This summer the Wellesley Human Computer Interaction Lab led by Orit Shaer teamed up with Doug Densmore’s lab at Boston University to compete in the international Genetically Engineered Machine (iGEM) undergraduate student research competition. The team won both Gold Medal and Best Software Project awards.

iGEM is the premiere undergraduate synthetic biology competition where teams can choose to compete in one of two tracks: the wet lab track or the software tools track. The Wellesley-BU team competed in the software track. Preparing for the iGEM competition, students work at their home institutions over the summer and then present their work in the fall at Regional Jamborees in the hopes of competing at the World Jamboree. iGEM teams are also expected to engage in outreach activities.

The Wellesley-BU iGEM team consisted of 19 students (8 from Wellesley, 1 from Olin) with backgrounds in Biological Engineering, Computer Science, Media Arts and Sciences, Computer Engineering, and Biology. Wellesley students include Heidi Wang ’12, Taili Feng ’13, Michelle Ferreirae ’13, Kathy Liu ’13, Kelsey Tempel ’13, and Casey Grote ’14 along with two Wellesley alumni: Consuelo Valdes ’11 and Megan Strait ’10, and Olin student Michael Lintz. As part of the team’s outreach efforts, the team mentored three high school students (two from Framingham High and one from Somerville) introducing them to computing and to synthetic biology.

The team created a collection of software tools to support the design, specification, and assembly of novel biological systems. These tools utilized novel human-computer interaction styles such as multi-touch and tabletop interaction and were developed through an extensive user-centered design process that included close collaboration with synthetic biologists. “From our collaborators at Wellesley College who specialize in human-computer interaction, I’ve learned a great deal about the user-centered software design process,” said BU team member Craig.

Casey Grote ’14, Taili Feng ’13, and Michelle Ferreirae ’13 presenting their work to the camera at the iGEM world jamboree
LaBoda. “This helps us tailor our synthetic biology software for the end users through feedback at different stages in the design process.”

In early October, the team presented at the iGEM Americas Regional Jamboree in Indianapolis, won a Gold Medal award and was invited to proceed to the World Jamboree. In the World Jamboree that was held in early November at MIT the team won the Best Software Project Award. To learn more about the Wellesley-BU iGEM project and experience check out the team’s wiki: http://2011.igem.org/Team:BU_Wellesley_Software.

To apply to the iGEM 2012 Wellesley-BU iGEM team contact Orit Shaer at oshaer@wellesley.edu.

Cirque du CS 2011

We had another tremendous turnout for the biennial Cirque du CS, which took place on February 27, celebrating the work of our students with demonstrations of course projects from the introductory to advanced levels, and many research and independent study projects. Fifty student presentations culminated in a panel of five senior CS majors, Rebecca Graber, Helen Wu, Jess Chung, Alexandra Olivier, and Chelsea Hoover. Thanks to everyone who helped with this terrific event!

Faculty News

Orit Shaer earned a Faculty Early Career Development (CAREER) award from the National Science Foundation. This five-year grant is the National Science Foundation’s most prestigious award in support of junior faculty who exemplify the role of teacher-scholars through outstanding research, excellent education and the integration of education and research. Orit also gave a well-received seminar in the spring to science faculty as part of Wellesley’s Science Faculty Seminar series.

Takis Metaxas is a visiting scholar at Harvard University’s Center for Research on Computation and Society while on sabbatical during the 2011-12 year. He recently spoke at a panel on "The Unexamined ilife" with faculty from Philosophy, Psychology and English, and at a panel organized by the Albright Institute on “Power, People, and Social Media” in London. To see the video from this panel, check his Twitter feed @takis_metaxas. He writes about Social Media research on his blog, "When Computation Meets Society, It Gets Interesting!" (http://blogs.law.harvard.edu/metaxas/). Last February he met with many alumnae while giving a talk at the Silicon Valley Club and in August with alumnae from the San Francisco area. On February 12, Takis will give a talk to the Wellesley Alumnae at the University of Washington Club in Seattle. If you are around, he would love to connect with you!

