

Who's who: Dr. Goll (top row, center) and Dr. Hans (third row, center) among the faces of their Face First students



Never Forget a Face

Your face is your identity. So says School of Dental Medicine professor and orthodontist Mark Hans, who, through his SAGES seminar, Face First, leads his students on a journey of learning and self-discovery.

In 1999, Mark Hans traveled to Paris for a lecture. He visited the Louvre Palace and Museum in part to view the Venus de Milo statue, the most famous of all Venus figures and often considered the ideal of Western beauty for women. Although the statue is missing its arms, myth has it that one arm held a shield and the other arm a mirror so that she could admire her own beauty.

While there, Dr. Hans happened upon a fascinating phenomenon. Visitors, seemingly enamored of the statue, waited in long lines to take a picture alongside it, as if the statue were an old friend. Dr. Hans found it peculiar that the people posing with the statue were neither Greek nor ancient, yet were applying that standard of beauty to themselves. Venus, he explains, represents a global view of attractiveness.

Still pondering the allure of Venus, he tapped into his training as an orthodontist and teacher and thought of ways to intersect science and art. “What does the face really mean to people? What makes a face attractive? And what about facial deformity? I wanted to explore all these issues,” he

says. Conversations with colleagues and others eventually led him to develop Face First.

Face First is part of Case’s undergraduate program SAGES, or Seminar Approach to General Education and Scholarship. SAGES is in the second year of a three-year pilot program. It will be instituted as the common undergraduate core experience starting fall semester 2005. The program will span all four years of a student’s undergraduate experience and consist of small interdisciplinary seminars designed to place subject matter in context and to promote integrated learning, critical thinking, improved communication skills, and close relationships with faculty advisors.

Face First is in the “Thinking about the Social World” sequence and exposes students to anthropology, anatomy, art, sociology, literature, psychology, and writing. Dr. Hans has been deliberate in his choice of material that touches upon each of those disciplines.

His fall semester class was the second time Dr. Hans has taught Face First. He bolstered the syllabus even more

using the insights he gained while on sabbatical last spring in Florence, Italy. He taught at the University of Florence and visited museums in search of all things pertaining to the face in art.

He also studied the artistic interpretations of David, from boyhood to old age, and was impressed at the understanding of the aging process demonstrated by these artists 500 years ago. In general, he says, people want to see symmetry. Called the divine proportion, or the golden ratio, it refers to how the face is divinely and mathematically proportioned to achieve balance. This idea of facial symmetry is centuries old and cross-cultural, he says, though some facial features, especially among celebrities, can be exaggerated and still be considered attractive.

People who have recognizable features set them apart from others: Iman’s large forehead. Julia Roberts’s broad smile. Lauren Hutton’s gapped teeth. Harrison Ford’s gashed chin.

Dr. Hans credits Asdghig Karajayerlian (GRS ’00, English), a onetime co-instructor, with developing the six themes for the seminar: Identity,

Self-Recognition; Diversity, Beauty, Perception; Facial Deformity, Marginality; Self-presentation, Self-Creation; Artistic Presentation; Facial Communication, Going Faceless, Anonymity.

“Your face is your identity. People recognize who you are by your face,” he says.

The Face Unfolds

Sixteen undergraduates met midday, twice a week, in a classroom inside the university’s Olin Building to analyze what may be the most sensitive of all the body’s parts: the face.

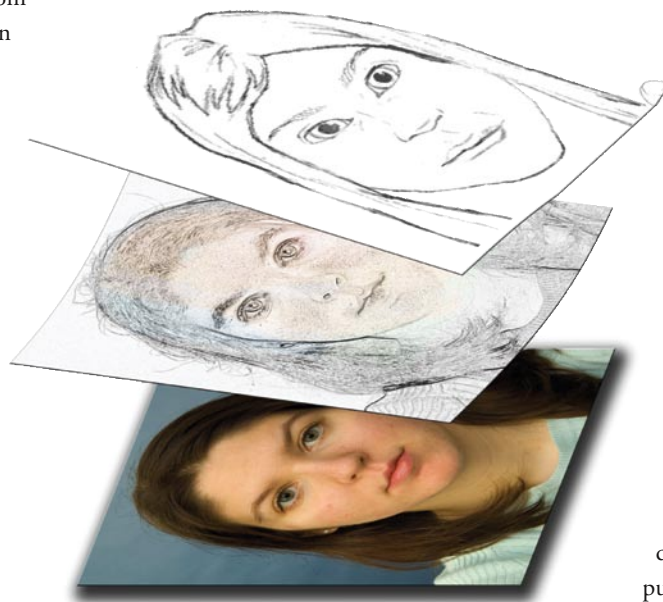
Over the semester, the class of mostly women explored, discussed, and debated subjects relating to the face and facial features. They also have considered the individual’s and society’s roles in shaping self-image and questioned the notion of an accepted standard of beauty.

Often the class split into two smaller discussion groups. Dr. Hans, associate professor and chair of the Department of Orthodontics in the School of Dental Medicine, and co-instructor Paulette Goll, a lecturer in the Department of English, asked insightful questions to facilitate the topic of the day. While most students were willing to share their opinions, others listened and guarded their thoughts.

An array of mixed media—books, magazine articles, essays, videos, and a museum outing—helped students contemplate the six themes.

