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## Faculty Senate Newsletter, May 2016

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College

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# Faculty Senate Newsletter

## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

With every change of regime comes a predictable if welcome discussion of the structure of higher education. In Louisiana, with its four systems and its Board of Regents, this "conversation," as administrators like to call it, usually centers on either the rearrangement of campuses or the consolidation of administrative units or the reduction of overhead. Occasionally, the more optimistic among us hope that, during regime turnover, the membership of management boards might change (with the good effect of allowing current board members to resume their proper role, that of wealthy heirs ironically professing the gospel of the self-made man).

By focusing on exchange—on whether campuses move across systems or whether Joe or Jane will replace Bob or Betty on Boards—this debate releases pent-up frustrations but avoids fundamentals. It glances about for visible change without considering the concealed causes of our problems. The system of public university governance in Louisiana as well as in many other states relies on non-academic lay-persons, whether supervisors or trustees or regents, to ensure that publicly funded institutions serve the public good and remain accountable to the people. Scholars of American history know that such an arrangement relies on an educated citizenry that possesses both the knowledge and the power to elect wise citizens as its representatives.

The goal of this kind of representative system is inclusiveness: the non-chaotic inclusion, in governance, of a large cross-section of the people through the deputizing of leaders committed to full and fair consideration of ideas. The system now at play has "flipped" so as to promote exclusion rather than inclusion. Meeting for short times to vote their way through items on an abbreviated agenda about which all the decisions have already been privately made, the present system prevents participation. It limits public input to routinely ignored three-minute public comments. In Louisiana, membership on management boards correlates directly with level of gubernatorial campaign contributions, thus limiting participation to a wealthy subset of society (whether the 53% that Mitt Romney admires or the 1% that Bernie Sanders slams or some segment in-between). Examining the careers of management board members (chicken-wing magnate; post-colonial Nigerian oil field machinery supplier; chiropractic franchiser; tabloid publisher; hairdresser) leaves one wondering whether they live up to the Jeffersonian hope for the creation of learned leaders and the enlargement of membership in the Republic of Letters.

Solutions are available, but they would require a new analysis of the relation of public education to a democratic society. An easy first step might be the introduction of requirements and qualifications for membership on supervisory Boards. A second, more profound approach might be the elimination of those Boards and, with them, the fiction that they express inclusiveness and representation. For example, Louisiana or any other state might junk the cliché, collusive, corporate model of the President-and-his-or-her-Board. A forward-looking state could create a panel of qualified experts to manage, cooperatively, portfolios within universities (finance; professional labor; research and development; whatever) and to consult with one another. To top it off, such a panel could be asked to secure both a faculty and a public mandate through periodic elections. Such a new model would eliminate the current non-productive arrangement, in which Presidents do only just enough to appear productive and therefore saleable to executive search firms but never so much as to frighten gubernatorial appointees on the Board. Another possibility would be the creation of faculty-public working groups who, again, could manage segments of modern, complex universities while also auditing the other panels. There are many other possibilities; the main point is that the present system is neither suitable for a university that promotes the public good nor is it inevitable.



Kevin Cope

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

President's Column.....	1
Higher Education Headliner; Faculty Benefits Experts to probe TIAA-CREF Servicing Fees .....	2
King mounts National Campaign for Newsletter Position in Higher Education Funding; YMCA Attack on Pro-College Sales Tax Shows Rift in Charity Community; Louisiana Sweeps AAUP National Elections; AAUP Union on Winning Streak .....	3
A.G.'s Corner .....	4
A.G.'s Corner Con't; Workday Ad; LSUnited Ad.....	5
Summer Fringe Letter Draws Federal Response; New AAUP Video Summarizes Salary Survey; Ricapito Captures Another Palm; Hester Ticket Sweeps SUSLA Elections; AAUP Ad .....	6
April Alexandria Summit: Anxiety, Amendments, Advancement; Statistics Don't Lie: Football Is Our Emphasis.....	7
Lifestyle Feature .....	8
9 Over 9 Debacle moving Toward Semi-Happy Resolution; LSUA Launches Salary Resolution; Tiger Athletic Foundation Overreach Piques Fundraising Control Questions .....	9
LSU system Org Chart Shows Business as Usual; LSU Day at the Capitol: King Stages Fake Faculty Fete; BRAC Luncheon Launches Dialogue; Campus Federal Ad .....	10
Capitol Park Museum Ad .....	11
Lifestyle Feature Con't .....	12
Elevate or Devalue?; Progressive Attainment: A non-monopoly Where Students Always Pass Go; LSU Chancellor Clark Lauds SUSLA FS President Hester; Geaux shop Vendor Sneaks in Extra Spending Goad .....	13
Veterinary School Ad.....	14
Aloha Means Both Goodbye and Hello: Howard, Kirylo on the Move; Don Chance Retirement Crowd Draws SRO Crowd; CSU Settles Contract with Faculty; New Vision Statement Coming for LSU .....	15
Monthly Movie Review .....	16
Alexandrian Reader Gallagher Identifies Enlightening Column; UFO, UAL, or URO? Dark Behemoth Hover Over LSU First; Shorts Travel Scratches Multi-City Itineraries .....	17
Mann presides over Higher Ed Documentary Debut; Nicholson Gateway proposal Draws Grimaces, Triggers "Presidential moment" Tip of the Month: Bistro Italia .....	18
Monthly Movie Review Con't .....	19

# Higher Education Headliner



**Tammy Millican**



A native of Baton Rouge, a single mother of five children, and a life-long learner, Tammy Millican has been part of the LSU community for many years. Her tenure at LSU began when a friend told her that staff could take up to two subsidized courses at the university per semester. As a single mother, she had not been able to attend college and saw this as a great opportunity to fulfill a life-long dream of earning an undergraduate degree. She applied for a position at the Work Control Department at Facility Services and never looked back. After working for a year, she started her BA, taking the allotted two classes per semester and one per summer. After years of grueling work, Millican graduated summa cum laude. After taking some time off, she realized that she missed school and entered into first a Master's in Public Administration, receiving the degree in 2012, and then enrolled in a doctoral program. She was able to continue with her graduate education due to a scholarship that she received from the Staff Senate at LSU.

Millican collected the scholarship at an LSU Staff Senate meeting, and her contact with that legislative body inspired her to run for a Senate seat the next year. Enjoying her time there and a natural in politics, she ran for Staff Senate President and was elected. Millican finds her work with the Staff Senate, "such a rewarding experience," and is very proud of what she considers her personal growth through the process of learning her new role. With a strong ethic of service, Millican constantly looks for ways to be involved in volunteer work both within the LSU community and beyond. She participates in Move-in Day every year, helping students and families transition into college life, and she will also be helping with graduation this year. Outside of LSU, she traditionally walks in the National Heart Association Heart-Walk in honor of her daughter, Erica, whom she lost at only thirteen to a heart defect. Much of her desire to serve she attributes to Erica, and she sees her daughter in so many of the students at LSU. Millican remarks, "When you see a student walk across that stage at graduation, we all have a part in that," she says, "from the professors all the way down to the groundskeepers; we all contribute to the life of the university. That is special."

In her position as Assistant Director in the Organizational Planning & External Relations division of Facility & Property Oversight (also known as Facility Services), Millican works with staff, faculty, and students from many differ-

ent departments and divisions on campus. She has been part of the transition to Workday, and believes that this new program will help to "streamline a lot of processes" and make it easier for staff to perform many of their Human Resource Management and finance duties. For faculty, she believes that such activities as submitting receipts for travel will be much easier to facilitate with Workday. In addition to her role with Workday, she has also had the opportunity to work with the Master Plan and provide input to assist in its implementation.

Her position as the President of the Staff Senate has provided invaluable insight into the concerns of staff, faculty, and students as well, and the intersection of these three groups in the university enriches her experience with both the Staff Senate and Facility Services. For example, in her current position at Facility Services, she has oversight over the sustainability program on campus and has won many grants over the years as the university moves toward a greener campus. Her collaborations with the Student Senate, very conscious of the need for an infrastructure of sustainability on campus, has resulted in the addition of the Bigbelly receptacles for recycling and trash across campus, as well as the installation of satsuma trees, which in addition to being aesthetically attractive will allow for students who are running low on time to enjoy a nutritious satsuma fruit on the way to class. Her current positions in both the Staff Senate and Facility Services provide Millican with ample opportunities to better campus life at LSU by collaborating between students, faculty, and staff and by implementing the best ideas from all three groups.

In the future, Millican sees herself continuing both to work with the university and to learn. She jokes that she spends her summers at the library, reading about topics that interest her and likewise new ways to better serve the university community. Her years of service to the LSU community and beyond has even inspired a possible PhD dissertation: "I think I might do it on the implementation of the Master Plan," she says – a topic about which she no doubt has unique insight. LSU's campus will be moving forward in the coming years, and Tammy Millican will continue to play an integral role in the life and improvements of the university that has become a cherished part of her life.

— By Amy Catania and Nate Friedman

## FACULTY BENEFITS EXPERTS TO PROBE TIAA-CREF SERVICING FEES

One of the most unfortunate aspects of the beleaguered Louisiana retirement system is the lack of supervision for the vendors of plans servicing those on the Optional Retirement Account. The Teachers Retirement System of Louisiana ("TRSL") at once asserts its right to control and to collect service fees from the Optional Retirement Account ("ORP") yet refuses to allow ORP members to vote in TRSL elections and sets no standards for those who lobby their way into lucrative vendor roles. ORP members have repeatedly complained regarding the low skill levels and limited availability of vendor representatives. The latest outrage: One of the most prominent vendors, TIAA-CREF, has tacked on a 0.12% "plan servicing fee" on the full balance of retirement accounts. Although that sounds like a minuscule sum, AgCenter expert John Westra has calculated that, for a person with twelve years of service, it amounts to an entire month's worth of employer (campus) contributions. The longer the service and the greater the sums saved, the greater the charge; a person with three dozen years in the trenches would lose at least a quarter of the employer contribution, year-in and year-out. The LSU A&M Faculty Senate Executive Committee has already begun investigations (and complaints) concerning this latest bit of state-sponsored peculation and will report the results in upcoming *Newsletter* issues.





