THE AMAZING APPLICATION AVALANCHE

They flood in, one after another. There are thousands of them, each with the same information, the same intention, the same ambition and hope wrapped up inside. To tell them apart – to separate the men from the boys, so to speak – seems all but impossible. But, each one is in fact different, each one exceptional, and now they have to prove it. All they have to do is stand out among this year’s record-breaking competition.

“We’ll top 11,000 applications for incoming freshmen this year,” says Jimmie Foster Jr., director of freshman admissions, noting that that’s a 13.6 percent jump from the number of applications in 2008, when it was up about 20 percent from the year before.

“All indications are that we’re going to continue breaking records,” says Foster (pictured above). “It’s a trend at institutions everywhere, but our numbers have gone up more than most.”

The national trend, Foster says, is the direct result of students applying to more schools than ever before. More than a quarter of all students are now applying to approximately seven schools, whereas, in the past, no more than 5 percent applied to that many.

“It has a lot to do with the Web: It’s easier to apply online,” says Foster. “It also has to do with this sense of closeness – they see these places online, and it seems more reachable to them than if they were looking at a recruitment brochure in a guidance counselor’s office.”

Indeed, high school students are much more likely to do their research on their own than in years past. Foster refers to such students as “stealth applicants.”

“Stealth applicants are going to college review websites, randomly e-mailing alumni and students on Facebook to ask them about their experiences, doing all their own research,” he explains. “Back in the day – and I’m talking about even in the late ’90s – students were actively recruited through direct mail. They didn’t use the Internet like they do now. It’s really changed the selection process for kids.”

Not to mention for the 13 people who are directly involved in the admissions process.

“The most obvious change is our increased workload – more phone calls, more e-mails, more paperwork, more applications to scan, process, read,” says Foster, adding that the staff comes in on weekends and works at night to keep up. “It’s a lot more work for us, but we’re up for the challenge. It’s very exciting.”

Another challenge that the vast quantity of applications creates is that of matching students up with the College. Traditionally, one out of every two students admitted into any given institution would accept. Now most institutions are seeing that number drop to one out of every four.

“Having so many applications makes it really hard for us to predict which students will actually decide to come here,” says Foster. “We have to work especially hard to be sure we’ve found that right fit.”

That’s not to say the staff doesn’t know exactly what it’s looking for.

“It’s usually pretty clear from their test scores and their transcripts. There’s not a whole lot of grey area,” says Foster. “If their grades are on the fence and they’re borderline students, the personal statement is the best opportunity to really grab our attention.”

It’s important to remember, however, that not all attention is good attention.

“We see some crazy, crazy stuff – you don’t even know,” says Chris Gay, an admissions counselor who recalls one applicant who wrote about a close encounter with a shark. “It was beautifully written, but it had nothing to do with the College. It wasn’t related at all, but it definitely caught my attention.”

And that certainly says something, especially considering how many applications are vying for just that.

Regardless of how applicants make themselves stand out, it’s safe to say that a little healthy competition among potential students only makes them – and the College – that much stronger.

“We have a really strong class coming next fall,” confirms Foster. “It’s very exciting for the entire institution, it really is. This kind of interest means a lot for everyone involved. The College is clearly doing things right.”

"Send your submission to lutza@cofc.edu by Monday, April 13, 2009."
HER GREAT ESCAPE: Jessica Robinson Is a Renaissance Woman

WHEN YOU’RE A TEENAGER, REALITY can be such a drag. Every minute feels more intolerable than the last, every adult seems impossible passé. All you want to do is leave – somehow escape to a different place, a different time.

That’s exactly what Jessica Robinson did when, at age 15, she stumbled into the Michigan Renaissance Festival with her aunt.

“It was amazing – like walking into a fairy tale,” remembers the facility manager for the Lowcountry Graduate Center. “It opened up a whole new world to me. There were so many different kinds of music and artwork and acting – and these were things that I was already very interested in. It was just fascinating to me.”

And now, some 25 years later, not much has changed – except that she’s now been to the Michigan Renaissance Festival more than 40 times and has more than seven other festivals under her belt.

