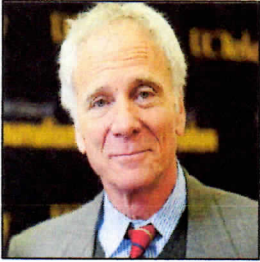


# BERKELEY EMERITI TIMES

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## **MARCH 21<sup>ST</sup> LUNCH WITH EDWARD WASSERMAN – ETHICAL JOURNALISM IN THE DIGITAL ERA?**

Our upcoming Emeriti Association lunch meeting (see the accompanying reservation sheet) brings us a distinguished speaker on a highly topical subject.

On January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2013, Edward Wasserman became Dean of the Graduate School of Journalism here at Berkeley. He has not only a distinguished record as an academician but also a deep, continuing involvement in active reportage and commentary. (For a quick introduction to this aspect of his life, consult his ongoing blog at [ewasserman.com](http://ewasserman.com) – a site he ironically titles “Unsocial Media.” A quick run through topics on that site reveals how socially involved he actually is!)

This involvement began during his undergraduate days. While still a student at Yale, he volunteered and taught in a remedial education program for inner-city children and at the same time was associate editor of the Yale Record, a humor magazine of long standing.

After receiving his B.A. in 1970 – in politics and economics – he earned a *Licence* in philosophy from the University of Paris. (Obviously this has recently stood him in good stead as he comments on the Charlie Hebdo affair.) His international point of view on matters of journalistic ethics was fortified by completion of the Ph.D. in media politics and economics in 1980 from the London School of Economics.

In addition to his academic qualifications, he has extensive journalistic experience as reporter and editor of newspapers in Maryland, Wyoming, and Florida,

serving for some time as the executive business editor of *The Miami Herald*.

Before coming to Berkeley he had been for ten years the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation professor of journalism ethics at Washington and Lee University in Virginia. While writing and speaking widely on media rights and wrongs, technological change, and media ownership and control, his academic specialties include plagiarism, source confidentiality, and conflict of interest.

With the current flurry of concern about reportorial misbehavior and untruths, along with judgment-making on matters of religion and/or terrorism, it looks as though our second speaker of 2015 will fill a very real need as we strive to understand the current media scene.

*- Phyllis Brooks Schafer*



## **JANUARY 24<sup>TH</sup> LUNCH WITH JAY KEASLING – ENGINEERING MICROBES TO PRODUCE OUR STUFF**

On January 24<sup>th</sup> we enjoyed a technically and socially interesting talk by Jay Keasling, Professor in the Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering. Jay is not limited to one department, however. His cross involvements include the Lawrence Berkeley Lab, the Synthetic Biology Engineering Center, the Joint BioEngineering Institute, and his own Keasling Laboratory among other institutions, as well as the Amyris Company.

The center of much of his recent work has been in the field of malaria diagnosis and treatment. Some three

**BERKELEY EMERITI TIMES, MARCH 2015**

billion people are currently at risk! One effective drug, artemisin, has long been known as a treatment for malaria – even in records from ancient China! As late as 2004 the World Health Organization recommended it.

But the drug itself had been derived only from the plant artemisia (wormwood), from which purification took a long time – 18 to 24 months from growing the plant to extracting the drug. In addition, pharmaceutical companies had problems with verifying price and supply, and such swings discourage further planting. Meanwhile, in certain areas (among them Vietnam, Cambodia, and Burma) resistances to the artemisia plant itself are developing.

The goal at Jay's lab is to engineer a micro-organism to produce artemisin from other inexpensive renewable sources. In this he has received funding from the Gates Foundation. The basic research is being done here at Berkeley in cooperation with One World Health.

However, academics may work on and make discoveries, but they are not attuned to developing bulk production. Thus the Amyris Company in Emeryville was founded and its staff works in cooperation with the university. Together they have found a gene in artemisia that enables the production of artemisinic acid in other plants. After tracking down enzymes and special yeasts, they found ways in 2006 to pump the acid out of plant cells and purify it.

Production is licensed by U.C. