Learning the nuances of workplace culture is a bit like exploring another country, says Jenny Strakovsky, assistant director of career education and graduate programs in the School of Modern Languages.

Each field has a vernacular and tempo of its own. Values, goals, and cultures differ from field to field.

This is why Strakovsky and the School of Modern Languages are pioneering the use of “culture-driven career design.” Using the study-abroad model as a metaphor for career exploration, Strakovsky and Anna Westerstahl Stenport, chair and professor in the school, teach a class called Career Design for Global Citizenship.

The class seeks to inspire both undergraduate and graduate students to consider how humanities-based skills can be central to their careers and give them tools to design “meaningful, fulfilling, and impactful careers.”

‘Real-World Scenarios for How to Collaborate’

“This innovative course brings together undergraduate and graduate students from fields as diverse as computer science and international affairs, math and city and regional planning, and public policy and applied languages and intercultural studies,” Stenport said. “It provides real-world scenarios for how to collaborate in multi-disciplinary and cross-cultural professional environments, while applying project management and communication strategies.”

The class is attracting attention nationally. Strakovsky has presented the work to the Modern Language Association (MLA), among others. The Association of Departments of Foreign Languages and English also has invited Strakovsky and Stenport to present the work at the annual ADFL/ ADE Summer Seminar for department chairs this summer.

The career education programs at the School of Modern Languages are part of an effort to change
Queer in AI Fosters Inclusion in Research Community

TESS MALONE
COLLEGE OF COMPUTING

Gender bias is one of the most pressing issues in artificial intelligence (AI) today, but what if even just sorting data by gender is part of the problem? This question is one of many that the group Queer in AI asks.

College of Computing alumni and Google AI Resident Rapha Gontijo Lopes co-founded the group in 2018 to create a community for queer researchers and to raise awareness of LGBTQ issues in AI and machine learning (ML).

Lopes has been active in the AI research community since he joined the College’s student AI networking and discussion group, the Agency, in his sophomore year. As a gay Latino man, though, he didn’t feel welcome at conferences, where other queer people are hard enough to find, let alone a nuanced discussion of gender in a dataset. After he attended the Conference on Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS) in 2017, he realized there wasn’t a group for queer people in the field. So, Lopes helped start Queer in AI.

One of the most basic ways it fosters community and sparks conversation is by hosting socials at prominent conferences for queer researchers to network.

“A lot of researchers might not have the community we do as queer people from cities, but they can see Queer in AI at a conference and not find it’s an ‘other’ environment they feel out of place,” he said.

Although Queer in AI is for the LGBTQ community, it’s inclusive to all. When possible, events are scheduled within the same building as the conference, so everyone from allies to people who may not be out to our community can attend.

The group also offers workshops to raise awareness of fairness and accountability issues in AI. These panels may be about inclusion through gender-neutral bathrooms and stickers where attendees can display their pronouns. They also raise awareness for research issues such the role of gender in natural language processing or ensuring people aren’t erased from data because they don’t fall into the gender binary.

“There are some implicit assumptions about the things we do in AI,” Lopes said. “The way we challenge them and reevaluate how we think about them is important.”

Although the group put on its first event less than a year ago at NeurIPS in Montreal, it’s already a success. It has hosted social mixers at four major conferences and workshops at two events with 50 to 90 people attending each event. According to Lopes, the goal is to continue to expand. He hopes Queer in AI will have a presence at every major ML and AI conference and eventually offer conference scholarships for queer researchers. Beyond conferences, Lopes said it’s also about creating a community year-round through the group’s mailing list.

“We want to make sure ML systems aren’t another force of oppression in society, and we’re positive about its future,” Lopes said.

“There are so many awesome people who do research on fairness and justice in AI and radical AI. Queer in AI is lifting those voices and bringing awareness to fairness and accountability.”

The Experience of Biking in Atlanta

Over the years, Spieler’s bike commuter knowledge has improved alongside the bike infrastructure of the city. He cites the Edgewood Avenue bike lane, Lucky Street Cycle Track, and the Tech Square pedestrian scramble in Midtown as adding ease to his experience on the roads as a bike commuter.

“Ninety-nine percent of drivers are courteous and careful, but they don’t always understand what it’s like to be a biker,” he said. “My advice to bike commuters is that they stay safe by taking the lane,” referring to the practice of cycling in a lane of traffic instead of hugging the curb, in order to remain visible and prevent passing in conditions that are unsafe, and to avoid a section of the road which often contains obstacles such as debris and storm drains.

One major difference between the bike and the car commute, in Spieler’s experience, is the amount of face-to-face communication you get while on the bike.

“Because I go at consistent times, I see some of the same people out on their porches while I’m riding through neighborhoods. Sometimes I’ll pull up to a light on Edgewood and there will be six other bikers there. Especially if it’s rainy, we will talk to each other, and say good job.’ There’s a self-reinforcing aspect to it that I really like. And that’s the type of social interaction you don’t get in a car.’”

Within the past five years, Spieler has noticed many more people in the streets commuting, including more e-bikes.

“The more bikes that are out on the road, the safer all of us are,” said Daniel.

— This story was originally shared as a Midtown Alliance Commuter Highlight at midtownatl.com.
functioning.

“The night-to-night variability in the older study participants had a major impact on their performance in tests aimed at evaluating episodic memory,” said Audrey Duarte, an associate professor in the School of Psychology and principal investigator in the Memory and Aging Lab. “The association between sleep and memory has been known, but this study’s novelty is showing that the connection is particularly evident for older adults and black participants, regardless of age.”

The study, supported by a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship, is believed to be the first of its kind in the relationship between sleep and memory with both age and racial differences. Duarte and Emily Hokett, a Ph.D. student in the School of Psychology, recruited 81 volunteers from the Atlanta area. The volunteers were evaluated carefully to screen out those who had mild cognitive impairment or other potentially confounding factors. Younger adults were recruited in the age range of 18 to 37 years, while older adults were recruited in the range from 56 to 76 years. Ultimately, 50 adults were selected for the study.

“We wanted to look at lifestyle factors to see how sleep duration and quality over a period of seven nights. Though they did not measure brain waves, the devices allowed sleep measurements to be done in the participants’ own homes.

Participants were asked to visit a Georgia Tech laboratory for a memory test that measured electroencephalography (EEG) brain wave activity as they attempted to recall word pairs that had been shown earlier. Not surprisingly, better performance correlated with better sleep in most of the older adults. But Duarte and Hokett were surprised that the memory subgroups between sleep and memory-related brain activity extended to both older and younger black participants — some of whom were college students. To understand the potential causes of the poor sleep, they administered a standardized questionnaire designed to measure stress levels in those participants.

“The main factor that correlated with poor sleep quality in black participants was race-related stress,” said Hokett. “When participants had higher values on that measure of stress, they would also have greater sleep fragmentation, on average. We found a very significant relationship here.”

The study found that black adults slept for 36 minutes less than other adults, which translated into a 12% decrease in memory-related brain activity. On average, black adults in the study spent 15 minutes more time awake after falling asleep than did other participants.

The study also found significant variations in long sleepers in each age group. “Some of our 70-year-old subjects looked like our 20-year-old students,” Duarte said. “There are many factors that contribute to individual differences.”

Daniel Youngchul Son, a graduate student in the School of City and Regional Planning, talks with Jenny Strakovsky, assistant director of career education and graduate programs in the School of Modern Languages, during a session of the Career Design for Global Citizenship course on April 17.

**HUMANITIES, from page 1**

the direction of liberal arts education in the United States.

“It’s an approach to teaching humanities at the intersection of cultural studies and career education, which are two different fields,” Strakovsky said of the class.

“Their unique and at the cutting edge of what is happening in both fields,” said Stenport.

