Senior writing major, Abdi Aynte, was born in Somalia and lived in Egypt before coming to the U.S. He seeks to use his journalism skills to help close the communication gap between the Eastern Muslim world and the West.

A cultural and educational odyssey

by Misha Jameson

Metropolitan State University senior Abdi Aynte is about to enter the next phase of a long and remarkable journey. He is an ambitious young man who knows the meaning of hardship and hard work. The 28-year-old writing major takes several classes, edits the world’s largest Somali/English Web site, Hiiraan.com and reports extensively on news stories about Islam in Minnesota. He is also a teaching assistant and will soon become a correspondent for the Voice of America in Washington, D.C. Aynte credits his unique cultural and educational odyssey for a large part of his success.

Journalism caught Aynte’s imagination when he was a schoolboy in Somalia. “In third or fourth grade, our school ‘newspaper’ was a little board that sat in a hallway. I took a composition course and I was so passionate about it. I signed up for the school paper so I could write on that board.”

His passion was small consolation when civil war overtook Somalia in 1991. At age 13, Aynte left Somalia, alone, for a safe education at an Egyptian boarding school. Everything about that journey was scary to him. “It was good for me, now that I think about it, because it gave me the strength to live by myself at a young age, in fairly harsh living conditions.” He says the food was horrible—bread, water, maybe a little cheese. “There were hundreds of other boys there, mostly Palestinian. I didn’t speak any Arabic at first, so it was hard for me to communicate.”

During his ten years at the school, Aynte learned Arabic and English. He soon wrote for the school’s paper in Arabic and found work as an interpreter for the International Organization of Migration (IOM), the primary agency helping
Abdi Aynte, continued from page 1

refugees to relocate to the U.S. and other Western countries. He began writing for Hiiraan.com, an extensive and popular Somali/English Web site; he later became its editor. Then Aynte got an offer to resettle in the U.S.

This leg of his journey brought another type of culture shock. “The Somali-American community here is much more liberal than it is in Somalia. Also, they were so busy running to work at 6 a.m., not having time for you. It’s not like they didn’t want to help, but circumstances in this country kind of caught up with them.” Aynte admits that he now shares some of those tendencies. “I have been away from Somalia for more than half of my life now and will probably be spending the rest of my life, if not here, then connected to here. This culture is very individualistic. You have to excel to really become something.

“Aynte’s covered many controversial stories like that of the six Muslim Imams detained at the Minneapolis-St. Paul airport in 2006 for praying in a public space. As a result, the well-spoken young reporter has been interviewed on Fox 9 News and several times on Minnesota Public Radio.”

There are opportunities in this country that are not available anywhere else in the world.”

Aynte has made excellent use of his opportunities. After settling in the Twin Cities, he found a good academic fit at Metropolitan State University. Here he gained a friend and influential teacher in Carol Lacey. “The one course that has most shaped my professional writing was Carol’s online Newswriting and Reporting course. This was the nuts and bolts of journalism. I learned how to write a lead and how to write an ending. She liked my coverage of weekly real-time stories.” These stories led to a job as a reporter for the Minnesota Monitor, an online, blog-based news site from the Center for Independent Media. Writing extensively on the convergence of Islam and politics, Aynte’s covered many controversial stories like that of the six Muslim Imams detained at the Minneapolis-St. Paul airport in 2006 for praying in a public space. As a result, the well-spoken young reporter has been interviewed on Fox 9 News and several times on Minnesota Public Radio.

Aynte found another great opportunity through Carol Lacey, working as her teaching assistant in an African journalism program at Cedar-Riverside’s Brian Coyle Center. The students are young African immigrants, mostly women. They learn to write about issues that concern their community. One student has gone on to work at KFAI radio, another at the Twin Cities Daily Planet. “These students are so amazing and they do incredible work. I am so proud of them.”

He is justifiably proud of his own work, too. In January, it will take him to Washington, D.C., where he will produce a daily, two-hour Somali program on the Web and on radio for the Voice of America. He is also applying to D.C.-area heavy-hitters for graduate school. Aynte’s short list: international law at Georgetown, conflict resolution at George Mason or public diplomacy and media at George Washington University.

Aynte says, “I’m interested in what Samuel Huntington calls a clash of civilizations: the Western cultures and the mostly Muslim Eastern cultures. What I’d like to write about is exactly this clash. It seems like the civilizations are colliding, but I think it’s a communication gap. I was born in Somalia, grew up in Egypt, and I have a perfect understanding of that part of the world. Now I’m a very proud American and I understand this culture fairly well. I’d like to take that knowledge and analyze far better how these two cultures can live side-by-side.” And so, Abdi Aynte’s journey continues.

