In a remote jungle of Guatemala, Professor Arthur Demarest and his team of Vanderbilt and Guatemalan archeologists have uncovered one of the largest and most elaborate Maya palaces ever discovered. With 170 rooms built around 11 courtyards, it occupies an area larger than two football fields. The palace is located in the ancient city of Cancuén, which means the Place of Serpents.

“It's a truly amazing palace,” says Demarest, the Ingram Professor of Anthropology, who led the discovery team with Tomás Barrientos from the Universidad del Valle in Guatemala (please see sidebar, page 4).

The Cancuén research might cause scholars to revise their views of Maya civilizations, and it has garnered national attention for Demarest. Included in the media attention is the naming of Demarest’s find as one of the top science projects of the year 2000 by Discover magazine.

While enjoying his “15 minutes of fame,”
Diversity with Distinction

For half a century, Vanderbilt center has devoted itself to Latin American culture

Last August, Jane Landers, associate professor of history, became director of the Center for Latin American and Iberian Studies, making her the first woman to lead the center in its 53-year history. Kurt Weyland, a political scientist, is the new associate director.

Their appointments coincided with a Gannett Report that ranked the center’s undergraduate program eighth in the nation.

In 1947, Brazil’s president Eurico Dutra inaugurated the A&S center as one of the first four permanent university centers on Latin America in the U.S. Today, it is the oldest, largest and best-supported area studies program at Vanderbilt, with funding scholars from the anthropology, fine arts, history, political science, Portuguese, sociology and Spanish departments.

One of Landers’ primary goals, she says, is “to build upon the center’s reputation, bringing it even higher levels of excellence.”

“By bringing people of different backgrounds together from Vanderbilt, Nashville and the greater U.S. and Latin American communities,” she says, “the center can pave the way to a stronger commitment to diversity at Vanderbilt.”

Learning while serving

Landers hopes to expand upon the Center for Latin American and Iberian Studies’ tradition of diversity through a new service-learning project, developed by former associate director Marshall Eakin, professor of history.

“Last fall we started a year-long faculty development seminar with 12 faculty members from all schools of the university,” Eakin says. “It will be held each year for the next three years and will specifically help faculty understand service-learning and develop their own courses.”

The seminar is funded by an $87,000 grant from the Corporation for National Service, which Eakin obtained while with the center.

The project will also “provide students with an opportunity to combine academic learning with hands-on experience by working with Nashville’s Hispanic community,” Eakin says.

Homebrew supercomputer crunches data at bargain-basement prices

A group of physicists, biologists and computer technicians from the College of Arts and Science and the Medical Center have assembled a powerful supercomputer from off-the-shelf PC parts for a bargain-basement price.

The new number cruncher, named VAMPIRE (Vanderbilt Multiple Processor Integrated Research Engine), will support a huge range of research projects across the campus in physics, medical research, and the Human Genome project, says Paul Sheldon, associate professor of physics and astronomy. Such research could result in better understanding and treatment of Alzheimer’s disease, cardiovascular illness and diabetes.

In its current configuration, VAMPIRE costs about $90,000 to build. That is about the same price as a single thin node, or processing unit, for IBM’s supercomputer, the IBM RS/6000 SP. In addition, two VAMPIRE nodes are more powerful than a single SP node, says Alan Tackett, the Information Technology Services administrator who made the new machine.

VAMPIRE received funding from A&S, Medical Center and University Discovery Grants, and funds from the individual investigators.

Sheldon spearheaded the project along with Jason Moore, assistant professor of computer science, and Will Johns, assistant professor of physics and astronomy.

Sheldon and Johns decided to build the supercomputer to support the research that they are conducting at the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory in Batavia, Ill. They are studying the behavior of quarks, the tiny particles that make up the protons and neutrons that reside in the nucleus of the atom.

“VAMPIRE provides campus investigators with an irreplaceable research tool,” says Sheldon. “It will allow them to compete successfully for research projects that involve intensive computation, as well as bringing increased funding specifically targeted to support computer facilities to campus.”

University names new A&S dean

Richard McCarty, executive director of science for the American Psychological Association, will become the new A&S dean July 1, 2001.

McCarty, who also is a professor of psychology and former department chair at the University of Virginia (UVA), said he was interested in coming to Vanderbilt “because it is such an outstanding research institution with aspirations to be even better. It is unusual to find an institution with both high standards and a tremendous base of support.”

He succeeds John H. Venable, who became dean of the University’s largest college upon the resignation last summer of Ettore “Jim” Infante. Venable agreed to serve as dean while the University conducted a national search for a successor to Infante.