Eni Mustafaraj and Takis Metaxas were awarded a three-year grant from the National Science Foundation to develop applications that examine the origin, authenticity, and trustworthiness of messages disseminated on social networks. Their work on the limitations of using social media to predict political elections has also received significant press coverage, including this article from the Wall Street Journal.
Sohie Lee was promoted to Senior Lab Instructor for her excellence in teaching, advising, service, and pedagogical development. Congratulations, Sohie!

Tyler Moore has accepted a tenure-track faculty position at Southern Methodist University in the Department of Computer Science and Engineering. He will be starting at SMU in the Fall of 2012. Congratulations, Tyler!

Lyn Turbak together with Robbie Berg (Physics) led an engineering activity for the Albright Institute on January 4, 2012. The session, entitled "Building a Better World: The Case for the Liberal Arts in Engineering" consisted of a talk followed by a hands-on activity in the Science Center Focus in which 7 teams of 5 to 6 students each were given 3 sheets of styrofoam and 20 pencils and were given the challenge of building the highest free-standing tower that could stand without being touched for 60 seconds. They were able to cut the foam with hot nichrome wire cutters. Amazingly, all the towers standing at the end of the session remain standing today!

In April, Jean Herbst attended the New England Consortium for Computing Science (NEUCS) conference at Tufts University and the Consortium for Computing Sciences in Colleges/New England (CCSCNE) conference at Western New England College. She accompanied Wellesley students presenting posters on their research, including Consuelo Valdes ‘11, Michelle Ferreira ‘13, Rebecca Graber ‘11, and Chelsea Hoover ‘11. Also at NEUCS were alums Emma Tosch ‘08 (currently a PhD. student at UMass Amherst), who was a speaker on a panel, and Dr. Audrey Lee-St. John ‘02 (currently professor at Mt. Holyoke College, profiled as one of our distinguished alumnae, below), attending with her students presenting research. Both conferences included keynote addresses and panels that focused on the recruitment and retainment of students (and women in particular) in the Computer Science field.

Consuelo Valdes ‘11 received a fellowship as part of a grant from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. Consuelo is a research fellow in the HCI lab working on mobile and tabletop research.

Distinguished Alumnae

We are profiling two distinguished alumnae in our newsletter this year!

Betsy Masiello ‘03 is a Policy Manager on Google’s public policy team. As part of her work at Google she is one of the leads for the company’s privacy efforts and for analyzing Google’s and the Internet’s impact on the economy. Prior to joining Google she was a consultant at McKinsey & Company, where she advised global telecommunications companies on new business strategies around emerging technology. Masiello holds a BA in Computer Science from Wellesley College, a MSc in Economics from Oxford where she was a Rhodes Scholar, and an SM from MIT’s Technology & Policy Program.

We asked Betsy: “What do you see as the trends in technology, and how should you prepare for the workforce?”

“In terms of technology trends, I’d suggest they don't matter as much as people think they do—focus less on what languages you're learning and more on what principles you're learning and how to generalize them. If you code for a living, you'll learn new languages and techniques all the time. I think I would tell people to take advantage of the instruction in writing that Wellesley offers, even in technical fields (maybe especially so!) - good writing skills are invaluable.”

Audrey Lee-St. John ‘02 is a Clare Boothe Luce Assistant Professor of Computer Science at Mount Holyoke College and loves teaching and mentoring undergraduates. Her research is motivated by computational challenges arising in biology, such as protein flexibility for drug design, and in CAD (Computer Aided Design) software for mechanical
engineers. She is passionate about increasing the number of women and other underrepresented groups in the field; her efforts include having students build a telepresence robot and creating an interactive hallway on campus.

St. John earned a B.A. in Computer Science and Mathematics from Wellesley College (Summa Cum Laude, Honors in CS), followed by an M.S. and Ph.D. in Computer Science from UMass Amherst (her graduate work was partially supported by an NSF Graduate Research Fellowship).

We asked Audrey:
"What suggestions do you have for Wellesley CS students who are considering graduate school?"

“Do everything you can to get a flavor of what graduate school will be like to see if it's a fit for you. Attend grad school info sessions, networking panels, research seminars, etc. If you decide a Ph.D. program is in your future, you should try to get involved in research as early as you can. Spend a summer doing an REU (Research Experience for Undergraduates). Take advantage of the exchange program with MIT to enroll in graduate classes later in your major and apply for a UROP (Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program). Ask faculty if they have any research projects you can get involved in (and definitely consider a senior honors thesis). Finally, make sure you take any chance you can to give presentations on your work, as terrifying as it may be, since strong communication skills are a key to success for any career path!”

Pamela Daniels Fellowship
For her honors thesis project, Alex Olivier ’11 created the PicoBee, a circuit board with microcontroller and XBee wireless chip and an associated block programming language to facilitate the creation of large-scale interactive installations. She demonstrated the effectiveness of PicoBees by using them to build Social Synapses, an installation in which eight large "neurons" located around the Science Center Focus appear to communicate with pulses of light. This project was supported by a Pamela Daniels Fellowship, and when Pamela saw them she was delighted by these "dazzling dendrites ... conveying the hum and buzz of activity in the focus below"

Student News
Pamela Daniels Fellowship
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UIT 2011 Student Competition awards
Three teams of Wellesley students advised by Orit Shaer participated in the ACM User Interface Software Technology (UIT) Student Innovation Contest and won awards. Students were challenged to come up with a new and innovative use of the Microsoft Touch Mouse. Entries were judged in three categories and the winners were announced at the UIST conference in late October.

The project TUI.TAR won top honors in the "Most Creative" category. The team - composed of Casey Grote ’14, Lara Helm ’12, Emily Lin ’14, and Karen Su ’14 - was inspired by the “air guitar” to create an interface for the creation of digital music. Users can use the Touch Mouse to pluck, strum, and record chords.

Michelle Ferreira ’13, Margaret Ligon ‘13, and Wendy Xu ‘13 won second-place in the "Most Useful" category for their project, Where’s Bo Peep?, an interactive storytelling game for kids.

Taili Feng ’13, and Consuelo Valdes ’11 presented Nudge, a project that facilitates social telecommunication through gesture-based interaction augmented with tactile feedback.

These projects will be presented at Wellesley later this year in the Ruhlman 2012 conference.

Research at Wellesley
Smaranda Sandu ’14 and Nichole Burton ’13 worked with Lyn Turbak on developing environments to make the laser cutter and vinyl cutter in the Engineering Studio more accessible to the Wellesley Community. At the end of the fall semester, CS111 students used the PictureBlocks environment from this project to create PictureWorld designs that they were able to cut out of wood and plastic.

Mary Benn ’14 worked on the commenting feature of the App Inventor Community Gallery. This project was funded by Google and involved working with a team of programmers centered at UMass Lowell. The Gallery was launched in December, 2011, and CS117 students were able to use it to share their App Inventor projects with the world.

Carolyn Kim ’13 (Neuroscience and CS) worked with Ellen Hildreth on a study of how the human visual system
integrates stereo and motion cues to analyze object boundaries in dynamic visual images, which highlighted important individual differences in peoples' ability to perform this analysis.

Jie Han ‘12 co-authored the paper “The Postmodern Ponzi Scheme: Empirical Analysis of High-Yield Investment Programs,” which will be presented at the 16th International Conference on Financial Cryptography and Data Security.

Carolyn Whitlock ‘12 and Samantha Finn ‘12 co-authored the paper “Vocal Minority versus Silent Majority: Discovering the Opinions of the Long Tail”, which was published as part of the 3rd IEEE Social Computing Conference.

In November, Samantha Finn ‘12 presented her poster “Classifying Twitter Accounts by Political Orientation” at the Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing in Portland, Oregon.

Jessica Chung ‘11 presented her poster “Can Collective Sentiment Expressed on Twitter Predict Political Elections” at the 25th AAAI conference in San Francisco.

Ljubica Ristovska ‘13 won the Three Generations Prize for Writing about Science based on her paper “Predictions Using Google and Twitter” from the CS315 course.

UROPs and Internships
A number of students did outside research or internships over the summer of 2011, including Dana Bullister ‘12 who did a UROP in the Gabrieli Lab in the MIT Brain and Cognitive Sciences department, entitled “Temporal Regularity in Speech Perception - Is Regularity Beneficial or Deleterious?”.

Lara Helm ‘12 did an REU at Suffolk University studying the Diaspora social network.

