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NASA night at Ohlone draws full house

By ERIC DORMAN
Staff writer

NASA's Jonathan Trent spoke on the origin and future of life on earth before an overflow crowd in the Jackson Theater Wednesday night.

The talk, entitled "The life and times of life and time" drew such a large crowd that the line stretched from the doors of the Smith Center back to the chain link fence surrounding the main stairway. Furthermore, about 150 to 200 people were shut out of the Theater after the maximum capacity of 400 had been reached.

"We've never seen even half this crowd," said Math, Science and Technology Coordinator Yvette Niccolls.

The exact cause of the huge

crowd is unclear; however, many professors did urge their students to attend and a significant number offered extra credit.

In the talk, Trent, who has a PhD in Biological Oceanography at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, attempted to put the history of earth in perspective by placing its conception, about 4.5 billion years ago, at one end of a football field, and the present in the other end zone.

Trent explained that life on earth first began 3.4 billion years ago, around the 25-yard line, in the form of cyanobacteria, or blue-green algae. The cyanobacteria expelled oxygen as a byproduct of photosynthesis, eventually creating an atmosphere of oxygen similar to the present world, as well as ozone. Life as we know it did not

begin until about the 10-yard line - Homo Sapiens did not come into existence until 0.08 inches from the end zone.

For the rest of the talk, Trent actually focused not on the human race, but on the microorganisms that had been living from the beginning. He talked in particular about those microorganisms what could withstand such unforgiving environments as boiling sulfuric acid in volcanoes, so-called thermo-acidophiles. He said that because of their ability to survive in extreme environments, they would be the survivors in a catastrophe such as a meteor striking the earth, which could wipe out all other forms of life.

"These are the organisms that have been carrying the ball from the 25-yard line to the present," said

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Photo by Eric Dorman

NASA/Ames scientist Jonathan Trent takes questions during the NASA Science Night.

Students and faculty reflect on short semester

By ERIC DORMAN
Staff Writer

As the college's first 16-week semester draws to a close, some students and faculty took time to reflect on the shortened semester. Most considered it a success.

"The 16-week semester is much better," said Math Professor Bob Bradshaw, who has taught at the college for 21 years. "Simply because students don't have to remember material from 18 weeks ago."

"I like it because of the longer break," said student Thomas Jernigan, echoing the sentiment of many

students.

"Eighteen weeks is just too long," said Speech Professor and 30-year veteran Kay Harrison. "It can really burn down students."

The college's decision to make the switch from the 18-week semester came at a September Board of Trustees meeting last year. The suggestion was brought up by the faculty, many of whom were hopeful that it would increase flagging enrollment and bring Ohlone onto the short semester model followed by all of the area's four-year colleges and many of California's community colleges.

The Faculty Senate voted overwhelmingly to adopt the new system, with 82 percent of eligible faculty voting for it. Enrollment has risen dramatically this semester over last, a total of about 12 percent at the last tally, said Vice President of Student Services Ron Travenick. Currently, the college has 3,952 full-time students and 11,271 total students, surpassing even record enrollment years such as 2002.

"I can't say specifically how much of it's due to [the 16-week semester]," said Travenick, "but I do know this is the biggest fall term we've ever had."

Whatever the reasons behind the increased enrollment, the shortened semester certainly is one of them. First-time student Zhen Wang, for example, said that the shortened semester was definitely a factor in his decision to attend the college.

While faculty and students for the most part agreed the 16-week semester worked well, the consensus seemed to be that it would still take some getting used to. Some faculty mentioned the need to reshape their classes in order to fill the extra time allotted, 10 extra minutes for every class period, and an additional three hours of class

time over the term. Some teachers, such as Harrison, said that many teachers found themselves winding down their lectures after the usual 50 minutes, then realized that an extra 10 minutes were still left before the class ended.

Student Alex Alejo agreed that while the 16-week semester was beneficial overall, it did make some courses, including his Biology class, more challenging because of the decreased number of labs.

Other faculty, such as Bradshaw, believed the shortened semester to actually fit their classes better.

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Gumby animator explains stop-motion history



Photo by Michael Aburas

Two of the clay figures used to make 'Gumby' posed on Stephen Wathen's desk. On the left is Gumby; on the right is his companion Pokey.

By MICHAEL ABURAS
Staff writer

With new computer special effects and computer-generated images, does anyone remember stop animation? "Stop animation isn't dead yet," said Stephen Wathen, who teaches technical theater. Wathen explained that, despite the use of computers for most special effects and animation, stop animation is occasionally used today for movies like "Corpse Bride" and "Wallace and Grommet."

Wathen was part of the animation team that worked on Gumby, possibly the most famous of all clay animation characters. "Gumby is literally and figuratively made out of clay," said Wathen.

Gumby was first aired on NBC in 1956. Gumby was the creation of Art Clokey. Wathen described Clokey as a strange beatnik artist who was part of the Topanga Can-

yon art crowd.

Gumby was voiced by character actor Dallas McKennon who is currently in his 80s. McKennon was also the cook in the Alfred Hitchcock movie "The Birds."

Gumby was revived in the '80s because of a "Saturday Night Live" skit titled "Merry Christmas Dammit," featuring Eddie Murphy as Gumby. "Art thought he should bring it back," said Wathen. Clokey then put together a studio in Sausalito. Wathen reminisced that for about three years after the skit aired, he could hear people in public say "Dammit, I'm Gumby."

Wathen worked on the last episode of Gumby to be filmed, entitled "Time Out." The episode featured a sick Father Time, resulting in time distortions. Specifically, he worked on the Father Time scene, which featured a jester popping out of a cuckoo clock.

When the studio filmed Gumby,

the voices were recorded first, then the team of animators would act out scenes. "You have to act the whole thing out," to have an idea of what it will look like, said Wathen. For Gumby's lip movements "we had a whole bunch of cut out lips," they changed depending on what was needed.

At the time Wathen was working on Gumby, film was shot at 24 frames a second. However, current stop animation is filmed with digital cameras that can also measure movement. That is why the movement of characters is so smooth in movies such as "Corpse Bride," explained Wathen.

One of stop animation's early pioneers was Willis O'Brien, who did experimental shorts in 1916. O'Brien was part of the crew who did the special effects for 1925's "The Lost World," which used stop animation for the dinosaurs in the

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