Misha Jameson is majoring in writing

Interim dean appointed

With the departure of President Wilson Bradshaw, Metropolitan State has seen a number of administrative changes that affect the College of Arts and Sciences. Ed Malecki, CAS dean, assumed the position of provost when William Lowe became interim president of the university. Professor Becky Omdahl was then appointed interim dean of CAS.

Dean Omdahl is a faculty member in the Communication, Writing and the Arts Department, where she teaches courses in interpersonal and family communication. From 2003–2006, she was president of the Inter-Faculty Organization (IFO). Dean Omdahl recently coauthored the book, Problematic Relationships in the Workplace. She is an avid runner and has completed the Twin Cities Marathon five times. The term of her appointment is November 2007 through June 2008.
New resident faculty in CAS

Ed Bok Lee is an assistant professor in the Communication, Writing and the Arts Department. Starting spring semester 2008, Lee will teach poetry, fiction and memoir writing with an emphasis on the experiences of U.S. people of color. He will teach and advise in the creative writing program.

Lee has published and presented widely as a poet, spoken word artist, fiction writer and playwright. His book, *Real Karoake People: Poems & Prose*, won a PEN/Beyond Margins Award and the Asian American Literary Award in 2006. He has been serving as visiting instructor in American studies/Asian American studies at the University of Minnesota and also as adjunct professor in the liberal studies graduate program at Hamline University and in the communications studies department at Augsburg College. Earlier he served as adjunct professor at the College of St. Catherine. He was also a journalist and columnist for *Asian Pages* for more than eight years.

Lee holds a B.A. in comparative literature from the University of Minnesota and an M.F.A. in creative writing from Brown University, Providence, R.I.

Julie Maxon is an assistant professor in the Natural Sciences Department. She teaches undergraduate courses in geology, earth science and environmental science. She advises students in the secondary science teaching B.S. programs, and leads the development of science content curriculum for new secondary licensure programs in earth and space science teaching, physics teaching and chemistry teaching.

She comes to the university from PEASE Academy, Minneapolis, where she developed and taught courses in earth and environmental sciences, biology and physical science. Previously she was an assistant professor and research associate at Gustavus Adolphus College; an assistant professor at Winona State University, Lawrence University and Carleton College; and an instructor at Oberlin College.

Maxson holds a B.A. in geology from Oberlin College and a Ph.D. in geology and geophysics from the University of Minnesota. She has also taken course work for K–12 licensure from St. Olaf College and the University of St. Thomas.

Rafael Ortiz is an assistant professor in the Social Sciences Department. He teaches political science and geography courses, develops curriculum, advises students and provides support to the urban teacher social studies degree.

Ortiz has been an adjunct professor at the University of Puerto Rico and a teaching assistant and guest lecturer at the University of Minnesota. He holds a B.A. in political science from the University of Minnesota; a J.D. from the University of Puerto Rico Law School, San Juan; and a Master of Public Policy from the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs at the University of Minnesota. Ortiz also served as executive director of Hispanic Advocacy and Community Empowerment through Research (HACER) in Minneapolis and an administrative fellow in the MacArthur Interdisciplinary Program on Global Change, Sustainability and Justice at the University of Minnesota. He is a Ph.D. candidate in geography at the University of Minnesota.

After his first semester at Metropolitan State, Ortiz finds that he is learning a great deal from his students. “They bring to the classroom a wealth of experience and views, and an all-too-often untapped enthusiasm for sharing both. To me, each and every interaction with a student—whether in the classroom, in my office or in a hallway—is an edifying experience.”

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Faculty and advisor news


Monte Bute (Social Science) was a 2007 inductee into the Minneapolis Community and Technical College Hall of Fame.


Ramin Daghigh (Natural Sciences) coauthored the article, “The Mystery of the Asymptotic Quasinormal Modes of Gauss-Bonnet Black Holes with Small Gauss-Bonnet Coupling,” in Classical and Quantum Gravity, March 2007.

Pauline Danforth (Advising) published a memoir, “Canoeing on Rainy Lake” in the winter edition of Yellow Medicine Review.

Tammy Durant (Literature and Language) presented a paper, “Classicism and Christianity in Blake’s Illustrations of Milton’s ‘L’Allegro’ and ‘I Pensoreso,’” at the Midwest Modern Language Association Conference, Cleveland, November 2007. She also chaired two sessions on illustrated texts.