**The Value of Humanities in the Workplace**

Ryan Gemelire, a second-year physics major from Saint Louis Park, Minnesota, took the class in 2018. He is now a research assistant in the career design studio at the School of Modern Languages, working with Strakovsky and Stenport on the intersection of humanities and STEM.

“A strong understanding of many subjects that fall under the umbrella of the humanities, especially philosophy and management, is fundamental for a successful career based in physics,” he said.

The course includes lecture and project components. Students learn about changing world of work and non-scientific roles in the modern workplace.

“Most of the students are then sent out to create case studies examining how humanities skills, such as well-developed communications abilities and a focus on human-centered problem solving, are crucial in helping solve intractable social and policy challenges.

Students have examined issues such as energy consumption and conservation, the impact of space policy on humanity, how to keep equity issues in the forefront of the sustainability debate, and water security.

**Different Perspectives Are Crucial**

This exploration also helps students learn the value of applying humanities-based skills, especially intercultural studies, to the field of work they want to pursue.

“In the process of doing science, or designing a product, you need to have the ability to design questions and think about other people’s perspectives,” Strakovsky said.

“Having the ability to think from the perspective of a different culture allows you to tap into new markets and discover new questions that you might not even realize are questions if you’re only looking at it from your own cultural perspective.”

Career exploration as a form of cultural studies also helps students overcome a pervasive unease with the process that will get them their first job.

“In career education, we talk about networking and the importance of tailoring resumes and writing cover letters a certain way,” Strakovsky said. “There’s a place for that, but students will often talk about how they hate it because it feels artificial and manipulative.”

“But when you bring the cultural studies framework to it, and you explain that this is a community and you are learning about it, that you’re on a study abroad in this community, it changes their perspective. If you were living in another country and trying to learn the language and the culture, of course you would connect with as many people as possible to ask questions and do justice to understanding that community,” Strakovsky said.

For Gemelire, who wants to work in the space sector after he graduates in 2021, the class proved invaluable.

“To do something other than university research with a physics degree, I believe an understanding of many humanities topics is essential,” he said. “I would even say that the humanities enriches the research process in which many physicists take part.”

**A Leader in Empowering Liberal Arts Graduates**

The School of Modern Languages, a unit of the Ivan Allen College of Liberal Arts, is quickly enlarging its reputation as a national leader in empowering liberal arts graduates to pursue successful careers in many sectors.

The School’s new Master of Science in Applied Languages and Intercultural Studies and the Master of Science in Global Media and Cultures, which is offered in conjunction with the School of Literature, Media, and Communication, were recently mentioned in the New York Times as an example of innovative curriculum for the future of language study.

Strakovsky and Stenport are next teaching the class in Spring 2019. That semester, Strakovsky also will expand offerings of the class with a master’s level version, part of the new Global Media and Cultures program.

“The humanities, particularly cultural studies, teach us how to create meaning out of facts, mobilize stories to shape our future, and connect with people who are very different from us,” Strakovsky said. “These skills are crucial for the kinds of leadership and innovation-oriented roles that Georgia Tech alumni pursue.”
**Happiness, from page 1**

culture through a wider lens. So, she talked to John Stein, vice president of Student Life and the Brand-Despite Students, who had read the same article and was also thinking about a happiness course at Tech. He suggested that Daboin collaborate with the School of Psychology to figure out how to make it work.

“It took us a little while,” Daboin said, referring to a couple of failed attempts to offer the class. “We were hoping for a certain number of students to enroll and didn’t get enough. This year we decided to focus less on the number of students, and instead just get the class going.”

The class, offered for the first time this summer, has 10 students.

“It’s a very intimate class, which is great,” said Daboin, who has a Ph.D. in clinical and community psychology from Georgia State University and is a licensed psychologist. “It lends itself to discussion and a more in-depth way of talking about issues and applying it on a personal level. The class is sort of our pilot to see if this kind of teaching the students like and if we can do it on a larger scale in fall and spring.”