Sam Kim ‘12 did an internship at Raytheon BBN Technologies researching computer security fuzzing.

Sam Wu ‘12 did an internship working on the Data Analysis Reporting Tool at Standard and Poor’s.

Era Vukansi ‘12 did an internship at MIT Lincoln Laboratory and worked with Tamara Yu, who gave a talk to the Wellesley community last year, making a network security Flash game. Era is currently continuing her work from the summer, which has turned into her thesis and the first joint thesis ever done between Wellesley College and MIT Lincoln Laboratory with Tyler Moore (Wellesley), Tamara Yu (LL) and Richard Lippmann (LL).

Ruhlman Conference
Several students presented their research at the Ruhlman Conference in April. Alex Olivier ‘11 exhibited her thesis work on “PicoBees and Social Synapses: Creating Interactive Spaces that React and Inspire.”

Consuelo Valdes ‘11, Michael Lintz (Olin), Heidi Wang ‘12, Taili Feng ‘13, and Michelle Ferreirae ‘13 led an HCI panel entitled “Gnomes, a Nude Male, and an Evil Queen: Exploring the Possibilities and Limitations of Touch-input Devices.”

Jessica Chung ‘11 gave a talk about her independent research study, titled “Twitter - Can Collective Sentiment Expressed on Twitter Predict Political Elections?”

Rebecca Graber ‘11 presented her thesis work on “Hora: A Program for Computer-aided Choreography.”

Tanner Conference
We had a good number of students showcasing their research at the Tanner Conference in November. Heidi Wang ‘12, Taili Feng ‘13, Michelle Ferreirae ‘13, and Casey Grote ‘14 led a panel discussion about “Supporting Innovation in Synthetic Biology Through Human-Computer Interaction.”

Nora McKinell ‘14 and Olivia Kotsopolous ‘14 described their experiences working with Scott Anderson to improve the Tandora online scheduling system http://cs.wellesley.edu/Tandora/.

Karen Su ‘14 and Mika Asaba ‘14 presented a workshop entitled “Create, Consume, Collaborate: How Web 2.0 Democratizes Art at the IADIS e-Democracy, Equity and Social Justice Conference.”

Lucy Archer ‘12 described a robotics project that she completed during her study abroad, in her presentation, “Closing the Loop: Helping Robots Navigate the World with a Kinect.”

New Courses

CS117 Inventing Mobile Apps
Lyn Turbak and Stella Kakavouli, with large amounts of help from Eni Mustafaraj, taught the new CS117 Inventing Mobile Apps course in which 19 students, most of whom had no previous programming experience, created apps for Android Smartphones using the App Inventor environment. The course culminated in a well-attended poster exhibition and demo session in which teams showed off their final project apps to the Wellesley community. These apps included a
Stella and Lyn with student presenters Margaret Loi ’14 and Jannet Sanchez ’14 at the poster session for CS117

CS349A The Intelligent Web
Eni Mustafaraj will be teaching students how to develop web applications that are personalized to users’ needs and interests. We use such websites everyday: Amazon.com, Netflix, last.fm. They all collect large amounts of data from users’ interaction with the website and use it to offer recommendations tailored to users. In this course, students will study the underlying algorithms that fuel recommendation and personalization. Students will then use this knowledge to develop intelligent applications for the Wellesley community. They will participate in two hackathons to this purpose, in collaboration with Wellesley’s Division of Student Life. For their final project, they will develop algorithms for a course recommendation system with historical data provided by the Registrar’s Office.

CS349B Quantifying the World
Tyler Moore will examine how we now live in a world of information, where data can be leveraged to rapidly answer previously unanswerable questions. This course will teach students how to make sense of the large amounts of data frequently available, from hypothesis formation and data collection to methods of analysis and visualization. The course will begin by discussing how to set up Internet-level experiments and formulate testable hypotheses. Ways to automatically gather, store and query large datasets will then be introduced. Two important classes of analysis will next be examined: statistical methods (descriptive and predictive) and information visualization. Students will learn to use the Python and R programming languages to carry out data collection, analysis and visualization, culminating in a final project using real data of the students’ choosing.

Colloquia and Talks

We have enjoyed many interesting and informative presentations during the past year.