Sue Fitzgerald (Information and Computer Sciences) for the past two years has been the organizer for a multinational, multi-institutional group that studies the debugging behaviors of novice programmers. The goal is to improve retention in this high-risk group by improving instructional methods. She also organized an NSF-funded daylong “Statistics Bootcamp” in Atlanta, September 2007. Fitzgerald is in the middle of a two-year commitment to lead the annual Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) Special Interest Group in Computer Science Education (SIGCSE), which sponsors an annual conference.


Kristin Johnson (Communication, Writing and the Arts) had her picture book manuscript, “Roots for Edgar Elm,” selected as a winner of this year’s Loft Shabo Award for “nearly there” picture books. She worked with seven other winners in a master class with Alison McGhee at the Loft. Johnson’s novel, Knights Before Us, won the Mystery Writers of America’s Helen McCloy Scholarship Award for a novel-in-progress. The award includes tuition and fees for a Split Rock Arts summer workshop through the University of Minnesota.

Carol Lacey (Communication, Writing and the Arts) is a project leader for a MnSCU Center for Teaching and Learning grant to create a master D2L Web site for all sections of the course, METR 101 Your Academic Journey. She was also recently interviewed by Cheri Register for an article in Minnesota History magazine on women and public policy in Minnesota in the 1970s.

Ed Bok Lee (Communication, Writing and the Arts) has had numerous recent publications, including the essay, “Mourning in Altaic,” in the anthology, An Uncertain Inheritance, HarperCollins, 2007; and poetry in Great River Review, Spout Magazine, Dislocate, Tinfish Review, Northography and Water-Stone Review. His play, Glow III, was recently commissioned by Theater Mu and the Jerome Foundation.


David Means (Communication, Writing and the Arts) will have several graphic scores, performance installations and an essay on experimental notation featured in Notations 21: an Anthology of Innovative Musical Notation, edited by Theresa Sauer for the American Musicology Society. This project will also include an exhibition at the Chelsea Art Museum in New York City and “videotron” displays in major cities around the world. David also created original music and live sound design for Red Eye Theater’s production of Dead City, a modern riff on Joyce’s Ulysses by Sheila Callaghan, October 2007.
This spring semester, five technical communication graduate students will be traveling to San Juan, Puerto Rico, as part of an intercultural service learning experience. Supervised by Suzanne Walfoort, chair of communication, writing and the arts, and Craig Hansen, director of the M.S. program in technical communication, the project is a collaboration between Metropolitan State faculty and faculty at the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras.

Students will live on campus and spend two weeks tutoring Puerto Rican students who are learning English. They will also work on technical communication projects, including promotional materials for a museum of traditional lace art and a proposal for an eco-friendly bike path. Walfoort hopes the students will experience “the demands and delights of communicating across cultures, learning and using a second language, and working in a business/project setting in two languages.”

The travel experience is part of a semester-long course on international technical communication that will include instruction in Spanish, video production, intercultural communication and ESOL tutoring.
**Student news**

Jason Allen (alumnus, Social Sciences) received second place in the Midwest Sociological Society Undergraduate Student Paper Competition, April 2007 in Chicago. The title of his paper was “The Heart of a Community: Structure and Activities.”

Bonita Baxter (alumna, Ethnic Studies) completed an M.A. in Language, Literacy and Sociocultural Studies at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque in May 2007.


Linda Janovsky (alumna, Social Science) received third place in the Sociologists of Minnesota Caroline Rose Undergraduate Paper Competition, October 2007, Minneapolis. The title of her paper was “Before and After: The Stigma of Morbid Obesity and the Construction of Social Identity.”

Sharon Leah (alumna, Writing) is pursuing an M.S. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology at the Harold Able School of Psychology, Capella University.

Randy Olson, (alumnus, M.S. Technical Communication) is a practicing metal sculptor. His wind reactive, kinetic sculpture, “Velocity,” has been acquired as part of the permanent collection for the University of Florida’s Gainesville campus.

Cindy Traxler (alumna, Writing) is enrolled in the M.F.A. program at Hamline University.

**Faculty and advisor news, continued from page 4**

of Pennsylvania Press, 2007 (see article on next page). In summer 2007, he served as the chair for the biannual Charles DeBenedetti Prize, awarded by the Peace History Society for the best article published on peace history.

Lori Schroeder (Communication, Writing and the Arts) passed her comprehensive exams for the Capella University School of Education Ph.D. program. Her dissertation studies the factors that influence adjunct faculty participation in online instruction. In October 2007 she copresented a concurrent session, “Creating a One-Stop Electronic Resource” at the National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) conference in Baltimore. Schroeder also was elected to the Professional and Organizational Development Network in Adult Education Diversity Committee.

Chris Weyandt (Communication, Writing and the Arts) will be chairing the session, “The Online Writing Center: Accommodating New ‘Writing Realities’” at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) in New Orleans, April 2008.