## KING MOUNTS NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR NEWSLETTER POSITION ON HIGHER EDUCATION FUNDING

If anyone doubts that the *Newsletter* serves an educational purpose, that skeptic should view the latest video release from the atelier of LSU President King Alexander, who recently appeared in a high-profile debate sponsored by the New America Foundation, an in-the-beltway non-partisan Washington think-tank only a stone's throw from what might be described as "Executive Search Firm Row" in Dupont Circle, another favorite venue for all top-level education executives. Alexander appears in a four-person debate centered on the proposition that government aid should go directly to states and their higher education institutions rather than trickling to campuses through Pell grants, work-study, student loans, vouchers, and the like. Regular readers of the *Newsletter* know that this faculty-driven publication has repeatedly called for the elimination of the tuition-based funding model, which creates huge student recruitment bureaucracies and multiple levels of administration and regulation, all of which siphon resources away from the support of campuses. Listening to Alexander on the online video recording of the [debate](#) suggests that the widely-hailed president has heard faculty opinion and is mounting a powerful argument, on the national scene, in favor of breaking the ungainly connection between the advancement of universities and the chasing after tuition. Alexander goes up against representatives from the private education establishment who have garnered more than their share of federal support through excessive spending on what is euphemistically called "the student experience" (lazy river pools, climbing walls, and plenty of cuddles). Congratulations to Alexander for striking a blow for institutions serving the public good by doing solid research and communicating the results to students and the public.



King Alexander promotes direct aid to institutions

## YMCA ATTACK ON PRO-COLLEGE SALES TAX SHOWS RIFT IN CHARITY COMMUNITY

One of the reassuring illusions that smooths out the rough spots of human life is the seldom expressed but widely held belief that charitable institutions support one another. *Newsletter* staffers are not immune to that virus of the optimistic imagination which leads good people to assume that the Red Cross loves the Humane Society and that Doctors Without Borders wishes only the best for the March of Dimes. Readers can imagine the daunted feeling that swept through our newsroom on receipt of an epistle from the YMCA of the Capital Area (the YMCA for the Baton Rouge region) in which Mr. Bob Jacobs, the President of an organization devoted to the multilateral education of the mind, the body, and the spirit, declares his "frustration" over the elimination of the sales tax exemption on membership in non-profit organizations and urges the YMCA membership to contact pro-higher-education legislators such as Dan Claitor to request the repeal of even a small tax that is helping colleges and universities remain solvent. Who could not be shocked that the head of an organization that is largely concerned with improving the lot of young people should try to pull the lifesaver off the neck of higher education?



## LOUISIANA SWEEPS AAUP NATIONAL ELECTIONS

Those who tire of hearing about Donald Trump and other alleged "outsiders" may rejoice over some good news from the ballot box, where some (former) genuine outsiders have now made their way deep inside the beltway. In the April 15<sup>th</sup> elections for members on the national Governing Council of the AAUP ([American Association of University Professors](#)), two Louisiana colleagues achieved landslide victories (which, of course, is amazing in a state that is too flat for landslides!). Sonya Hester from Southern University Shreveport bagged a seat as a Member-at-Large of the Council, giving her a splendid post as a voice for the entirety of the profession, while Leslie Bary, of the University of Louisiana Lafayette, won election to the open seat for District V, which includes most of the southeastern quadrant of the United States as well as part of the Caribbean, all of Canada, Guam, and the international members of the AAUP. When current District V member Kevin L. Cope is added to the count, Louisiana now holds three seats, or nearly eight percent, of the AAUP Council positions, an astonishing achievement for a state that accounts for barely over one percent of the American population. Louisiana now has an opportunity to steer the national debate over faculty prerogatives and the goals of higher education institutions.



Sonya Hester joins Leslie Bary and Kevin Cope in AAUP national office

## AAUP UNION ON WINNING STREAK

Those who fear that the days of labor organization are over and that faculty will remain without representation or leverage forever may take heart in the latest developments at the AAUP—CBC (American Association of University Professors—Collective Bargaining Congress), the union and arbitration branch of the AAUP. In the last month alone, the AAUP—CBC has won unionization votes on three large campuses, including garnering a landslide 54–7 win with the faculty at the prestigious, high-profile American Film Institute of Los Angeles. Northern Illinois University and Plymouth State University produced similar victories for the legions of the competent. In one month alone, three campuses have gained union representation and reasserted the dignity and power of academic professionals.





## A.G.'s Corner

LSU HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGER, CHIEF A. G. MONACO, ADDRESSES QUESTIONS ABOUT HRM AND "EMPLOYEES' LIVES" IN GENERAL. IF YOU HAVE A PRESSING HRM ISSUE FOR A G TO ADDRESS, PLEASE SEND YOUR QUERIES TO [ENCOPE@LSU.EDU](mailto:ENCOPE@LSU.EDU).

### The Letter

Dear A G.,

I know that crises have been rocking Louisiana higher education for decades, and I know that we will all probably survive the latest budget calamities. However, some of the announcements from university officials have started me thinking—and gotten me worried. Suppose that “we”—either one institution or the whole of higher education—should declare financial exigency. What then happens to the benefits that are partially supported by state funds? What about medical insurance, prescription support, life and disability insurance, and contributions to retirement plans? Are there any measures a university employee can take against any adverse consequences, for benefits, of a financial emergency on our campuses?



Your reader,  
LUCIUS in Denham Springs

### The Response

Lucius,

Your question reminds me of the line from the old R&B song ...“I use to worry about being rich and skinny ‘til I wound up poor and fat.” For years we have focused on retirement planning and the individual decisions we have to make in order to achieve financial balance in our later years, but now the focus has shifted to the viability of the institutions we work for. With detail to follow, it is my opinion that the declaration of financial exigency by an institution is not a significant threat to the continuation of benefits for employees. It is however, a concern regarding the continuation of employment for some of us.

In Louisiana, the budget by constitution must be balanced and, as such, the State is required to have all funds contractually required for benefits somewhat accounted for prior to starting the fiscal year. It seems from what I can fathom that benefits covered by the Office of Group Benefits are actually less likely to be lost than most other services provided by the state. That is they may choose to cut employment, reduce the number of agencies, etc. but they will still work through the fiscal year providing health insurance.

For participants in the LSUFirst health insurance plan a different situation exists. LSUFirst has a sum of money (at present time about \$34mm) that is held in reserve for the support of the insurance plan. It is not counted as part of the University's overall reserves and is not included as money accessed by the University to pay bills outside those incurred by the health plan. Since premiums go directly to the fund, the employees' contribution to the plan would remain untouched even in the very unlikely event that the University could no longer pay its share. In that case the assumption would be that the University would reduce employment in order to fulfill salary and benefit obligations to the remaining faculty and staff by paying its share of LSUFirst premiums. Even if the LSUFirst plan were to achieve an unlikely demise, the employee would still have the ability to move over to the health insurance plans offered by the state through the Office of Group Benefits.

As to the funds for pensions, ORP participants hold individual access to their money and, as such, have their full pension accumulations pro-

tected from the state's financial woes. Those in the traditional plans under TRSL or LAZERS hold a defined benefit but are protected in that funds already “in the hands” of those pension agencies are not subject to withdrawal by the legislature.

The risk for pensions associated with exigency centers on the future contribution rate into the pensions. In order for those contributions to cease we would have to see revenue schemes fully implode – not impossible, but far less likely to occur than the declaration of exigency by an institution.

Although ERISA imposes participation, vesting, and other requirements directly upon employee pension plans offered by private sector employers, governmental plans such as those provided by Louisiana or local governments to their employees, are excluded from these requirements. In addition, ERISA established an insurance program for defined benefit plans under which promised benefits are paid (up to a statutorily set amount) if an employer cannot pay them—but this too does not apply to governmental plans. However, for participants in governmental pension plans to receive preferential tax treatment (that is, for plan contributions and investment earnings to be tax-deferred), plans must be deemed “qualified” by the Internal Revenue Service. So, as a result, there are some protections and oversight provided to Louisiana's pensions by review of the Federal government. I again believe that financial exigency by the institution is not likely to affect pensions. Those factors that would disturb our state pensions would most likely come with a substantial amount of advanced warning from the IRS.

Regarding the matter of disability, life, dental and vision insurance, those products are fully funded by the employees. The employee pays premiums directly to the insurance carrier and the financial condition of the state and the institution would have no impact on the plan's viability. Those private insurers are under significantly tighter scrutiny by both state and federal agencies than state provided benefits and, again, most problems would come with significant advanced notice.

—Continued on page 5

While a negative impact to your benefits from a declaration of financial exigency is possible, it remains rather improbable. I believe that, for the most part, institutional exigency is not a direct threat to the survival of benefit plans. The risk of exigency is to employment and that should be the greater concern. Lay-offs of personnel and terminations of positions are the more direct risk since financial exigency usually results in fewer people being employed as a primary means to balance the budget.

Regarding what a person can do to mitigate the risk associated with an institutional financial collapse and its impact on your pension plan, I would advise creating a supplemental retirement plan (403b or 457b) and saving money in addition to your state pension plan. Augmenting your pension with funds that would normally go to Social Security were you employed elsewhere is a critical piece of retirement planning. It provides a small safety net of a pension that should problems arise with your primary pension income could be sustained. If your concern rests with a national collapse of our economy, you could divert your mutual fund investments to funds that rely heavily on international investments. As to a worldwide economic collapse, I have no suggestions.