Rob Jacob, Professor of Computer Science at Tufts University, presented on February 8 on “Reality-Based Interaction, Next Generation User Interfaces, and Brain-Computer Interfaces.”

Peter Norvig, Director of Research at Google, Inc., gave a talk on May 2 on the “Unreasonable Effectiveness of Data.” This talk was hosted by the Mathematics Department.

As part of her visit to campus on September 27, Wilson Lecturer Amy Smith (famous for MIT’s D-Lab) led a hands-on engineering activity in the Engineering Studio in which teams of students experimented with ways to simplify the shelling of moringa nuts, a source of oil valued by the perfume industry that is a promising crop for poor farmers in the tropics. Lyn Turbak, Robbie Berg (Physics), and Jennifer Stephan (Class Dean) helped out with this event.

On October 4, the theme of using technology to help others continued with a talk by Ralph Morelli from Trinity College on his “Humanitarian Free and Open Source Software initiative.” He described many projects in which computer science students were able to use their design and programming skills to help with local communities, disaster relief, and foreign aid.

On October 14, Matthew Merzbacher, head of the Processing group at Morpho Detection, Inc. and former Wellesley faculty member, gave a talk entitled “Explosives Detection for Aviation.”

On October 17, Wellesley alumnae Catherine Grevet ’10 (graduate student at Georgia Tech) and Megan Strait ’10 (graduate student at Tufts University), returned for an informal discussion with current students.

On October 21, Bruno Goncalves, Associate Research Scientist from Northeastern University, gave a talk entitled, “Political Activity in Social Media.”

Ryan McFall, Associate Professor of Computer Science at Hope College have a talk on October 28 about research opportunities in computer science for undergraduate students.
Senior Seminars

In spring 2011, several seniors gave talks as part of our seminar series. On March 9, Korina Figueroa and Catherine Lui presented a talk on the computer science in video game technology, “Achievement Unlocked: Used Computer Science Degree.”

On April 13, Audrey Kao talked about “How to Write a Deadly Virus”, all the way down to the dirty bits. Donna Yee discussed “Internet and Privacy”, about concerns relating to privacy and security issues on the Internet. Kathy Chen presented “Simulating Proteins and Chemistry”, about the complexity of simulating chemical processes.

We had several talks by graduating seniors this fall semester, as well. The first seminar on November 18 included “Cubicle Life: 12 Weeks with Standard & Poors”, by Sam Wu ’12, who discussed the challenges faced and the lessons learned during a 12 week internship working on the Data Analysis Reporting Tool (DART) at Standard and Poors. Sam Kim ’12 presented “Fuzzing Between the Lines”, about techniques used for security robustness testing.

On November 30, Lara Helm ’12 presented “Diaspora: Study of a Distributed Social Network”, in which she discussed research she performed on distributed social networks during a UROP the previous summer. Samantha Finn ’12 talked about “How to Succeed in Undergraduate Research in Three Easy Tweets” on the emerging importance of Twitter as a platform for political campaigns.

Events and Activities

Visit to Lincoln Labs
On April 28, a large group of CS faculty and students visited Lincoln Labs in Lexington, MA. The trip was coordinated by Lyn Turbak. Those attending were given a tour of the Air Traffic Management Lab and a Cyber NetSpa Demo. We were pleased to see alum Lily Lee ’92 during our visit, and enjoyed hearing about the many interesting projects underway at Lincoln Labs.

CS/MAS Senior Luncheon and Prizes
The annual Senior Luncheon for our CS/MAS majors took place at the end of the Spring semester. We again celebrated with our graduates in the penthouse of the Science Center. Chelsea Hoover ’11, was the recipient of the Academic Excellence award, and Consuelo Valdes ’11, was the recipient of the Spirit award. The Academic Excellence award is selected by the CS faculty, based on a student’s academic record. The Spirit award is chosen by nominations from the Wellesley community to the graduating senior who demonstrates high involvement and creates positive experiences in the CS/MAS community.

Faculty/Student Ultimate Frisbee
This was a big year for ultimate frisbee in the CS dept. We had our traditional end-of-semester faculty/student game on May 11, which also featured Lyn's chocolate chip cookies. There were weekly pick-up games during the summer that had high attendance from Orit’s HCI Lab and Alex Diesl and his math students. Alex has challenged the CS department to a Math vs. CS ultimate game in the spring -- stay tuned for details.

