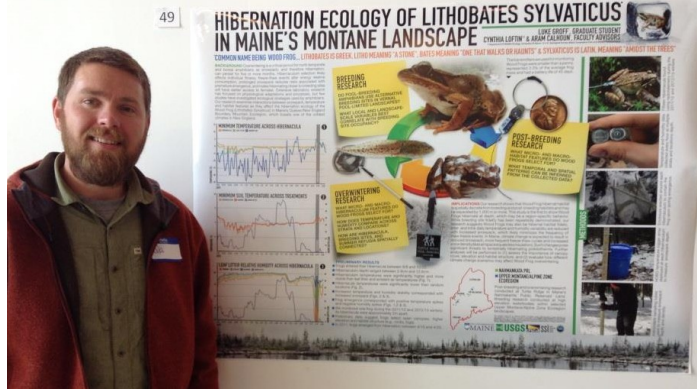
### Conclusion

We applied principal components analysis and item response theory to data collected from a retrospective study of astronomy misconceptions. Our results suggest that it would seem logical to allocate more classroom time in the course to those topics reflecting the most persistent misconceptions. Our results also suggest the best order to present astronomy topics for high school and college level courses. Our complete survey is presented in Favia, Comins, & Thorpe (2012).

For more details, see

The Elements of Item Response Theory and its Framework in Analyzing Introductory Astronomy College Student Misconceptions. I. Geophys. Res. (Favia, Comins, & Thorpe 2012)

<http://www.org/doi/10.1029/2012>



## Expo Student Highlight:

### Luke Groff, Wildlife Ecology

Q: What are your thoughts about the Expo and how it relates to your research?

A: This was my first year attending the GradExpo and I was super impressed. It was a great venue for showcasing my research and learning about that of other UMaine grads. The expo, unlike many of

the conferences we attend, was loosely themed with diverse presentations. This was refreshing because, as grads, we're typically entrenched in our own research and any exposure other disciplines is rare. Plus, what other conference offers such significant monetary awards?! Q: Can you describe your research a bit? A: My research focuses on pool-breeding amphibian habitat selection and spatial distribution in Maine's western and interior mountains. Northerly occurring amphibians have three annual life history periods: breeding, post-breeding and overwintering. Using the Wood Frog as a study organism, my research will elucidate the movement patterns and habitat characteristics selected for both within and among these three periods. Pool-breeding amphibian research has

not been conducted in Maine's montane landscapes. As such, this work will better inform Maine's significant vernal pool legislation, which is based on research conducted in few, specific locations. Q: When will you be finished, and do you have specific plans for after UMaine? A: I expect (and hope!) to finish December 2014-ish. As of now, my post-grad school priorities are to hike the Appalachian Trail, find permanent work, preferably conducting research aimed at conserving herpetofauna, and make a baby with my wonderful wife. In a perfect world, I'll have my choice between being an ecologist with the USGS Amphibian Reptile Monitoring Initiative, a biologist at a National Park (e.g., the Great Smokies), or an --ologist with a nonprofit organization (e.g., The Nature Conservancy).

**Calling all UMaine Graduate Students!**  
**Join the GSG to celebrate a great year at our annual**  
**End-of-Year Barbecue!**  
**Thursday, May 2nd, starting at 5 pm, on the Stodder Hall patio!**  
**Food, beverages, lawn games, fun!**

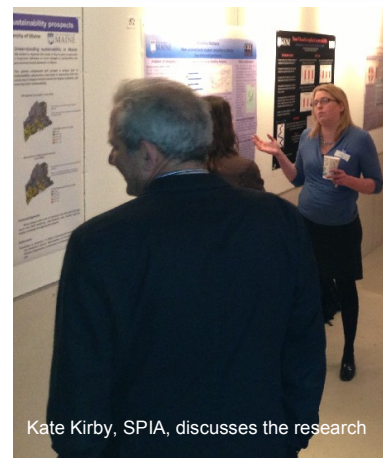


## GradExpo Photo Gallery

Photos by Heather Parry



Sean George, Intermedia: *Becoming Ground*



Kate Kirby, SPIA, discusses the research



Meagan McCready, Human Development: *Building on the Relationship Between Mindfulness & Couples' Satisfaction*



Judging posters is serious business!



Ben Burpee and Siglinde Langholz, Intermedia: *Spaz.lab*

### 2013-14 GSG Excomm Election Results

On April 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Graduate Student Government held elections for next year's Executive Committee. The results were:

President: Richard Luc, Molecular & Biomedical Sciences

Vice President: Robin Arnold, School of Earth & Climate Sciences

Grants Officer: Amamihe Onwuachumba, Electrical & Computer Engineering

Treasurer: Anna Breard, Food Science & Human Nutrition

Outreach & Professional Development Officer: Elisa Sance, Modern Languages & Classics

Board of Trustees Representative: Charles Rodda, School of Earth & Climate Sciences

Secretary: Abigail Jones, Communication & Journalism

All GSG meetings are open to the public. For continuing graduate students who wish to participate, please contact your school or department's graduate coordinator to see if your department will need a representative for the coming year. Not only do you gain a great awareness to the UMaine graduate community, but you get to influence policy, be informed on the issues, and your regular attendance allows grad students in your department to be eligible to apply for GSG grants!