The class is designed to teach students scientifically-validated strategies for living a healthier, happier, and more satisfying life at Georgia Tech and beyond. Students explore psychological concepts related to mental health and well-being and learn to apply the concepts to better manage their own stress and improve their habits, which will lead to more fulfilling personal lives.

The class begins and ends by measuring the students’ happiness. It also measures the students’ psychological wealth, including their satisfaction with life and their emotional wellbeing. Students also must envision their best possible self, identify their personal strengths and values, do acts of kindness, and keep a gratitude journal.

Daboin wants students who have taken the class to become wellness ambassadors by sharing strategies they have learned, and promoting a healthier campus culture.

“It’s exciting to see students immediately connecting the lessons learned in class to their personal lives,” said Daboin, who thought she would have to sell the class every step of the way. “But it’s hitting home,” she said. “If these students can walk out of this class leading healthier lives and their psychological well-being improves, then hopefully it will be a little contagious.”

**More Happiness**

Chris Martin, a postdoctoral fellow in the Wallace H. Coulter Department of Biomedical Engineering, taught a happiness course at Emory University and brought it with him to Tech in 2018.

He teaches BME 2803 Special Topics: Happiness. The class was created by Emory sociology professor Corey Keyes, and Martin taught it for three sessions while earning a Ph.D. in sociology at Emory. Martin taught the course at Tech last fall and spring, and his third session will be this fall.

The class covers three big themes: maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain, the meaning of life; and coping with suffering.

The course explores various theories of happiness, such as how money does or does not help one’s level of happiness.

“In the modern world, we have too many choices and that tends to inhibit happiness,” he said. “Making the choice is burdensome. You think about all of the things you didn’t choose. And, you feel like you lost out on all of the things you didn’t choose because of what you chose.”

Martin said there is an underlying idea that one’s circumstances are the result of their choices. And part of a person’s level of happiness is tied to expectations.

“Happiness can sometimes be elusive because we think a possession or purchase will make us happy for months, but it only makes us happy for a few days,” he said. “This is called the hedonic treadmill, you experience some pleasure and some pain, but you end up pretty much in the same place.”

The two things that seem to help sustain happiness are variety and appreciation. If there is variety in what you purchase, that will help. Also, take time to consciously appreciate what you bought.

“Otherwise, once you purchase something nice your aspiration level goes up,” Martin said. “So, you have to keep purchasing things that are significantly more expensive than the last thing you purchased, which is impossible.”

This fall, there will be two sections of Martin’s happiness course: a regular section and one for the Honors Program. The regular class is housed in BME but is open to all undergraduates. Most students who take the class are engineering majors who have an interest in the humanities. About 25 students usually enroll.

The curriculum covers a discussion of happiness, the hedonic treadmill and if it is realistic (for the students) to increase happiness, and students’ idea of a good relationship. The final paper is on what they have learned from the class and also what they have learned about life overall. The class also talks about character strengths, careers, and relationship ships.

“The students enjoy having discussions,” Martin said. “The assignments are reflections, so I get to know each student’s unique personality. I get to hear stories about their lives, and it’s quite an honor.”

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**The Nostalgia of Malls and Why They Are Dying**

Ellen Dunham-Jones, professor and director of Georgia Tech’s Master of Science in Urban Design program, recently connected with WIRED to discuss mall culture and where it is headed today.

The interview was in anticipation of season three of the hit Netflix series Stranger Things, which highlights mall culture of the 1980s. Dunham-Jones is an expert in dying malls and how to retrofit them for future use.

“Newspapers like to jump to the headline that it’s online shopping, but that’s more like the nail in the coffin than it really is the beginning,” she said. “The decline of the malls really starts in the ‘90s, mostly because we built so many of them that they started to cannibalize each other.”

Dunham-Jones is most interested in when people are looking at the death of these properties as opportunities to help a 20th century institution address 21st century systems.

Watch the full interview with WIRED at c.gatech.edu/wired-malls.

Much of season three of Stranger Things was filmed at Gwinnett Place Mall, located in Duluth, Georgia.