Beach Day
CS summer students and faculty celebrated the hottest day of the year (> 100 degrees) with a day at Wingaersheek beach on July 22.

CS Club
Era Vuksani ’12 started the CS Club (CSC), in order to get students more involved in programming and to help provide students who are interested in learning languages which are not covered at Wellesley with the opportunity to learn these languages with other students. The Club is currently learning about HTML5, and future plans include learning Ajax, Ruby, PHP, Python, Django, how to use grep, and Node.js, all of which were selected by students who came to the first few meetings of CSC. They are also thinking about having weekend afternoon classes to teach some important languages in the near future. Visit http://groups.google.com/a/wellesley.edu/group/computer-science-club/topics?hl=en for more info on when the Spring semester’s first meeting will be held.

ACM Programming Contest
In October, the largest ever number of teams (4) from Wellesley participated in the Boston preliminary of the ACM programming contest, held this year at MIT.

Grace Hopper Conference
Current students (Yesenia Trujillo ’14, Heidi Wang ’12, and Samantha Finn ’12), alums (Consuelo Valdes, Scout Sinclair, Rebecca Shapiro, Catherine Greuet, Megan Strait, Lia Napolitano, Korina Figueroa), and faculty (Sohie Lee and Orit Shaer) attended the renowned Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing in Portland, Oregon in November. Several Wellesley faculty and alumnas participated in a panel entitled “Lessons Learned from the All Female Classroom”, and “How to Translate Into the Coed Environment”. Next year’s conference is in Baltimore, Maryland in October. If you are considering attending, please let us know!
CS/MAS Holiday Get-Together
On December 8, we had our annual Holiday Get-Together at Slater House. We repeated our Japanese theme from last year, with the addition of Lyn Turbak’s famous chocolate chip cookies (300+ freshly baked cookies were consumed by the crowd, along with hand-made sushi and other goodies).

UPCOMING
This spring, Wellesley’s Library and Technology Services is hosting a symposium on “Liberal Arts Education in the Digital Age”. There will be panels and events throughout the spring involving students, staff, external visitors, and faculty (including Orit Shaer and Brian Tjaden). Stay tuned for more information!

Chair's Corner
It has been an exciting year in the CS department, filled with fun and engaging faculty and student activities and events! With the help of our students, the faculty have also been taking a hard look at all aspects of our program in a department self-study, in preparation for an external Visiting Committee coming in early March. This study has generated lots of ideas about ways to strengthen our program and we look forward to further input from the Visiting Committee.

Watch for a new look to the Science Center over the next decade! The College recently launched Wellesley 2025: A Plan for Campus Renewal, a major initiative to support long-term space planning and renovation across the College, including the Science Center. The CS faculty have been meeting with members of the Ellenzweig Architectural firm to share ideas for creating spaces for a new vision of computer science teaching and research!

Make an Impact: Support Wellesley CS

The CS department relies on the generosity of alumnae, friends, and corporations in helping support the department to provide an excellent liberal arts education for women studying computer science at Wellesley. Your gift enables students to attend conferences such as the Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing, supports student research, provides much needed equipment, and allows the department to host a variety of events for the Wellesley CS community. Every gift makes a big difference. Non ministrari sed ministrare.

Gifts can be sent to Gift Processing, Wellesley College Office for Resources, 106 Central Street, Wellesley, MA 02481 with a note designating the gift for the CS department. Your gift to Wellesley CS is tax deductible.

Thank you for your support.

Keep in Touch!

Contact Chair
Send e-mail to Ellen Hildreth at echildreth@wellesley.edu if you want to know what is going on or tell us about your accomplishments or future plans.

LinkedIn Group
The LinkedIn Group for the Wellesley CS and MAS community (named Wellesley CS & MAS) now has over 200 members. Check out this resource for communication and job opportunities within the community http://www.linkedin.com/e/gis/1067337.

Alum Webpage
If you would like to add or update your contact information on the CS alumnae webpage: http://cs.wellesley.edu/~cs/People/alumnae.html, please e-mail Scott Anderson at sanderso@wellesley.edu.