“By the time I was 22, I was pretty much addicted,” admits Robinson, who for a while was going to three or four festivals a year. “I don’t know how else to explain it other than an addiction, because it really is like an escape. You’re leaving your daily life and walking into a faraway land of strange fantasy and make believe.”

It’s a land of Elizabethan and medieval revelry, of sword fights, jousting, juggling, fire eating, comedy acts and limerick challenges. It’s a world filled with the music of drum circles, dulcimers and troubadours and the smells of ciders, “gigantic turkey legs and Scotch eggs (which are eggs, wrapped in bacon and then roasted or fried … they’re very decadent).”

It is, indeed, a world where anything goes. “There’s a school of thought that wants everything to be historically accurate – down to the tools they use and the colors they wear,” says Robinson. “For me, the fun of it is that there is a little bit of fantasy mixed in.”

The result, she says, is almost indescribable. “You’ll see pirates running around, people dressed up like Shakespearean characters, people in fairy wings – you name it. It’s like you’re trapped in a Shakespeare scene gone awry,” says Robinson. “It’s like the Saturday Night Live of Shakespeare. It’s just like nothing else you’ve ever seen.”

Or dreamt of.

“It’s kind of a chance for each person to be whatever they want to be and live out their personal fantasies,” says Robinson, adding that – even if you don’t necessarily have a fantasy to live out – the enthusiasm is contagious. “After you start going for a while, you get the bug and you start to create characters.”

For Robinson, that meant assuming the persona of a pirate wench. “The pirate wench was just my style. I got a couple of costumes, then I started speaking in ‘piratese’ and getting into the character,” she says. “It’s so much more fun to get really into it.”

Eventually Robinson added another piece to her character: a griffon named Izzy, who became part of the act she puts on for children at the festivals.

“The kids are just in awe of it,” smiles Robinson. “It’s a kind of take on fantasy medieval, and it’s incredibly fun to play with.”

But aside from all that fantasy – all that play – Renaissance festivals offer Robinson something very existent, something very real. They offer friendship.

“You’re in this relationship with these people year after year, and you’re doing just silly, silly stuff, together,” says Robinson. “You really become good friends over the years. You end up going to spend a weekend with some old friends more than anything else. It’s just nice to spend some time with friends.”

And that’s something we can all relate to – no matter what our age.
LET’S GET PHYSICAL
Andrew Lewis Exercises More Than the Mind

They’re hitting the books instead of a ball. They’re pushing pens instead of a tire swing. They’re hunkering down at computers instead of in the perfect hide-and-go-seek spot. And, with their ever-increasing load of homework, kids today are becoming less and less active. That’s why, when it’s Andrew Lewis handing out assignments, grade-schoolers better be ready to exercise a lot more than their minds.

“In our zest to gain more academic time in subjects like math and science, we have often overlooked the physical being of a child,” says the associate professor of health and human performance, who recently received an Honor Award from the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance. In a study measuring the effects of physical education homework among Charleston fifth-graders, he asked three elementary classes to spend time after school bench-pressing phonebooks, curling tin cans and just running around. “All of the activities were designed around things they would have in their own home.”

All he was really asking was that the students act like kids – and burn some energy doing so. It’s something he wishes every teacher would encourage. Which is exactly why he’s dedicated his entire 29-year career at the College to teaching his students, themselves future teachers, the importance of physical activity and education. “I have the opportunity to work with young professionals who want to be outstanding physical educators,” says Lewis, who also serves as the director of professional development in education for the School of Education, Health, and Human Performance (EHHP), “I really enjoy seeing them grow from a student, the consumer of information and knowledge, to a teacher, the provider of information and knowledge.”

His students aren’t the only things he’s enjoyed seeing grow over the years. Considering the student body of around 3,500 when he first came to campus in 1974, Lewis has seen the College do its fair share of growing, as well. “I suspected that with our very strong liberal arts base, we were going to grow some, but I did not imagine it being the size it is,” says Lewis, who has served not only as the interim assistant dean of undergraduate studies but also as the interim associate dean of the EHHP. “I was in a position in what the College considered its essence, and that was its academic offerings.”