An authority on the physiological and behavioral aspects of stress, McCarty was professor and chair of UVA’s psychology department from 1990 to 1998. He has been with the American Psychological Association since 1998. In 1994-95 he was visiting scientist for the Clinical Neuroscience Branch of the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke.

McCarty came to his field of study in a somewhat roundabout way. “I started out to be a biologist,” he said, “before becoming interested in psychology.” He received his bachelor’s degree in biology and a master’s degree in zoology from Old Dominion University before earning a Ph.D. in comparative animal behavior from the Johns Hopkins University.

He spent two years as a research associate in pharmacology with the National Institute of Mental Health before joining UVA in 1978 as an assistant professor of psychology.

He also was a senior fellow at the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute and spent 10 years as behavioral science coordinator for the FBI National Academy.

He is a fellow of numerous professional organizations and serves as editor of the journal of the American Psychological Association.

McCarty plans to teach classes at Vanderbilt but will forego his research. He will make regular trips to the campus during the spring semester to meet faculty and students before assuming the deanship next summer.

Alumnus, student win Fulbright Fellowships

Two prestigious Fulbright Fellowships, the government’s premier scholarship program for overseas studies, have been awarded this year to a recent Vanderbilt graduate and a current student.

Mark Pertus, BA’01, is currently studying in Russia. Rhonda Collier, a doctoral candidate in comparative literature, will study for a year in Brazil.

Their appointments coincide with a Gannett Report that ranked the center’s undergraduate program eighth in the nation.

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There are currently only a few service-learning courses at Vanderbilt, but Eakin hopes the seminar will increase the number. In addition to Eakin, who has taught a service-learning course on Chile, a few other A&S faculty members have already incorporated service-learning into their courses. They include Professor of Sociology Gary Jessen, who has developed a criminology course, and Professor Emeritus Melvin Joesten, who has offered service-learning courses in chemistry. Richard Pride, associate professor of political science, and Pudia Arai, assistant professor of religious studies, also are developing courses in their fields, Eakin says.

(See related article page 6.)
Dean Venables discusses the strengths and challenges facing A&S

State of the College

Dean Venables discusses the strengths and challenges facing A&S

The College of Arts and Sciences recently named Richard McCarty as dean, to replace Etorre F. Infante, who retired last summer. John H. Venables, associate professor of middle American archeology, takes over as dean until McCarty takes office on July 1, 2001. We spoke with Venables recently about the strengths and challenges facing the college today. Here is an excerpt from that discussion.

A&S Cornerstone: What are the major challenges facing the College of Arts and Science today?

Dean Venables: In one of the first conversations I had with our new chancellor, Gordon Gee, he asked me what I consider the toughest challenge facing the college. My answer was “maintaining the optimal balance between teaching and research.”

A&S Cornerstone: How is that balance being accomplished?

Dean Venables: There is no magic solution, but there are a number of things we know we have to do. We start with the appointment of faculty members, who by their training and personality, are likely to sustain an interest in both undergraduate and graduate teaching, and who can be mentors to the next generation of faculty. Then we need to reinforce the faculty in both endeavors through varied means that let them know that both teaching and research contribute to their careers. Then we must continue to encourage excellence in both teaching and research for promotion, tenure, and salary advancement. Finally, we provide assistance to faculty members in both teaching and research through, for example, the Center for Teaching and Research Leave. Still, teaching and research are in a delicate balance that requires an ongoing commitment and attention on the part of the faculty and administrators.

A&S Cornerstone: What do you see as the major strengths of the college?

Dean Venables: One of our great strengths, something relatively rare among the top schools with whom we compete, is that all of our regular faculty members teach. Gifts from alumni for faculty chairs and scholarships for outstanding students are vitally important in strengthening the College of Arts and Science.

We could not attract faculty of the stature of Arthur Demarest and Jon Kaas if we could not offer them endowed chairs. Gifts from alumni for faculty chairs and scholarships for outstanding students are vitally important in strengthening the College of Arts and Science.

Although the campus continues to change with the construction of new buildings, some things, like Kirkland and Alumni Halls, provide continuity for the college and its people.

Another strength is directly related to balancing the needs of the faculty. Dean Venable: “We teach undergraduates willingly, and we teach them well.”

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Eye on the sky

Francesca Bergquist, associate dean of the College of Arts and Science, likes the idea of people looking in the sky where her brother loved to fly. That’s why she and her family donated a new telescope to the university in memory of her brother, Eric. Bergquist was a 24-year-old Army helicopter pilot who was shot down in Vietnam in 1969. “My brother loved to fly,” says Dean Bergquist, adding that he enlisted in the army because he believed in the cause and gave him the opportunity to fly.