I know someone who stores canned goods, firearms, gold coins, and bottled water in an underground "safe room" on his property in Dutchess County, New York. He swears that he is prepared to face the impending collapse of our economy and our government. I suspect that he will die disappointed that those events have not happened. As a result, he will be leaving his heirs the hassle of cleaning out a large room filled with cans of chili and Vienna sausages.



**Many faculty will be off campus for the July 1<sup>st</sup> launch of the LSU Workday system. If you are faculty, please plan to log into the system shortly after July 1<sup>st</sup> to validate your personal information, and set up your delegate for specific business processes, if applicable. If you support faculty, please be aware of this need for any faculty who may be away from campus on or shortly after this July date to log in.**

**Additional information and instructions on how to perform these steps will be forthcoming and made available via the LSU Workday website at: [http://www.lsu.edu/workday/getting\\_started.php](http://www.lsu.edu/workday/getting_started.php). Workday will be accessible through the myLSU portal. Questions or requests for further assistance may be sent via the following "feedback" [link](#), and someone from the communications team will respond as soon as possible.**



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- Securing regular, periodic raises for faculty
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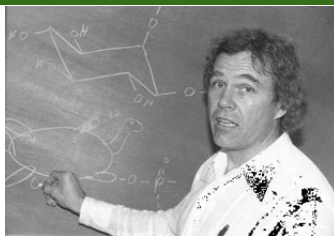
#### **CONTACT:**

**Mike Russo, [6923louis@gmail.com](mailto:6923louis@gmail.com)**



## SUMMER FRINGE LETTER DRAWS FEDERAL RESPONSE

Past issues of the *Newsletter* have reported on benefits activist Roger Laine's effort to draw attention to the diversion of federal grant money that is earmarked to support pensions into non-educational projects that should be supported by ordinary state appropriations. In that [letter](#), Laine notes that only a fraction of the 42% charge to grants for fringe benefits makes its way to faculty accounts and that the vast majority of the fringe money goes to the retirement plan administrator, TRSL (Teachers Retirement System of Louisiana), where it is used to bail out the unfunded accrued liability ("UAL"), most of which UAL arose from the underfunding of pensions for K-12 teachers. Laine additionally points out that fringe rates continue to be deducted in the summer even despite the fact that faculty in the Optional Retirement Plan ("ORP") receive no benefit whatsoever from these monies. Now Laine has received a reply from the inimitable (or perhaps unduplicatable) Mr. Matt Dito at the Program Support Center of the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services field office in Dallas. Mr. Dito affirms that he will indeed review this case within a five-month window. Dito's letter establishes that the federal government suspects that there may be merit in Laine's complaint and is prepared to commit resources to its investigation.



Retirement investigator and biochemist Roger Laine turns from describing money as well as molecular exchanges

## NEW AAUP VIDEO SUMMARIZES SALARY SURVEY

Men and women of metrics anticipate the yearly release of the AAUP salary survey, which provides a measure of both the economic health of the profession and the financial situation of the generous and competent people who dedicate their lives to learning. Reading the survey is, however, hard-going for anyone not inured to columns upon columns of numbers or to fine distinctions among types of institutions. The AAUP has now released a pleasant, accessible video summarizing the results, which includes several encouraging elements. Catch the video, entitled [Education at the Crossroads](#), online.



AAUP analyst John Barnshaw stars in the new video summary of the AAUP salary survey

## RICAPITO CAPTURES ANOTHER PALM

Those who occasionally sing hymns know that monarchical imagery is not uncommon when praise is warranted. More than once Martin Luther and his many hymning successors imagine heaven and its glories as a royal court. Faculty efforts, in their dedication to the betterment of humanity, share in this royal graciousness. Our colleague, Joe Ricapito, has earned special praise for capturing yet another regal distinction. After already earning a European knighthood, Ricapito was recently enrolled in the Royal Academy of Spain ([Real Academia Espanola](#)).



Joseph Ricapito joins the Royal Academy of Spain

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## HESTER TICKET SWEEPS SUSLA ELECTIONS

No one needed a trip to [New Orleans's Rock 'N' Bowl](#) in order to feel the house shaking down when Sonya Hester ran for a fresh term as President of the Southern University Shreveport (SUSLA) Faculty Senate. As reported in the most recent *Newsletter*, Hester revolutionized faculty senate campaigning by running with a full slate of five candidates for five offices and by unleashing a flock of [video endorsements](#) and [platform statements](#), of which the two clips linked here are only the smallest sample. Hester's slick, sophisticated, and professionally produced snippets have set a high bar for those aiming to upgrade faculty governance and even to enter the national debate on higher education. The result of Hester's media innovations was a runaway victory in SUSLA's April 13<sup>th</sup> elections as well as a mandate that has outdone Samson insofar as it not only has shaken, but outright moved the pillars of university governance. Congratulations, Sonya!



Sonya Hester makes James Carville look amateurish with a cavalcade of top-notch pre-election videos

## APRIL ALEXANDRIA SUMMIT: ANXIETY, AMENDMENTS, ADVANCEMENT

April 23<sup>rd</sup> was another red-letter day for faculty governance practitioners as colleagues from around the state converged on LSU of Alexandria for the concluding Alexandria Summit Meeting of the 2015-2016 academic year. Innovations, expositions, and epiphanies abounded. Following the predictably unpredictable, jovially original welcome by LSUA Chancellor Dan Howard, Commissioner of Higher Education Joseph C. Rallo entered into his most brass-tacks dialogue to date. Rallo acquainted conferees with the ins and outs of the budget and of the past special and ongoing regular legislative sessions while also providing a sneak preview of the “Elevate Louisiana” program that the Regents would unveil later this week. Rallo, who, like all newbies, was met with initial skepticism when he appeared on the scene a little over a year ago, scored high marks with conferees for his candor, his readiness to answer questions, and his robust avoidance of euphemisms. Counterpointing the Commissioner’s response to Louisiana *Realpolitik* was blogger-activist James Kirylo’s exhortation against the commercialization of K–12 teacher education, which commercialization (and politicization) Kirylo regards as correlated with a similar corruption of public higher education. Kirylo’s avid interpretation of the motivations of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation may well be responsible for the wave of earthquakes shaking Microsoft-saturated Washington state! Formalities were not overwhelmed by the foregoing powerful shock treatments. Conferees passed a slate of amendments to the ALFS (Association of Louisiana Faculty Senates) Constitution while evaluating two resolution penned by McNeese delegate Vipin Menon. After lunch, noted neurological psychologist Darlyne Nemeth, currently Co-General Secretary of the World Council for Psychotherapy, conducted an hour-long participatory presentation on the causes and cures of institutionally-generated anxiety, with special emphasis on the chronic nervousness that plagues the academy. Nemeth astonished conferees through the administration of an evaluation instrument showing the



Internationally renowned psychologist Darlyne Nemeth evaluates anxiety among educators

rapid fluctuations in anxiety levels in groups of academicians. Next, LSUA communications expert Zachary Wagner looked at the pros and cons as well as the ideological history of the sanction for free expression in the classroom, while Grambling University *literatus* and educationalist Hugh Wilson probed the philosophical and ideological bases for the defense and advancement of higher education. If you would like to participate in these spectacular ALFS meetings, mark your calendar for July 9<sup>th</sup>, when the Alexandria Summit Meeting will feature, as its plenary speaker, no less than Louisiana Commissioner of Administration Jay Dardenne!



Zachary Wagner probes the free expression sanction

## STATISTICS DON'T LIE: FOOTBALL IS OUR EMPHASIS

One of the most common lobbying techniques among campus and system chief executives is the reminding of legislators that the education of the young and the advancement of knowledge is the primary purpose of universities—that activities such as workforce development or big-time sports remain ancillary rather than central concerns. But does the record show this to be the case? Consider the [statistics](#) compiled by national blogger and higher education commentator Martin Kich, editor of the *AAUP Academe Blog*. According to Kich, LSU ranks second, behind only perennial football superpower USC, in the production of NFL draft picks, having nurtured sixty-three pro-football candidates between 1996 and 2015. If that is not sufficiently sobering when compared with the recent research, funding, and teaching struggles of Louisiana institutions, then those seeking a wake-up splash of coffee in the face should drill further down into Kich’s historical statistics. For the longer period between 1936 and 2015, LSU ranked only thirteenth among the pro-baller producers. In order to reach the #2 status for the last ten years, a significant increase in productivity would be required—the existence of which is verified by the discovery that, for the 2015 season, LSU ranked #1 with regard to the production of players on NFL rosters during the opening week of professional play. Considering that Louisiana institutions have undergone severe economic retrenchments in recent years, it seems that the (sinking) commitment to learning and the (soaring) commitment to athletics are vectoring in opposite directions.





# Lifestyle Feature

## THE GREATEST ALL-AROUND DESSERTS FOR EVERY DAY AND EVERY SEASON

During the high age of good health—of sound diet, aerobic exercise, the purchasing of outdoor apparel from wilderness-themed retailers—dessert became something of a forbidden course. It was widely understood among aspiring administrators, for example, that ordering a dessert during a job interview meal would suggest intemperance. Likewise, those who attend the power lunches that fill the upper-echelon day feel somewhat awkward about ordering a calorie bomb after finishing a nutritionally correct salad (the one heaped with high-fat fried crawfish, that is). Dessert, however, epitomizes the high inquisitive culture. The surplus food value delivered by a baked Alaska is no more or less useful, in ordinary life, than an assessment of the interaction of binary stars. Dessert, like college life, seems to have originated in the regulation and perhaps moralization of surplus. By using a precious gem of a tiny after-dinner dish to overload the senses, chefs of bygone eras wrote the last chapter in the book of pleasure and reminded diners that the host offered bounty but that the time to quit had come.

Nowadays, dessert at home has become something of an afterthought, one often unfortunately relegated to ready-made, ready-mix, or store-bought goods that leave more dissatisfaction than pleasure. Many home chefs look at the welter of cookbooks that deliver the secrets of dazzling desserts only to collapse in despair over the imagined difficulties of the miniature masterpieces. Others are daunted by the sheer volume or quantity produced by recipes. What in the world is that thirty-something newly re-singled person to do with thirty-six apricot-coconut bars?

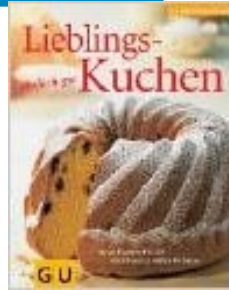
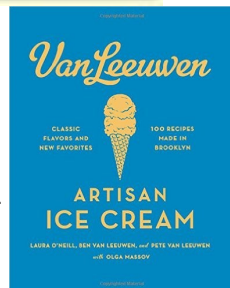
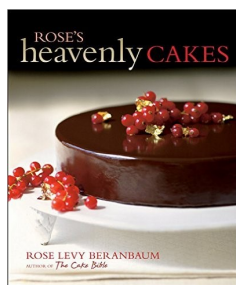
To address the apparent inaccessibility or overawing immensity of dessert, the *Newsletter* kitchen staff has selected a veritable week—seven—of the world's *greatest all-around* desserts. Note that these may not qualify as the unchallenged *greatest* of desserts, but only the greatest in the *all-around* category. That category is defined by several properties: ease of preparation; accessibility of ingredients; potential for variation and interchange with other desserts; suitability for the varying seasons; and scalability—the susceptibility to preparation in reduced-size batches. Certain easy as well as grand recipes such as chocolate mousse had to be excluded owing to the necessity for multiple hands (try whipping that cream and dispensing the unset mousse mixture into glasses at the same time on your own!). Let us, then, take a tour through the seasons and the weeks of the most artful of courses.

First among American classics is ice cream, a great favorite of George Washington and the other “Founders” as well as an evidence of early American interculturalism insofar as both the European and oriental worlds seem to stand in the background of this world-traveling confection. Ice cream, the ideal sweet refreshment for the hot summer season as well as a fine, calming cap to a spicy meal at any time of the year, combines the unctuousness of cream with the pointedness of sugar in a surprisingly easygoing dialectic. Ice cream suffers from a reputation not only of difficulty, but of impossibility. Many regard its production as mysterious, even miraculous. In truth, it is the easiest of

all desserts. Comprised of eggs, milk, cream, sugar, a dash of salt, and almost any flavoring ingredient, the custard underlying ice cream can be prepared in fifteen minutes. Those willing to buy an ice cream freezer with a built-in compressor such as the laudable [Whynter](#) can pop the warm custard directly into the machine, let it do the work, and begin enjoying in sixty or so minutes. A top-notch recommendation for those seeking a summery taste is easy strawberry ice cream; the *Newsletter* recommends the recipe in the incomparable [Van Leeuwen Artisan Ice Cream book](#).

Summery yet all-seasonal ice cream heads this list because its showcasing of custard points up the centrality of that divinely simple mixture to a host of spectacular—and spectacularly easy—desserts. A person who can cook a custard can prepare almost anything that comes at the end of the meal, whether a rhubarb torte or a pie surrounded by crème anglais. The most spectacular as well as the most accessible of warm-weather desserts in which custard plays a role is surely the trifle, that tall glass filled with fruit, sponge cake, liqueurs, and occasionally inventive additions. Stacked up like a skyscraper and visually textured with all the colors of both the orchard and the bakery, a proper trifle is ultimately only a matter of cooking custard, choosing additions, and stacking up a superstructure of sponge layers. Surely the most delightful trifle recipe of all time can be found in cake goddess Rosa Levy Berenbaum's [Rose's Heavenly Cakes](#). Those gearing up to try it will need to buy a trifle glass from Williams Sonoma or Sur la Table, but once you have one of those you have it forever, and with that a perpetual mandate to create trifles (which academic people are certainly good at doing!)

Moving a little closer to autumn brings us to another dessert in which custard plays more than a supporting role: the *Donauwelle*, or Danube Waves. A kind of pictorial dessert, *Donauwelle* makes cunning use of multiple cake layers and cherries to crate a cross-sectional look resembling rolling waves in a body of water. In the last analysis, *Donauwelle*, which fits the oncoming autumn with its remembrance of summer orchards and its deployment of harvested cherries within the warmer embrace of custard and cake, is just another instance of stacking components around the quivering custard cement. First the pan receives the vanilla half of the cake dough; then, atop that, the chocolate-infused remainder; then, the top ornaments of sour cherries. After baking, on goes the layer of vanilla custard and then, finally, a spread of melted dark chocolate lubricated with coconut oil. Far simpler than pie! Those who read German can discover a splendid and manageable *Donauwelle* recipe in Christa Schmedes's [Lieblingskuchen Einfach Gut](#), but easy English-language recipes abound online, for *Donauwelle* has become a great favorite among chefs for cruise ship lines.



—Continued on page 12

## 9 OVER 9 DEBACLE MOVING TOWARD SEMI-HAPPY RESOLUTION

Last month, the *Newsletter* reported on a fiasco within a success: the mandatory conversion of twelve-month salary distributions to nine-month distributions for all nine-month professional employees at LSU. Heads were shaking with regard to the apparent inflexibility of the otherwise successful new business enterprise system, Workday, that is scheduled to replace all current business mechanisms at LSU on July 1<sup>st</sup>. Many asked, if Workday were indeed so powerful—and many opined that it indeed is a great step forward!—then why could it not handle multiple payroll distribution styles? Be that as it may, faculty governance officers sprang into action and asked payroll pundit A G Monaco and Campus Federal Credit Union (“CFCU”) banking brainiacs Ron Moreau and Brian Ainsworth to find some solutions by which faculty could conveniently and economically manage their cash flow following the aforementioned system conversion. The results are in and they are good! Please see the info-advertisement from CFCU elsewhere in this issue of the *Newsletter*.



Brian Ainsworth headed the LSU-CFCU team seeking solutions to the nine-month payroll problem

## LSUA LAUNCHES SALARY RESOLUTION

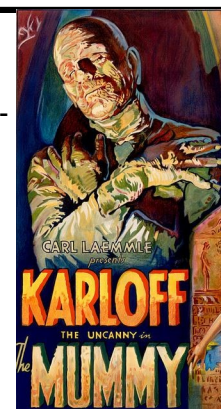
Perhaps the most widely-known secret in the world of Louisiana university budgeting is that, although officials at LSU of Alexandria wanted last year to reward faculty for increased productivity (huge enrollment increases; years of volunteer supplemental course loads) by giving a 4% raise, LSU System officialdom nixed the increment owing to fear that “optics” in the legislature were not correct. Experience has now shown that excessive caution in the goosebump-ridden LSU System office had no effect on the evolution of the budget and that colleagues at the big-performing little schoolhouse on the Red River remained without relief from a nine-year raise drought for no good reason. Tired of stories about patience and (unfunded) appreciation, the LSUA Faculty Senate passed a resolution enumerating the numerous achievements and productivity increases of the LSUA faculty and urging the LSU Board of Supervisors to confer on all continuously employed LSUA faculty members a permanent raise of \$3,000.00 and calling for the development of a compensation policy that recognizes both the accomplishments and the loyalty of the LSUA cadre. At the May 6<sup>th</sup> LSU Board of Supervisors meeting, three LSUA faculty members—Susan Sullivan; Bernard Gallagher; and Christof Stumpf—appeared for public comment so as to acquaint the Board with the resolution. LSU Board Chairman Ray Lasseigne responded by advising each speaker that he or she would be limited to three minutes and affirming that the Board appreciates good work—and then promptly went back to the agenda. In response to this effort, the LSU Council of Faculty Advisors determined that it would begin organizing campus-based teams to address the Board at each and every meeting on a topic of faculty concern. Applause is due to our LSUA colleagues for their courageous efforts to organize and to speak out for their colleagues.



Bernard Gallagher spearheads LSUA salary initiative

## TIGER ATHLETIC FOUNDATION OVERREACH PIQUES FUNDRAISING CONTROL QUESTIONS

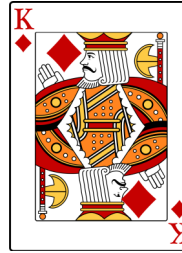
Over the years, the *Newsletter* has reported several examples of breakdowns in the command and control structure overseeing assorted development and fundraising entities. Events on several campuses have led to questions about whether campus executive officers—the deputies of the people—are really in charge of booster foundations or whether the proverbial tail is not only wagging but shaking the dog (or tiger or jaguar or Ragin’ Cajun or whatever tailed totem is at play). The *Newsletter* has questioned, in particular, the unproven theory that athletic foundations do no harm to other university charities—that they attract only donations that would never go to support academic causes. Now the biggest of all foundations, The TAF (Tiger Athletic Foundation), has committed an act of overweening exceeding all others to date by mounting a campaign for post mortem donations or what are euphemistically called “legacies” (tigers in the real world might use the word “prey”). In tender phraseology worthy of the soft-spoken character Kaa in Walt Disney’s version of *The Jungle Book*, a splashy new [TAF advertisement](#) proclaims that “we want to celebrate YOU now!” and then asks the affluent to designate the TAF as the beneficiary of wills, life insurance policies, retirement plans, and estates. Perhaps there was a time when universities trained those who were nearing the final station on life’s journey to bestow their possessions—not “now!,” but after it was all over—on worthy causes that advanced learning and bettered humankind. Those days seem to be over. Was it not the mummy, in the famous film of the same name, that punished those who overweened regarding the property of those heading into the next world?



Tiger Athletic Foundation plunders legacies, fills bleachers with unadvised souls

## LSU SYSTEM ORG CHART SHOWS BUSINESS AS USUAL

A few weeks ago, the *Newsletter* investigative team discovered that the LSU System office (which now calls itself, in genuine Orwellian style, simply “the university”) had, shall we say, neglected to post the system-level organizational chart on its web site. Finding the organizational chart for the LSU A&M campus was a piece of cake, but finding its system-level counterpart required more than a metal detector. A review of this [chart](#) shows why the System might not want to advertise it. Although the propaganda surrounding the various consolidations of campuses and offices suggests that the new arrangements under the “One LSU” program might allow the composite institution to become an academic powerhouse headed by strong, centralized, and enlightened leadership, what the new organizational chart reveals is an intensification of the status quo and a Balkanization of territories. The office of Executive Vice-President and Provost job, which was to have hovered over the report lines for the campus Chancellors, has now slipped below that threshold, with the campus Chancellors reporting directly to the President, all in a non-consultative fashion that ensures that they will compete against one another for the President’s favor (and therefore remain obedient) rather than launching cooperative projects. In another corner of this Yuri-Andropov-appropriate chart, the Athletic Director, who was transformed by former Chancellor Mike Martin into a Vice-Chancellor in order to make him or her more accountable to the academic side of the university, has likewise reverted to a direct dependent of the President. Quaintly dotted affiliation lines conceal the confusion and instability in the command and control structures relating to the agriculture effort, to the foundations, and to the finance side of the university. Most distressing of all is the complete lack of academic presence at the very top level—a situation that recalls the high-casualty British Navy of the eighteenth century, where captains of ships routinely came from wealthy or influential families rather than from naval academies.



## LSU DAY AT THE CAPITOL: KING SWEEP INTO FAKE FACULTY FETE

April 13, 2016: a day that will live, not in infamy, but in the annals of administrative showmanship. Billed as “LSU Day at the Capitol,” that day was dedicated, by King Alexander and the LSU central administration, as an occasion for reminding legislators of the manifold ways in which higher education with a tiger touch benefits our state. The PR-proficient President announced that “LSU faculty, students, and staff represented the university” at this festive occasion. The only trouble with this is that it seems not to be true. A review of the official [photo record](#) of the event reveals an image of only one faculty member who also happens to be an administrator while a survey of faculty governance leaders up and down the LSU system indicates that none of them knew anything about this and that such faculty members who may have turned up at the fake faculty fest had been hand-picked by administrators. Looks as if, once again, the administration is afraid of what unscreened faculty might say.



## BRAC LUNCHEON LAUNCHES DIALOGUE

April Fools Event got off to a refreshingly non-foolish start with the first luncheon dialogue between executives from the Baton Rouge Area Foundation (BRAC) and an assortment of LSU A&M faculty members (Griffin Campbell; Judith Schiebout; Gundela Hachmann; Stephanie Braunstein) and administrators. Envisioned by LSU Provost Richard “Rick” Koubek, the luncheon aimed to eliminate misunderstandings between the business and academic communities; to find ways to enhance the relations between business and the full range of university efforts; and to inject more of an LSU presence into venues around the greater Baton Rouge area. The first luncheon centered primarily on introductions, on the exposition of the BRAC strategic plan, and on the defining of faculty concerns regarding the culture and economy of the Baton Rouge area. Great things are yet to come!



The LSU Faculty Senate is working with Campus Federal Credit Union to ease the transition from the current twelve-month payroll cycle to the nine-month payroll cycle. Campus Federal was started by seven LSU Faculty members, so it is only fitting that we work with them to provide solutions and options for you. With the changes that will be occurring with Workday and the payment cycle transition, Campus Federal is available to assist with your financial needs.

Campus Federal is a full service financial institution offering consumer and business products and services – checking, savings, money market, certificates, and credit cards. Specifically, they offer automated payroll deposits and deductions to assist with the Workday transition. In addition, service charges on the different checking accounts can be easily avoided without the regular automatic deposit, more information can be found at [Campus Classic Checking](#) and [Lagniappe Checking](#) pages.

LSU employees, faculty, staff, and family are all eligible to join Campus Federal, find out how to [join today](#).  
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**From 7-10pm**  
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## Save the Date!

### Night at the Capitol Park Museum Gala, a Celebration of Festivals

**Saturday, June 11th**

Roll out the red carpet and get ready for a celebration that will come to life with live entertainment, food & spirits. Come support the museum and discover Louisiana's culture on display for all to see. Click the image to purchase tickets!

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The Capitol Park Museum is located at 660 N. Fourth St.

The museum is wheelchair accessible. For more information, visit [louisianastatemuseum.org](http://louisianastatemuseum.org).



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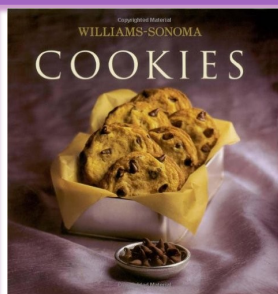
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—Continued from page 8

Autumn, the harvest season, at once marks the acme of the acidic tastes of summer even as the onrush of apples marks the turn from the brilliance of berries to the mellowness of orchard fruit. As the weather cools, the calorie demand goes up (at least for those not completely

given to desk work), and with that the taste for vegetable protein. In Louisiana, late October heralds the renewal of tastes for that front-porch favorite, chocolate chip cookies with nut additives. Among not only the easiest but also the most durable desserts, the assorted versions of chocolate chip cookies all offer a shelf life approaching a full week if kept in an air-tight container. Culinarists differ with regard to the question of protein-driven additives, with some favoring walnuts, others endorsing pecans, and still others embracing the full range of woody kernels. Nuts play an important role in the chocolate chip cookie by blunting and distributing the straight-up butter-and-sugar taste on the famous dough. In favor of chopped walnuts is their slight bitterness, which compliments the edgy sweetness of the cookie itself; in favor of pecans is their slight butterscotch flavor, which blends exquisitely with similar notes in the brazen wafer. Although the chocolate chip cookies legendarily emanates from grandma's kitchen, the best, somewhat de-sweetened recipe for modern tastes hides in the [Williams-Sonoma Cookies cookbook](#).

Very late fall and early winter brings with it the renewed zest for one of the world's most complex and even mysterious (could it be alien DNA at work?) flavors: chocolate. Chocolate offers a universe of possibilities, serving equally well as a principal component in a creation such as chocolate cake or as a decorating covering—[couverture](#)—for other desserts (think *Donauwelle*). In American restaurant culture, chocolate may well have become too much of a thing-in-itself, with perversely concentrated creations such as chocolate decadence cake or Mississippi mud pie robbing this subtle ingredient of the contrast required to elicit its full bouquet. Perhaps the grandest and yet also most approachable fine confections created for chocolate originated with widely heralded Parisian patisserie Dalloyau. Few morsels can compete with the famous *opéra* minicake, a small, rectangular bar cake that might be described as a distant, denser, French relative of Italian tiramisu. Comprised of multiple layers of sponge, buttercream, coffee syrup, chocolate ganache, and chocolate *couverture*, the *opéra* invokes almost every contrast and juxtaposition that has made chocolate famous without creating the overwhelmed feeling characteristic of chocolate-only desserts. The ideal venue for enjoying an *opéra* is an elegant café on a rainy early winter day in the arts district of a sophisticated city, but, in truth, this celestial composition will delight in any context. And you can make it yourself! Try the recipe at online gourmet

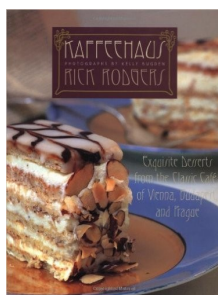


site [Epicurious](#).

One of the unexpected turns of the cooking calendar occurs at Christmas, when, unexpectedly, the weightiness of main courses and the ripening of citrus renews the appetite for fruits, at least in some modified form. Now is the time for a legendary

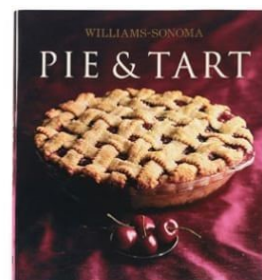


Austrian dessert, the justly applauded Linzer Torte. The simplest of all the grand tortes and well within the capability of beginners, the Linzer Torte is nothing but a crust comprised of flour, butter, ground nuts, and spices topped with a healthy dollop of berry jam (usually from bramble berries such as raspberries or blackberries or occasionally currants), all finished with a merry lattice crust. An eye-catching Linzer Torte can be assembled in half an hour and baked in forty minutes yet, despite its simplicity, can please the most sophisticated gastronome with its ability to reconcile the brilliance of fruit with the Santa-Clausian savor of cinnamon and similar sandy spices. Linzer Torte recipes are as abundant as bees on a flowering berry bush, but a superb entry point is in the carefully explained recipe found in cookbook super-producer Rick Rodgers's [Kaffeehaus](#). Letting winter go by without at least one Linzer Torte is like stripping Kris Kringle of his patent-leather belt!



Everyone in the bake house is slightly sad when winter wanes, but early spring brings with it the hope of another cycle. One of the most encouraging and uplifting recipes for this in-between time marries the woodsy nuts of winter with the oncoming fruity flush of spring. Perfect for February and even Valentine's-Day-appropriate, an Italian almond-raspberry tart suits diminished post-holiday appetites while providing a sparkle of aromatic flavor anticipating the first flowers of the new year. Little more than a standard pastry crust (make it, don't buy it—nothing is easier than crust!) topped with a marzipan custard and raspberry *confiture* and then sprinkled with a few shaved almonds, the Italian almond tart seems to get the jump on time itself by eliciting the wonders of stone fruit—of seeds—even before germination begins. A brilliant recipe appears in the [Williams Sonoma Pie and Tart cookbook](#), but the devious or thrifty might want to take a look at the free version on [Pinterest](#). And, remember, most of the world's almonds come from California, but most of its high-quality almond [paste and marzipan](#) originates in Denmark. By preparing an Italian almond tart, you help the agricultural heartland of a little Scandinavian nation fight back against worldwide food combines!