But it’s his 11-year post as the chair of what’s now the Department of Health and Human Performance that has meant the most to him, largely because – as the first African American professor to become a departmental chair – he feels he made a difference in its growth.

“I think that’s probably one of the proudest moments of my career,” says Lewis, adding: “I’m also proud of the College for the student and faculty diversity it has today. It’s a better place for it.”

Lewis has certainly had his hand in making the College a better place. He helped create the athletic training major, developed new extracurricular athletic activities and oversaw the $3.5-million renovation of the Willard A. Silcox Physical Education and Health Center.

“I think my time here has been well spent,” says Lewis. “I’ve enjoyed every minute of it.”

Still, he insists, nothing would make him prouder than to help today’s children get more exercise – even if that does mean assigning a little extra homework. 

ON THE MOVE
The main administrative offices of the Department of Health and Human Performance – including the offices for the department chair and the office manager – will be moving into the newly renovated space on the first floor of the Willard A. Silcox Physical Education and Health Center. “It’s great to be moving into the Silcox,” says Mike Flynn, the department’s chair. “A presence in there will help us to serve students more effectively.” The move is expected to take place at the end of the month. All contact information will remain the same.

GARDENER’S PICK

Bottlebrush
AKA: Callistemon citrinus.
ON CAMPUS: Found in the garden behind the Blacklock House, 18 Bull Street.
DESCRIPTION: This massive evergreen shrub is easy to grow and tolerates drought, frost and heat. Typically growing to 10-15’, the plant can be trained into a narrow, round-headed, 20-25’ tree by staking and pruning in its youth. Its flower spikes are made up of individual, bright red flowers that produce small, woody fruits containing hundreds of tiny seeds. It may bloom intermittently throughout the year, attracting hummingbirds, bees and butterflies year round.
TIPS: Plant in full sun for the most showy flowers. To use as a screen, plant every 4-6’ and trim from top to keep foliage lower. Otherwise, prune lightly after flowering to keep plant’s shape. Propagate in the late summer from cuttings of semi-mature wood. Avoid planting other plant species beneath the shrub.
FIELD OF DREAMS: The College’s Fantasy Baseball League Hits It Off

THERE’S SOMETHING ABOUT BASEBALL

that evokes a hazy sense of nostalgia and optimism — something almost magical. Certainly the most fitting pastime for America (this so-called land of dreams), baseball somehow makes us believe we can be anything we want to be and do anything we want to do. Sure, it’s a competitive sport that takes just as much strength and skill as any other, but somehow baseball and fantasy go hand in hand.

Just ask the College of Charleston fantasy baseball league.

“Every season is a new season, but the whole air of baseball is always the same — it just makes you reminisce,” says Kyle Comen, the office manager in the Office of Admissions and Adult Student Services who started this season’s rotisserie league of 14 staff and faculty members. “There are some huge baseball fans on campus, and I just thought it’d be good to bring us all together for some good old-fashioned trash talking!”

In fantasy baseball, however, even that camaraderie and good-humored rivalry is simulated, taking place on the league’s ESPN-owned website. In fact, almost everything the fantasy baseball league does together is done separately.

“You don’t need face time to play fantasy sports,” says Comen, who — in addition to playing fantasy baseball for 10 years — has played fantasy football and fantasy hockey. “You just need to be a fan.”

Of course, some knowledge of the players and the game doesn’t hurt either — especially since each member of the league uses real-life players’ statistics to draft players of the fantasy team he’s managing and then makes roster moves and lineup changes according to how the players perform throughout the season (the better one’s players do, the more points one’s fantasy team gets).

“You have to watch who’s getting injured, who happens to be hot at the time, that kind of thing,” says Travis Ebaugh, a student services program coordinator in the Office of Financial Assistance and Veterans Affairs, who coached baseball at James Madison University for three seasons and who has played fantasy baseball for 10 years.

“There’s actually a lot to consider in this game.”

Including the other people in your league.

“You have to be flexible because you don’t know what the person in front of you is going to do,” says Tom Buchheit, an academic advisor, who still runs the league he started with his college buddies 13 years ago. “Back then it was all by hand — I had to enter the baseball statistics and everything. It was hard work, but I was committed.”

Things might be easier now that everything is online and automated, but that doesn’t mean it’s any less time consuming.

“In the 26 weeks of the fantasy baseball season, I spend … more time on it than I should admit: maybe about 5 to 10 hours a week,” says Buchheit. “There are some people who spend a lot more time on it than I do.”

And then there are those who spend a lot less — people like Comen.

“I just pick my top three and then I just let the draft work itself out. I just let it roll,” he says. “I’ve had seasons where I’ve come in at the bottom, and I’ve had seasons where I’ve come in at the top.”

And, of course, winning isn’t everything.

“It’s nice talking to people who are into sports as much as you are,” says Comen. “Besides that, it’s just something that divides up your boring day. It takes your mind off the rigmarole of life.”

Just as any good fantasy should.

TECHNO BYTES

Employees are asked to plan accordingly for an IT service outage on Sunday, April 19, when the data center in the Information Technology Division will be powering down its server and sharply curtailing its services to transfer equipment to the new power supply and the new generator in the AT&T Building. The outage — which will begin at 8 a.m. and will last an estimated six hours — will not affect Internet access to external websites, telephone services, CougarAlert services or printing availability in the Addlestone Library, E-mail, College websites, CougarTrail, WebCT and network drives are among the capabilities that will not be available during the outage.

For a complete list of applications and systems that will be affected, and for more information, visit cofc.edu/itstatus/scheduled.html. Please address questions and concerns to helpdesk@cofc.edu.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION

- The design for the temporary parking lot at 34 George Street (the old Great Wall Chinese Restaurant) will be submitted to the City of Charleston for review this month.
- An elevator was installed last month in the Calhoun Annex, 172 Calhoun Street.
- The metal roofing and the brick and cast stone installations at the Marion and Wayland H. Cato Jr. Center for the Arts were completed in March. Windows will continue to be installed this month, as will other interior finishes.
- Last month at the new science center, the lecture hall concrete work was completed, windows were installed in the west wing, an elevator was installed and work on the third-floor greenhouse was begun. HVAC, plumbing, sprinkler and electrical rough-ins will continue in April, and masonry and cast stone placement will be close to completion by the end of the month.
SAVE THE DATE

WHAT BUILDINGS CAN REVEAL
Gene Waddell, archivist in the Addlestone Library, will explain how the physical evidence a building provides can reveal how it was designed, constructed and renovated, even when there is no documentation.

When: Tues., April 7, 6 p.m.
Where: Addlestone Library, room 227
Fee: None
Contact: Jenny Fowler, 3.6526, fowlerj@cofc.edu

PRE-RETIREMENT EDUCATION SEMINAR
Learn everything you need to know about planning for your future retirement under the South Carolina Retirement System.

When: Mon., April 20, 8:15 a.m.—4:15 p.m.
Where: Jewish Studies Center, Norman and Gerry Arnold Hall
Fee: None
Contact: RSVP to Sandy Butler, 3.5709, butlers@cofc.edu

A CHARLESTON AFFAIR
This annual alumni reception will honor the Class of 2009 and will feature food, drinks, music and plenty of surprises.

When: Sat., April 25, 7-10 p.m.
Where: Cistern Yard
Fee: through April 18: $30/employee, $50/guest; April 19-24: $75/each; April 25: $100/each
Contact: Lauren Towe, 3.7107, towell@cofc.edu

All information is subject to change. Please verify times, places and registration requirements with listed contact.