Donors give $12.7 million to A&S

At the close of Vanderbilt’s fiscal year on June 30, alumi and other friends contributed $12.7 million to the College of Arts and Science. Those gifts included more than $1.46 million for endowed scholarships, $3.75 million for endowed professorships, and $935,000 for endowed teaching fellowships. Somehow Form a Family, the author of a book of stories, won the prestigious D.B. Hardeman Prize for their book The Great Divide: Religious and Cultural Conflict in American Party Politics. "My group and I try to tell day events like exposure to sunlight and normal processes such as respiration can generate free radicals in the body," says Ned Porter, Stevenson Professor of Chemistry. Researchers know that free radicals attack the cell’s lipoprotein (LDL, or so-called “bad cholesterol”). They believe this process may be linked to the development of arterial plaque that can lead to heart attacks and strokes. “We’ve shown that vitamin E reduces this reaction, but also affects the kinds and amounts of product formed—which can be protective or harmful,” Porter says. "You know what kind of disorder might begin without free radicals reacting.”

Twenty-five years of dedicated service to the University

Vanderbilt has recognized the following faculty members who recently completed 25 years of full-time service to the University:

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Noted neuroscientist receives Sutherland Prize

Centennial Professor of Psychology Randolph Blake, a national leader in neuroscience research, particularly in visual perception and cognition, received the Earl Sutherland Prize in November. Blake is well-known for his work on binocular perception—how the brain combines information from the two eyes. He is considered a world expert on binocular rivalry, the perceptual competition that occurs between the two eyes when the images in each eye are different. Besides shedding light on normal vision, this work has practical implications for understanding how the brain assembles pieces of visual information into meaningful perceptions of objects and events. This work could eventually shed light on developmental disorders such as dyslexia.

A fellow of both the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the American Psychological Society, Blake has been called “an international leader in visual psychophysics and visual neuroscience.” By William T. Newman, professor of neurology at Stanford University.

Blake is also adept at creatively communicating brain science to non-scientists. He co-authored with Robert Schuler of Brandeis University the book, Star Trek on the Brain: Alien Minds, Human Mind, in which they use “Star Trek” episodes and movies to explain the neurological and psychological basis of human behavior. They also wrote a seminal textbook, Perception, reviews in newspapers and magazines, and it appeared on the cover of the New York Times Book Review.

Randolph Blake

New appointments

Paul Edelman, a distinguished mathematician, has joined the faculty as professor of applied mathematics and professor of visual arts. He will make his home on campus and supervise students in the School of Law. His expertise is in the ways mathematics can inform a variety of legal issues.
WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

As associate dean of the College of Arts and Science from 1973 to 1985, Ruth Grace Zibart, MA’42, advised and counseled many students concerning their academic careers. After each counseling session, she would write a summary on the student’s interview card.

“Dean Zibart was famous for her humorous, insightful, and wise counsel, as well as for a wonderful use and appreciation for the English language,” says Francille Bergquist, who worked with Zibart. Here are a few of Dean Zibart’s more ‘famous’ lines:

• About a student who was considering a transfer to another school: “Initially counseled student to stay, then urged to go.”
• Concerning a student who came to her office wearing earphones: “He came in wired for sound.”
• About a student that she had difficulty getting out of her office: “Came to talk, stayed to pray.”

In addition to her administrative duties, Dean Zibart also taught in the French department. She became a student again at age 40, earning her PhD degree in French literature from the University of Michigan.

When her late husband, Alan, died in 1995 after a long illness, she began to travel abroad, making trips to Panama, Scandinavia, Italy, Hong Kong, and Bali. She continues to live in Nashville and is actively involved with her two granddaughters and 15 great-nieces and great-nephews.

Distinguished Alumni

Antonio Gotto, BA’57, MD’65, right, Distinguished Alumnus for the year 2000, Dean of Cornell University’s Medical School, Gotto is one of the world’s foremost authorities on atherosclerosis, the primary cause of cardiovascular disease. He is also the author of several popular books, including The New Living Heart Cookbook and The New Living Heart Diet. Presenting Gotto with the award are Wayne Hyatt, BA’65, JD’68, left, and Chancellor Gordon Gee.

A Shared Vision of America

The Fine Arts Gallery is presenting a special treat for Parent’s Weekend: the first-ever exhibition of Robert Frost’s poetry with woodcut illustrations by J.J. Lankes. The exhibit will open March 31 and run through June 15.

Drawn primarily from the extensive private collection of Patrick J. Alger, a Nashville collector, the exhibition will present rare first editions of Frost’s poetry, each containing woodcut illustrations by Lankes, as well as a large selection of his original woodcuts.

“Exhibited for the first time, this remarkable collection will reveal a vignette of a rural America that is both simple, yet eloquent,” says Joseph Mella, curator of the gallery.