Students were required to respond to their classroom lectures, reading assignments, and discussions through audiovisual oral presentations and essays. Dr. Goll (GRS ’87, English) helped students formulate their ideas and concepts on paper. She then

pored over their work,



offering critique and praise, with the goal of readying their text for their portfolio, a SAGES requirement.

“Students generally choose the subject; they write what they care about,” she says. Indeed, students did not shy away from controversy, whether it be self-image, body art and body piercing, or cosmetic facial procedures.

Who Am I?

One of the first identity projects

required students to use an FBI software program to sketch their face. They posted the printed sketches side by side and had to identify one another. Some were easy to recognize; others stumped the class.

“The brain identifies features by characteristics,” Dr. Hans says. “Those who lack distinct features often get the ‘You remind me of...’ or ‘You look like someone I know.’”

To test this theory, students used their sketches as “wanted” posters and placed them around campus. The first person to correctly identify the face in the sketch would receive \$20.

“This year, the face the students chose to post was hard to identify. We got four and five different answers,” Dr. Hans says.

A social science experiment required each student to wear a pair of fake glasses with the nose and mustache attached, go about their typical day, and gauge reactions. The purpose was to find out what happens when you change your appearance to stand out from the crowd.

“Some students said people pretended they didn’t see them,” Dr. Goll retells. “Others were approached and asked why. When I wore them, the response I received was, ‘How could they possibly do that to you?’”

Eye of the Beholder

If there was one component Dr. Hans wanted to use in Face First, it was the 1960s TV series *The Twilight Zone*, by Emmy award-winning writer

Rod Serling. Using his technology-enhanced classroom, Dr. Hans showed a DVD of the segment “Eye of the Beholder” (November 11, 1960), filmed in black and white.

“I remember that show from my youth. It was always in my mind from the beginning, especially since it involved surgeons... goofy ones.”

The session featured a woman in a hospital room with her face wrapped in bandages. She hopes that her latest round of treatments—medicinal injections— will enable her to live a “normal” life. Should the treatments fail, she would go to a commune with people who shared her disability, or be admitted to a state hospital.

As the story unfolds, not once does the viewer see the faces of the actors. Instead, they must pay attention to voice intonation, body language, and other visual cues.

Finally the doctor removes the bandages. The medical staff recoils. The patient is light haired, beautiful, with seemingly flawless skin. The doctors and nurses, however, have faces akin to swine, the norm of that society. An individual from the commune, who has features like the woman’s, comes to escort her to their village where he tells her she will feel an “immediate sense of belonging.”

“I just thought that segment would open the conversation where we could talk about marginalization, deformity, even makeup, and should you change to fit someone else’s standard of beauty,” Dr. Hans says. “What you do to your face says a lot about you.”

Community Matters

What happens when you don’t fit in? Dr. Hans poses the question soon

after students read an autobiography of John Merrick, who suffered a grotesque deformity. His life was the subject of the movie *The Elephant Man*, by director David Lynch.

For someone like John Merrick, where he is the *only* Elephant Man, how would people treat him if he were in modern day Cleveland, probed Dr. Hans. Responses shot out: “Someone would pay for him to get treatment.” “He could get surgery to correct his deformity.” “People would be hostile.”

Dr. Hans brought the matter even closer to home by asking students about their experiences at Case—even asking if there is a “Case look.” The room was quiet until one student offered, “Most [students] make an effort to include other students... though I think most will agree that Case students like to be alone or with just a few friends.”

Others remarked that students may “join” groups based on their interests—sports, computers, music, arts, and community service. Some may group along racial, sexual orientation, political, or religious lines.

Dr. Hans noted that he’s not yet had an African American student take the Face First seminar, though other students of color have. “We have a fair number of Indian students at Case and many of them came from schools where they were the only Indian in some of their classes or even the school.

“They often have great insight into diversity issues, and the small-group format allows them to discuss their concerns.”

Based on talks he’s had with students, he surmises that “Some of the kids at Case were probably ostracized while in high school because they were smart

or ‘geeky.’ Now that they are here, it’s not an issue. They are in a community where it’s OK to be smart.”

Face Forward

Dr. Goll’s introduction to SAGES as a writing instructor came via the seminar Mathematics and the Quest for Truth, led by David Singer, a professor of mathematics. A lifelong teacher of English and gifted students, Dr. Goll says she enjoys the challenge of interdisciplinary teaching.

“The seminar approach allows us to bring ourselves into the discussion. You cannot hide from what you don’t know. It is a collaborative building process so that we all gain,” she says.

“I like the seminar approach because it brings about an active, engaged learner. This approach offers many possibilities of what we can do.” Her goal as the writing instructor is to ensure that the students emerge as capable, confident writers who can convey and support their ideas and opinions.

As for Dr. Hans, he hopes one of the outcomes is that students will know *how to think*. A purpose of liberal arts education, he says, is to get people to think critically.

An equally important goal, he says, is that the conversation and learning continue outside the classroom. “I want the discussion to carry over to the dorms. One indicator of a great university is that students learn from each other, and it is not necessary for professors to be there to facilitate that learning.” ☐

FBI sketch of undergraduate Bernadette Crookston

Marsha Lynn Bragg is the alumni editor of Case Magazine

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