Dessert is the dining course that seems to intimidate most people and that seems to draw the most adverse publicity among health enthusiasts. Fortunately, the good feeling and healthful glow that comes with a modest slice of cake or a nibble of cookies more than compensates for any dietary damage; even more fortunately, dessert is probably the easiest and most predictable of all kitchen assignments. Open that oven today!





## ELEVATE OR DEVALUE?

Once in a while, the Board of Regents makes a move in the right direction. Under the stewardship of creative Commissioner Joseph C. Rallo, the regents recently approved the “Elevate” program that the Commissioner has been bruited. At one time, the program was tagged “Educate—Elevate—Innovate,” but whether through the influence of graphic designers of consultants or nudging from the *Newsletter*, the pedagogy- and commerce-related words have receded into a small font while the key “E” word has fluffed up to billboard-ready dimensions (good call, Commissioner!). As is the case with everything emanating from the Regents office, there is cause for a tad bit of concern. Item number two in the program, “access to graduate education must be re-evaluated from a narrower state-wide perspective,” certainly needs decrypting. What exactly is “narrower” about a statewide perspective? Does this mean more cutbacks on prosperity-inducing graduate education? Will we see consolidation of programs? Not all of these prospects are bad, but clarification would be helpful. This caution having been sounded, there is reason to hope that the Regents, with help from Rallo, will soon be accounted rational creatures.



Commissioner Rallo unveils his Elevate program at Alexandria

## PROGRESSIVE ATTAINMENT: A NON-MONOPOLY WHERE STUDENTS ALWAYS PASS GO

Traditional higher education has always practiced a kind of post hoc monopoly. Students, once enrolled in an institution, have remained at their educational provider of first choice, off-limits to competitors. After a student entered, say, Oshkosh Omnicurricular College, recruiters from other campuses laid off, looking for fresh pickings among high schoolers or graduating junior college students. Higher education resembled a high-stakes *Monopoly* game; when a student drew a bad card (or grade), that student went, if not directly to jail, then into the drop-out pool, there to languish forever among the unhappy metrics. Under pressure to increase graduation and degree-conferral rates, Southeastern Louisiana University and Northshore Technical Community College have now devised a new plan, the “Progressive Attainment Model,” in which the aforementioned bad card or grade leads not to the pokey and not to dropout status, but straight back to the “go” square. In the Progressive Attainment Model, students who accumulate a certain number of credits undergo degree audits, then, if standards are met, are reverse-enrolled in another, usually two-year institution, where they quickly receive a credential or even a degree. These students may then enter industry, acquire additional life experience, and then perhaps re-enroll in another, possibly four-year institution, where they will again graduate. The jury remains out on the scheme.



## LSUS CHANCELLOR CLARK LAUDS SUSLA FS PRESIDENT HESTER

In one of the most remarkable examples of cross-campus and faculty-administration collegiality to date, LSUS (LSU—Shreveport) Chancellor Larry Clark used part of his report during the May 6<sup>th</sup> LSU Board of Supervisors meeting to praise the contributions of Southern University Shreveport Faculty Senate President Sonya Hester. Clark included Hester in his articulation of a comprehensive education plan for the north Louisiana region. Bravo for Chancellor Clark, who continues making efforts to affirm the centrality of faculty to Louisiana’s higher education efforts.



## GEAUX SHOP VENDOR SNEAKS IN EXTRA SPENDING GOAD

One of the selling points for the Geaux Shop, LSU’s post-LAGRAD-Act, autonomous-campus purchasing system, was its ability to deliver any and every order at a discount, whether the item orders was a five-figure science tool or a five-cent eraser. Geaux Shoppers reeled in surprise when one of the vendors, Office Depot, slipped into the web interface a banner that warns purchasers when their orders fall below a minimum. Consultation with top-level money manager Dan Layzell revealed that no one in the LSU Finance headquarters knew anything about this supposed “recommended minimum order.” Layzell and his comrades are presently taking action to deal with this instance of vendor overweening (thanks, Dan!). Let this tale be a lesson to those who think that outsourcing and the elimination of regulation will solve all economic problems and encourage thrift (looks like you were wrong, Adam Smith!).

### Please Note

\$17.00 remaining to meet LSU's recommended order minimum of \$25.00.

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LIVE GOLD**

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## ALOHA MEANS BOTH GOODBYE AND HELLO: HOWARD, KIRYLO ON THE MOVE

The *Newsletter* shares with Santa Claus the property of knowing who is naughty and who is nice—and the list of the nice, *Gott sei dank*, is far longer than the list of the naughty. Two of the nicest people on the planet, LSUA Chancellor Dan Howard and Southeastern Louisiana University educationalist-columnist James Kirylo, have decided to graze the grass in greener pastures. The *Newsletter* rejoices in their good fortune and wise decisions but laments the loss to Louisiana of two such diesel-level engines of improvement.



LSUA Chancellor Dan Howard heads to active retirement

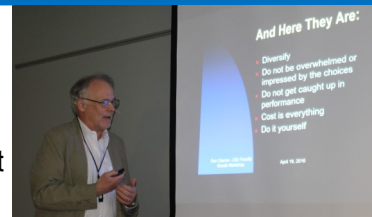
Chancellor Howard will head into an active retirement filled with consultation and other good works while analyst James Kirylo will take up a new post on the faculty at the University of South Carolina. Fortunately, as Hawaiians know, any “aloha” moment both implies parting and greeting. We anticipate that we will be seeing plenty of these gentlemen in the future, for no more can Saturn shed its rings than can these two great orbs of excellence stop shedding their light on Louisiana!



Educator James Kirylo moves to South Carolina professorship

## DON CHANCE RETIREMENT SEMINAR DRAWS SRO CROWD

Anyone who ever doubted that faculty and staff members are slow to help themselves should have attended the colleague-to-colleague retirement planning seminar offered on April 16<sup>th</sup> by LSU Finance professor Don Chance. That event, slated for a room that seated 100, drew an “SRO” (standing room only) crowd! For the past two years, the LSU A&M Faculty Senate has organized general, all-purpose financial wellness seminars by way of helping members of the university community get a grip on their finances. This year, the Faculty Senate decided to “go deep” by asking a colleague with no ties to financial firms to look carefully at the options that are actually available to participants in university retirement plans. Chance’s surprising, ovation-eliciting seminar centered on the potentially gigantic impact of fund administration costs on the portfolios of long-term investors such as retirement plan participants. The PowerPoint slides from Professor Chance’s runaway success of a show are available online by going to the multimedia archive of the [LSU A&M Faculty Senate web site](#) and selecting the Don Chance presentation, which is presently the first line in the main menu. In view of its popularity, LSU A&M Faculty Senate officials are reviewing the possibilities for taking the Don Chance seminar statewide.



Don Chance draws SRO crowd to retirement planning seminar

## CSU SETTLES CONTRACT WITH FACULTY

One way to track both the good and bad deeds of both administrators and of educational institutions is to look at the post-departure trajectories of the institutions that Louisiana campus administrators formerly led. The campus once managed by LSU President King Alexander, Cal State Long Beach, quickly became the epicenter of a faculty labor movement that culminated in a series of targeted, brief strikes. The Cal State central administration, being somewhat more cordial toward labor interests than individual campus administrators, resolved the problem by offering up a staged series of general salary increases that include an immediate 5% increase followed in the next fiscal year by a 2% general increase and a 2.65% step increase. Additionally, the minimum increment for those promoted from assistant to associate professor or from associate to full professor will rise from 7.5% to 9%. Perhaps, in order to achieve similar results, we need some more labor-friendly executives in Louisiana higher education system offices?



## NEW VISION STATEMENT COMING FOR LSU

At one time, LSU’s vision statement, *Flagship 2020*, seemed, as might be appropriate for the vision test to which its title alludes, to gaze out at a distant future (let us overlook the fact

that the title for this ambitious program was something of a rhetorical blunder: a mixed metaphor forcing together nautical and optometric imagery). As of the publication date of this bulletin, however, the year 2020 is only 1,327 days away. Sensing that, as Walt Disney put it, “tomorrow is just a dream away,” visionary LSU Provost Rick Koubek has begun the process of formulating a new strategic plan for the marginally buoyant flagship institution. In a memorandum to the LSU community, Koubek announced that he had commissioned the LSU A&M University Planning Council to spearhead the development of the plan, adding that the planners should not limit themselves to “functional areas, such as research, teaching, and service,” but rather should consider “the higher order attributes that define our institution.” Koubek’s courageous charge represents the dawn of a new day insofar as it dashingly re-commits LSU to leadership, achievement, and the advancement of knowledge, even despite pressure to focus on commercial issues.





# MONTHLY MOVIE REVIEW

## THE BIG SHORT (Adam McKay, 2015)

Reviewed by Carl Freedman

Cinema, like every other art form, has both its powers and its limitations. One of the most obvious limitations is that, as a (largely) visual form, it has difficulty representing those areas of human experience that are hard to visualize, or at any rate hard to make visually appealing and interesting. There are, for example, many films about the law. But these films tend, overwhelmingly, to stress the dramatic human interactions of the courtroom and to give little or no attention to legal research—even though any real-life attorney will tell you that, in the practice of law as a whole, the hours spent poring through dusty law books are of far greater importance than courtroom theatrics. Doubtless many young viewers have been inspired to pursue a legal career by the performances of Orson Welles in *Compulsion* (Richard Fleischer, 1959), and of Spencer Tracy in *Inherit the Wind* (Stanley Kramer, 1960), and of Gregory Peck in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Robert Mulligan, 1962). But those viewers, grown up and admitted to the bar, are very unlikely to lead professional lives that have much, or anything, in common with the exploits of their screen heroes. Otto Preminger's *Anatomy of a Murder* (1959) is unusual in that it *does* make clear the importance of research; but even here it is James Stewart's visible histrionics, especially in his courtroom duels with George C. Scott, that are most memorable.