**Numbers with a purpose**

For Cindy Kaus and Rikki Wagstrom, mathematics isn’t simply a symbolic system students must learn to fulfill a general education requirement. Kaus and Wagstrom see mathematics as a tool for understanding and resolving important social problems. Using math, they say, can be a part of contributing to the community.

Last year, Kaus and Wagstrom, professors in the Mathematics Department, attended the National Science Foundation-sponsored Science Education for New Civic Engagement and Responsibilities (SENCER) Summer Institute in San Jose, Calif. Inspired by what they learned about connecting mathematics instruction to critical civic engagement, they started revising some of their lower-division math courses.

In spring 2007, Kaus taught a section of STAT 201 Statistics I, emphasizing the use of statistics in understanding social issues. “I did this by incorporating semester long community-based projects into the course. Students chose a civic issue, researched data available on the issue (or in a few cases gathered the data themselves) and then presented what they learned in both a final written project and an oral presentation. In addition, the students had to take an action at the end by writing a letter to an agency, a community group or a politician with their findings.”

Wagstrom’s project focuses on MATH 101 Exploring Functions. Her spring 2008 section of this course will teach math through current environmental issues such as greenhouse gases, global warming, food webs and bioaccumulation.
New resident faculty, continued from page 3

Milton Luoma is an assistant professor in the Information and Computer Science Department. He teaches courses in the Bachelor of Applied Science program in computer forensics and provides leadership for the computer forensics program, in addition to conducting research.

Luoma has been a community faculty member at Metropolitan State since 2002, an instructor at Inver Hills Community College and an adjunct instructor at Minnesota State University, Mankato. He has also been an online adjunct instructor at several universities. Previously he was program director and instructor at Fond du Lac Tribal and Community College, Cloquet, and computer science instructor at Normandale Community College.

In the first half of the 20th century, leftists and liberals came together to work for a more just society. The ACLU, for example, founded in 1920, emerged from the repression of labor activists, draft-resisters and German-Americans during World War I; it successfully brought together liberals and leftists of the period. By the ‘50s and ‘60s, however, the left and liberalism parted ways, as McCarthyism and then the Vietnam War created bitter divisions between them.

Although Rossinow’s work is impeccably researched, he avoids writing for a specialized audience of historians. “I write in plain English, and I don’t use academic jargon. I really admire historians of the ‘40s, ‘50s and ‘60s who tried to be accessible to a general audience.” Although the demands of teaching and coordinating curriculum at Metropolitan State are substantial, he has learned to chip away at a project over several years. “I know how to take advantage of small increments of time, to stay committed to the long-term project. You can’t expect instant gratification.”

For his next project, Rossinow plans to write about the 1980s and 1990s, a period that is just now becoming the subject of interpretive contention. “I’ve focused on the left for a long time,” he says. “Now it may be time to train my sights on the right.”

Luoma holds a B.S. in engineering from Case Institute of Technology, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland; an M.B.A. and an M.S. in engineering management from the University of Dayton; an M.S. in computer science from the University of Minnesota Duluth; and a J.D. from William Mitchell College of Law.
Spring play will be adaptation of Antigone

Metropolitan State’s spring theater production will be *Antigone... a Riff on Sophocles*. This adaptation of Sophocles’ masterpiece does not follow the typical formula for Greek tragedy. Instead, the production, directed by Allen Hamilton, is set in the present, spinning a timeless tale of one person’s resistance to intransigent leaders.

Hamilton says the play is timely, given current frustrations with political leadership: “Antigone is above all a political play with a special resonance for those heartsick over the direction our country has been heading in this decade. As our leaders stubbornly pursue fatal misadventures and abridge our rights in the name of order and security, many of us are experiencing a sense of helplessness. The character Antigone provides a powerful reminder of how one heroic individual with a conscience can affect profound change.”

Be prepared for a creative take on traditional Greek tragedy. Forget the stately columns. Forget the mournful, droning choruses draped in bed sheets. Enter a world of Bartok, flashlights, orange peels, stuffed rabbits, graffiti, jogging suits and rebellion!

Performance dates are March 21, 22, 28 and 29 and April 4 and 5 at 7 p.m.; and March 29 and April 5 at 1 p.m. The location is the The Stagedoor Theater in the Whitney Fine Arts Building, Minneapolis Campus. For more information, e-mail camille.d’ambrose@metrostate.edu.

Send us your news!

Share your news with the College of Arts and Sciences community. Whether you’re a faculty member, student, staff member or alum, we want to hear from you.

Contact Anne Aronson, newsletter editor:
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