(Continued from page 1)

sential at the time of their academic career when the timelines they have used to structure their work, such as 15 week schedule and deadlines in courses, are taken away. The main way in which the studio provides this scaffolding for writers is the peer group. The members of the group become accountable to each other after they decide how many pages they have to submit before the deadlines they negotiated upon. This is what really helps the students submit work, even if it is still a draft. The same work structure is in place for the Thesis Studio.

The interdisciplinary character of the studio allows the students to focus on their writing, rather than the content issues that they might discuss with their advisors. Dr. Dryer explains that the students in other fields are far enough removed from your own discipline and that allows them to focus on questions of readability, organization and structure and ways of dealing with other researcher's work. Thesis or dissertation are actually genres that require sustaining very complex arguments over hundred(s) of pages and not losing the internal coherence of a very long argument. Such problems span across disciplines and can be worked on with the support of writers from different fields. Another issue that the Studio can help with is shared by almost all writers – the issues of anxiety – by taking a more writer-friendly approach to the writing process. You work with series of drafts and you are not expected to produce a polished version at the first attempt. The Studio also teaches the students a way of thinking and a way of talking about writing that can help them in their communication with advisors or editors, and can be very useful in their

future academic work.

Another resource for academic writers is The Writing Center, located on the 4th floor of Neville Hall. Prof. Harvey Kail is the Coordinator of the Writing Center and he emphasizes that this place models the processes that professional writers engage in when writing. Graduate students can share their work in progress, whether it is a thesis/dissertation or an article for journal submission. The work with tutors can be arranged in a number of regular sessions to help the writer get outside of their viewpoint with the help of critical and careful readers. The writers can get feedback on the questions that arise in the reading process, which in turn can make the writing better. The Writing Center also offers support for graduate ESL students, who might not feel confident if their writing style is meeting the graduate writing level when it comes to issues of style and grammar. If you would like to schedule a meeting in the Writing Center, just go to the website <http://www.umaine.edu/wcenter/> and sign up for a session.



Photo courtesy of the Writing Resource Center

When you are feeling that the writing tasks are overwhelming you, just remember that you can get support from these resources on campus.

Testimonials from graduate students who participated in the Thesis Studio: Avi Rude, MS - Spatial Information Science and Engineering.

Graduation date: May, 2011.

I joined the Thesis Studio (TS) after long-standing frustration with starting to write my thesis. The TS was helpful because it helped me understand that the process of writing is iterative, involving several versions of editing and collaboration. Before TS, I read research publications in my field (Information Science) and thought that what I was writing was very different in style. My writing read like a personal letter whereas papers I was reading felt like objective and factual reporting. When I discussed this with the facilitators at TS, they assured me that what I was reading went through a lot of editing and not to worry about the narrative style in the first draft. It helped me to know that writing the first draft was hard for most

other participating writers and they acknowledged that allowing one to write that first draft was the most important step. Editing was an easier step. With this understanding, I started sending rough drafts of my writing to my advisor who gave me edits. Soon, a few pages of edited writing turned into chapters.

As I wrote, my advisor started seeing gaps that needed to be written about and filled. Once we had enough material, it became a question of organizing the material.

It helped me to work with other writers. The fact that they were reading and commenting on my writing in-person during TS sessions spurred me to write. I would get most writing done as the TS meeting sessions approached. The deadlines set during the TS material exchange helped me immensely.

Emily Rasely, M.A. candidate in English

The Thesis Studio run by Dr. Dryer was an incredible help to me as I finished up my thesis work this semester. The group I was part of came from four different disciplines, and the different perspectives were extremely helpful in addressing the challenges of writing a huge document outside of the support offered by seminars. I really appreciated the chance to look over other people's writing. It helped me figure out how to be a better reader of my own work. I would strongly encourage anyone writing a thesis or dissertation to apply to be part of this studio.

I would like to thank Prof. Dylan Dryer and Prof. Harvey Kail for agreeing to be interviewed for this article.

## Student Spotlight: Matt Jones

by Peg Killian



Q: What is your program, and a brief background on how you arrived here?

A: I'm in EES, and I wanted to work with Frank Drummond on applied insect ecology research. Frank offered me a position with very broad research parameters which really attracted me, and here at U. Maine our former entomology department got folded into the more interdisciplinary program. Q: What is the focus of your research? A: I study insect mediated predation and scavenging in the Maine

lowbush blueberry agroecosystem; My greatest research interest is in the interaction between dung beetles and pathogenic *E. coli* in agricultural systems. Q: Can you tell us about your recent discoveries? A: The most exciting findings, in my opinion, were regarding these dung beetle/pathogen interactions. We found that wildlife in Maine can carry pathogenic *E. coli* into this agricultural system, via fecal contamination. However, dung beetles feed heavily on this (potentially) contaminated feces, and utilize it as a food resource. In addition to feeding on this feces, we also found that dung beetles have the ability to reduce the persistence of the pathogen in the soil, without vectoring it to the fruit. These factors indicate that dung beetles may be, to some extent suppressing pathogens in our food system and acting as a natural biological control of pathogens. Q: What impact do you

hope/intend your research to have? A: I hope that growers will recognize the importance of this ecosystem service and that producers, processors, and policy makers might one day reference this work when placing "good agricultural practices" on growers. Q: What are

your plans for after you complete this program? A: I will be working on a few supplementary experiments in collaboration with Frank and Dr. Vivian Wu (Food Science) this summer before heading west to begin a PhD program at Washington State University.



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