If there is any human activity today that seems resistant to visual treatment, it is high finance as practiced on Wall Street (and in the City of London and in the other global centers of finance capital). The workings of finance are not only nearly impossible to visualize: in their most consequentially avant-garde forms, they are often said to be so mind-bendingly complex as to be hardly comprehensible in *any* way, save through algorithms so sophisticated that nobody without a Ph.D. in mathematics is likely to be able to follow them. It may, indeed, actually be an open question as to whether certain highly computer-dependent areas of modern finance are genuinely understood by any human being on the planet.

Nonetheless, the financial crisis of 2008 and its apparently interminable aftermath have made clear (to adapt Trotsky's famous remark to the Russian Formalist literary critic Viktor Shklovsky) that, though we may not be interested in finance, finance is very much interested in us. The enormous impact that the most abstruse Wall Street speculation can have on the day-to-day lives of millions (or billions) of people has made it inevitable that filmmakers would attempt cinematic treatment of finance today. Several good films on the subject have appeared; and it is interesting to consider how they have responded to the representational problems that finance presents to the filmmaker's art.

Mostly, I think, they have responded by trying to evade the central difficulties. Martin Scorsese's 2013 film *The Wolf of Wall Street* (which I reviewed in this space about two years ago) is the best of the finance-related movies of recent years; and, after the initial scenes, it takes its leave of high finance and (despite the title) of Wall Street altogether. Instead, it focuses on what might be called low finance: specifically, the "pumping and dumping" of low-value

stocks, a confidence trick so simple that any bright fifth-grader could understand it. In addition, finance itself gets considerably less screen time than the lifestyle that the protagonist's unprecedented success at pumping and dumping makes possible. In a somewhat parallel way, *Too Big to Fail* (Curtis Hanson, 2011) is set during the worst of the 2008 meltdown, but turns most its attention from the inner workings of finance to the political response to the crisis. The most memorable characters are Fed Chair Ben Bernanke and Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson (well played by Paul Giamatti and William Hurt, respectively); and the film focuses on their attempts to stabilize the US economy as they deal with the skepticism of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, the ignorant fanaticism of the House Republican caucus, the confusion of Republican Presidential candidate John McCain, and the very mixed feelings that Paulson's erstwhile colleagues on Wall Street have about being bailed out by the federal government.

*The Big Short*, however, is noteworthy in focusing more squarely on high finance itself: while also being a hugely enjoyable movie that is 50% fast-paced thriller, 50% raucous comedy, and 100% outraged populist polemic. Hitherto known mainly for such lightweight comedies as *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy* (2004) and *Step Brothers* (2008), Adam McKay here applies his rapid pacing and his sense of comic timing to a far more serious purpose. The film is based on Michael Lewis's highly successful journalistic book, *The Big Short: Inside the Doomsday Machine* (2010); and, after you have watched it, you will not only be able to produce tolerably accurate definitions of such financial concepts as mortgage-backed securities, credit default swaps, and collateralized debt obligations, but you will also have a sound general understanding of the forces that created America's housing bubble and led inevitably to its 2008 bursting. This is achieved primarily through several autonomous but overlapping seriocomic narratives that focus on a few oddball members of the financial profession. Mainly because they just pay careful attention to what is going on around them, our heroes (I use the term mainly in the structural sense of protagonists) are able to see the crash coming when nearly everyone else assumes that the boom financial market will last forever. Their stories are nicely supplemented by a series of witty celebrity cameos in which, for instance, the chef Anthony Bourdain (while cooking in a kitchen) and the actress Margot Robbie (while sipping white wine in a bubble bath) lucidly explain some of the more abstruse financial terms that the movie introduces. Though *The Big Short* is at heart a deeply didactic film, there is nothing dry or intrusive about its didacticism. On the contrary, the latter is thoroughly assimilated into the movie's formal structure; and, while watching, you may be so entertained that you hardly even notice, at first, how much you are learning.



—Continued on page 19



## ALEXANDRIAN READER GALLAGHER IDENTIFIES ENLIGHTENING COLUMN

One of the pleasures of editing the *Newsletter* is the frequency with which colleagues statewide submit items of interest, items that might not rise to the front page of digests committed to large or general audiences or advertising revenue. Faithful reader and Alexandria Summit Meeting local arrangements manager Bernard Gallagher would like to draw reader attention to a fine piece by AAU (American Association of Universities) President Hunter Rawlings, who argues that higher education is not a commodity and should not be treated like one. Originally published in the *Washington Post* and available for free [online](#), the essay is a must-read for anyone who would like to persuade legislators, deal with supervisors and trustees, or otherwise free the pursuit of knowledge from the mantras of workforce development and “affordability.”



## UFO, UAL, OR URO? DARK BEHEMOTH HOVERS OVER LSU FIRST

Those who attend higher education management board meetings have come to expect shockers even when the agenda looks to be compounded of cotton candy with a dollop of saccharine. Even a seemingly innocuous order of business can suddenly set off alarm bells. The May 6<sup>th</sup> meeting of the LSU Board of Supervisors, which looked as if would compete for the international tedium award, turned out to be one of the most devastatingly amazing to date. Although few would associate “HRM” (human resources management) concerns with stand-up comedy, inveterately witty benefits expert A. G. Monaco was on deck to offer the annual report for LSU First, the highly successful medical plan that many LSU System employees prefer to the Office of Group Benefits (“OGB”) offerings. After more than a few gags from this Rodney Dangerfield of actuarial science, audience members began reeling as A. G. revealed some formerly top-secret facts about LSU First. When the LSU First plan was approved by the legislature, lawmakers, never reluctant to pursue their own interests, allowed entry into the plan not only for LSU employees, but also for legislators, their staff members, and an assortment of state employees. Said non-LSU employees were also empowered to remain on the LSU First plan even after moving to other state agencies. The latest analysis reveals that 70% of the new members of LSU First are *not* LSU employees and that this flood of refugees from other, less appealing OGB plans costs the plan, per capita, 17% to 31% more in claims payouts than do the LSU-affiliated members. Reasons for this skewed cost basis among non-LSU plan members range from poor dietary habits to lifestyle “issues” to higher reproductive rates (in many cases, owing to delayed family creation among long-studying academic personnel).



A G Monaco discovers URO hovering over benefits office

Most readers of the *Newsletter* know that, in the retirement plans, the “UAL” (unfunded accrued liability) eats up over 30% of contributions by sluicing them into the support of underfunded K–12 pensions. Now the same process is underway with medical plans as faculty premiums slide over to the support of non-academic personnel who would not qualify for the LSU actuarial pool were it not for legislative meddling. LSU employees this month received a premium increase; they may assume that all of that is going to buoy up unanticipated enrollment avalanches.

So, that dark form that you see hovering over the LSU System benefits office is not a UFO, nor is it the familiar old UAL, but a new spawn from the same economic nursery: a “URO,” or unfunded rip-off.

## SHORTS TRAVEL SCRATCHES MULTI-CITY ITINERARIES

Just when everyone thought that travel policy requirements for state employees were becoming more reasonable—at the very moment when the HotelPlanner accommodation booking requirements had been scuttled—Shorts Travel, the state-mandated travel agent, astounded academic itinerants with the most baffling pronouncement to date. Visitors to the Shorts web site now encounter a banner message reporting that owing to certain mysterious “changes” in the measurement of airline booking fees, the multi-city destination utility had been shut down until further notice (which notice has not yet arrived). Travelers are being instructed to book multi-city journeys as one-way segments in the interest of saving money. On seeing this bizarre banner, *Newsletter* shoppers went to work comparing airfares. These investigators discovered that, for the typical three-stop transatlantic journey (for example, Baton Rouge to London to Frankfurt and back to Baton Rouge), the fares assembled by using the multi-city option on any commercial travel vendor (Orbitz; Expedia; Travelocity) were two- to three-thousand dollars cheaper than the fares produced using the Shorts Travel method. Additionally, assembling multi-city journeys on many airline web sites triggered the Shorts “FindIt” utility, which quickly matched those commercially generated airfares despite the allegation in the banner announcement that this could no longer be done. Faculty activists are working with finance departments on various campuses to figure out what might be done about this capricious dismantling of an option used by countless faculty travelers. The denouement to this story will be announced in a future *Newsletter* issue.

**ALERT:** As a result of the major airlines’ recent change to the way fares are combined when booking travel to multiple destinations within the same trip, the “Multi-City” feature has been disabled. If your air travel arrangements involve more than one destination city, you will need to book travel to each destination city separately. STM is monitoring the airline change and will update this process when we are confident lowest fares are available using this functionality. At that time the Multi-City feature will be reinstated.

## MANN PRESIDES OVER HIGHER ED DOCUMENTARY DEBUT

Witty, cerebral, and constructively irreverent, NOLA.com and *New Orleans Times-Picayune* journalist and columnist Bob Mann is always looking for ways to bring the case for higher education to a large, media-savvy audience. Mann's latest event: presiding over the Louisiana debut of a major new documentary (produced by genuine Hollywood moguls) that exposes the assault on higher education by an assortment of heavily-funded neo-conservative foundations and think tanks. Entitled *Starving the Beast*, the quick-paced but sobering film explores the harsh ideologies of the Koch Foundation, the educational ideas of Texas Governor Rick Perry and his henchmen, and the machinations of a rag-tag group of think-tank dependents around the country. Festooned with most of the features of a west-coast premier (alas, however, no red carpets or limos or megaphone-toting directors in knickers), Mann's unveiling attracted a full house and included post-screening commentary from senior, balding bigwigs such as political machine operator James Carville and celebrity-magnetized King Alexander. True, the film has a few drawbacks—it is a little bit too committed to big names and talking heads and looks rather like an extended, somewhat angry version of a Discovery Channel documentary—but, all in all, it should provide a fine focal point for persons seeking to peer into the mischief underway in American higher education. Thanks go out to Bob Mann for the application of his inexhaustible ingenuity to the support of higher education.