NEWS BRIEFS: News You Can Use

• Alan Shao is the new dean of the School of Business and Economics.
• Leroy Lewis, director of the College’s Upward Bound Program, was honored by the Tom Joyner Morning Show, a nationally syndicated radio show, which gave him $1,000 and named him the “Real Father, Real Man” for the third week of February.
• Scott Peeples, English professor, was awarded a grant from the Fulbright Specialists Program in recognition of his work on Edgar Allan Poe.
• Frances Welch, dean of the School of Education, Health, and Human Performance, was named a 2009 Woman of Distinction in the education category by the Girl Scouts of Eastern Carolina.
• State Health Plan, BlueChoice and Cigna subscribers are eligible for a preventive health screening for $15 on April 14, 8 a.m.—12 p.m. For more information, visit eip.sc.gov/publications/screeningguide.pdf. Register with Margie Gamble – 3.5513 or gamblem@cofc.edu – by April 6.
• The application deadline for the 2009–2010 Faculty/Staff Dependent Scholarship is May 1. For eligibility criteria and more information, visit cofc.edu/finaid/forms/DepSchol.pdf.
• Employees’ children are eligible for a $15 discount for the College’s 2009 soccer camps for 4-12-year-olds and for advanced 10-18-year-old girls. For more information, visit cofcsoccercamps.com. Enter coupon code 28899 to receive the discount.

When most of us meet a personal goal, we get a sense of accomplishment, satisfaction and self worth. When Melanie Fulton crossed the finish line of the Tampa Bay Gasparilla Marathon in Florida last month, she got all that, plus a medal. “We all got medals with skulls and crossbones because of the race’s fun pirate theme,” says the transfer and adult student admissions counselor, who trained and raced with five students from the College’s Graduate School. “When we crossed the finish line, the pirates were there greeting us, cheering and ringing bells. It felt very cool.”

More meaningful than the warm welcome and the shiny medal, however, was the fact that Fulton finished her first marathon, which fell on the fourth anniversary of her mother’s death. “That was kind of why I chose this marathon to be my first,” says Fulton. “That, and it was really flat.”

It may have been flat, but the race wasn’t easy. Not only was it a cold and rainy day, but Fulton was still recuperating from a stomach virus (and fever of over 100 degrees!) that had her out of work the entire week prior to the race. “It was a pretty miserable running experience for my first marathon,” admits Fulton. “But at the end, I had a mega runner’s high that made it all worth it!”

Not to mention a medal, the satisfaction of honoring her mother and the relief that surely her first marathon would be the only one in such adverse conditions. “We are all very proud of her, but think she was crazed to risk her health,” says Dorinda Harmon, director of transfer and adult student services. “She says she is just stubborn; I say determined.”

Either way, Fulton met her special goal – and she has a lot to show for it.
Thanks to everyone who participated in the last photo quiz, and congratulations to Amie Smith, administrative specialist in the Office of Cougar Card Services, who was the first to guess that the object in question was one of four colorful clocks in the Addlestone Library. Located between the doors to rooms 121 and 122, near the front door on the first floor and near the copiers on second and third floors, these clocks are authentic re-editions of the “Multi Color Ball Clock” created by modernist designer George Nelson for the Howard Miller Clock Company in 1948. “I have always been a fan of mid-century design,” says David Cohen, dean of the library, who had a major hand in choosing the fixtures. “The clocks are colorful, creative statements that contrast with their rather staid, institutional counterparts.”

Take a look at the picture above. The object can be found on campus. Do you know what it is? The first person to submit the correct answer will win a tasty lunch for two at Liberty Street Fresh Food Company, compliments of ARAMARK. Good luck!

Send your submission to lutza@cofc.edu by Monday, April 13, 2009. The contest is open to all College faculty and staff. One submission per person, please.

What's the first thing you do when you get to work?

Enid Idelsohn
Administrator, Jewish Studies
“I turn on the lights, check the thermostats, check my e-mail and then get coffee.”

Todd McNerney
Chair of the Theatre Department
“One word: Starbucks! Seriously, I arrive every day at about 7:45. I love the quiet of our campus in the early morning, so I take a leisurely walk across it to the Starbucks in what old-timers like me remember as The Goody House - then it’s to my office. I need that caffeine in order to begin trying to tackle all of my e-mail.”

Patty Lewis
Custodian, Custodial Services
“I clock in, check around to see what needs to be done and start my work - dust, vacuum, clean the bathrooms.”

Bea Smith
Salad Bar Server, Liberty Street Fresh Food Company
“I set up the food station - put the ice in the bar, cut up whatever the choices are and put out the yogurt and the cottage cheese.”