Bob Mann introduces *Starving the Beast*

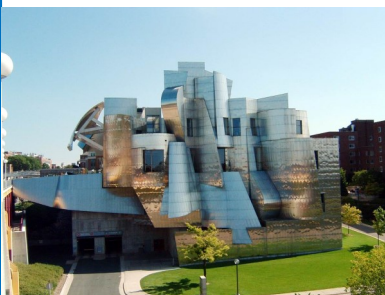
## NICHOLSON GATEWAY PROPOSAL DRAWS GRIMACES, TRIGGERS "PRESIDENTIAL MOMENT"

Louisiana universities prize little as much as bizarre aesthetics. The LSU in Eunice campus, out in the middle of farmlands, sports a Victorian clock tower that plays the Westminster chimes; Nicholls State abounds in Roman columns that disappear under live oak trees that would perish in a Mediterranean climate. The latest outbreak of aesthetic inflammatory disease is erupting along Nicholson Boulevard, adjacent to the LSU A&M campus. At the May 6<sup>th</sup> LSU Board meeting, the architects revealed and the Supervisors approved the plan for the Nicholson Gateway development, a gigantic renovation of a blighted area between LSU and downtown Baton Rouge that, its proponents claim, will confer a new visual identity on LSU while uplifting incoming campus visitors. Reactions to the plan among educated audience members were less than enthusiastic. Looking at the colossal, utterly unoriginal imitations of the faux-Italian barracks that comprise the LSU campus, one wit commented that the aggressively flat main buildings resembled nothing so much as a nineteenth-century Austrian military academy. Other words heard included "gulag" and "penitentiary" (the overall development includes fenced recreation yards reminiscent of San Quentin). For their part, the architects bragged about having harvested "elements" from the campus: about the studious avoidance of originality. Perhaps the strangest moment involved an enthusiastic endorsement from King Alexander, who had previously critiqued campus architecture but who now seems to have flipped. Al-



Nicholson Gateway facility (or correctional center?) lauded by King Alexander

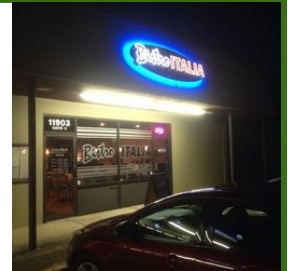
exander slammed campuses where monumental buildings "didn't look like anything else on the campus" and singled out for abuse the highly creative Weisman Art Museum on the campus of the University of Minnesota, a structure created by renowned postmodernist architect Frank Gehry. Well, it looks like a long time before LSU will get out of the "big house" mentality.



Breathtakingly original University of Minnesota art museum slammed by LSU

## TIP OF THE MONTH: BISTRO ITALIA

Although folks in Louisiana like to boast about the selection of dining venues and the overall high quality of deep-south chefs, the Italian dining experience in the Baton Rouge metro area has always been somewhat less than stellar. There is north Louisiana import Monjuni's, where the diner encounters overly sweetened tomato sauce; there is the old-fashioned atmosphere of Gino's, with its godfather-meets-Dean-Martin theatricalism; there is the Little Village, which competes with Gino's for the nostalgia market; there is Nino's, which is long on flavors but short on service and seating space; and then there are the innovators who have gone out of business (for example, the wonderful Oscar's Pizza Joint, where the fresh and Euro-evocative ingredients seemed to jar the local palate). Now a fresh new entrant in the Italian derby, Bistro Italia (11903 Coursey Boulevard), has come along, indeed appears to be entering its second year. Located in the admittedly grim strip-mall wasteland along Coursey Boulevard, Bistro Italia offers a compact but sound menu featuring a reasonable assortment of both Italian classics and excerpts from the evolving book of Italo-American cuisine. Ingredients are fresh, sophisticated (both the feta cheese on the salads and the pepperoni on the pizza resonated with pleasingly complex flavor and tickled with texture), and properly distributed (no pizzas with stifling piles of meat on them here). Although it is impossible to overcome completely the coldness that comes with a glass storefront, the proprietors, who seem young and enthusiastic, have done a superb job in creating a modern, design- and art-rich environment that approximates an urban bistro. Customers at Bistro Italia evidence remarkable diversity given that the area remains notorious for its conservatism. Hop in and enjoy first-rate pizza, wraps, salads, or pasta!





Much of the film's appeal lies in several excellent performances. The best is one that requires me to offer as radical an aesthetic revaluation as I have ever made: for, prior to watching *The Big Short*, I would have said that, if there was one prominent actor in the world who was a total waste of space, it was Steve Carell. After all, Carell, among other atrocities, was in large part responsible for taking one of the most brilliant television comedies of all time—Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant's great BBC series, *The Office* (2001-2003)—and transforming it into the almost unwatchably banal NBC show of the same title (2005-2013). But here, having gained some weight and not even immediately recognizable from his television role, Carell is absolutely superb as Mark Baum, a profane and independent-minded Wall Street financier. Once a brilliant schoolboy in a Jewish religious school who disconcerted the rabbis by ingeniously seeking inconsistencies in the word of God, the grown-up Baum has lost none of his skepticism toward authority. Throughout the film, he becomes increasingly appalled as he realizes how fraudulent the US financial system is and how essentially criminal are the big banks and their enablers at the rating agencies. Like the film's other heroes, he sees that the mortgage-backed securities—hugely profitable financial instruments that represent the bundling of thousands of ordinary home loans—on which the American economy has come increasingly to depend are certain to collapse eventually, because too many of the underlying mortgage loans can never be repaid. So he performs "the big short": that is, he shorts (bets against) the housing market (in effect, against the US economy) by purchasing hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of credit default swaps and other financial policies that will pay off if and when the mortgage-backed securities crash. When they do, he gains vast profits but no joy, for he knows how much human misery the crash is causing.

Nearly as good as Carell is Christian Bale as Dr. Michael Burry, the very first person to grasp the truth of things. A medical doctor who no longer practices, Burry is an eccentric financial genius who turns up at the office of the hedge fund he manages wearing shorts, a T-shirt, and sandals, and who spends much of the workday listening to death metal and beating on things with a pair of drumsticks. It is at Burry's request that credit default swaps are invented. As he visits the offices of one giant bank after another, atypically wearing a business suit and asking to purchase extremely expensive policies that will pay off only when mortgage-backed securities lose their value, the bankers with whom he meets can hardly believe that they are hearing what he says. Nobody has ever bet against the housing market before, for it would be—they are certain—an insane bet. Defaults on home loans are extremely rare; if there is one bill that even the most financially strapped homeowners generally manage to pay, it is the monthly mortgage note. Why would anyone expect defaults to occur on a scale that could threaten the integrity of the mortgage-backed securities on which the banks have been making vast sums? Has Burry, who is known to be a weirdo, finally lost his mind completely? Still, if Burry is offering to pay the banks huge premiums that the bankers are confident can amount to nothing but pure profit for them, why should they say

no? If he wants credit default swaps, then credit default swaps he shall have. But Dr. Burry's crucial act of genius here has consisted largely in doing something very simple that, however, nobody else had ever thought, or bothered, to do: He has actually read through the thousands and thousands of pages of unspeakably dry legalese that record the mortgage loans which have been bundled into mortgage-backed securities. In this way, he knows that the financial pyramid on which so much of the American economy depends is rotten in its foundation and so must collapse sooner or later. He cannot know exactly when the crash will come—and it requires nerves of steel to ignore the almost unanimous consensus that the enormous sums his fund is paying on the premiums for the credit default swaps amount to money down the drain—but he is rightly confident that come it must and will.

There are other notable performances as well. Ryan Gosling plays Jared Vennett, a smooth and impeccably groomed official of Deutsche Bank who, apparently alone among the bankers that have sold credit default swaps to Dr. Burry, sees that Burry, far from being a lunatic perversely determined to throw money away, is actually onto something. Vennett also serves as the film's sometime narrator, occasionally informing us of points at which the screenplay has (or has not) taken small liberties with the historical record. Somewhat less prominent but perhaps more memorable is Brad Pitt as Ben Rickert. Once a big-time Wall Street trader who has grown disgusted not only with the financial system but with modern capitalist civilization as a whole, Rickert is retreating to a rustic Thoreauvian existence, eating vegetables that he grows in his own garden. But he comes out of retirement to help two young friends of his, who run a ridiculously small hedge fund, to get rich after they stumble on the big short entirely by accident.

Whenever the hero or heroes of a movie attempt a difficult job, the audience naturally roots for the job's success, however morally dubious it may be. Perhaps the most classic instance occurs in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960). When Norman Bates cleans up and covers up after the murder of Marion Crane, we want him to succeed. Our heart stops when Marion's car at first fails to sink completely into the swamp where Norman has driven it; and we breathe easy again when, a few seconds later, it does sink after all. In a film about finance, we want the heroes to make money—which, here, they do. But some of the heroes themselves caution us against being too happy for them: for their success depends on the human disaster of the 2008 crash, with its massive destruction of people's jobs and homes and security. Ben Rickert at one point dampens his protégés' enthusiasm by informing them (and us) that 40,000 Americans die for every percentage point that the unemployment rate rises. For all its comic turns and sometime high spirits, *The Big Short* is a deeply sad movie: sad not for its central characters, who do very well for themselves, but for you and for me. For we, of course, are the ones who have really been shorted.

**The Newsletter staff will be on a brief hiatus over the summer. But, fear not, loyal readers, the Newsletter staff shall return with a brand new issue scheduled for release on September 30, 2016.**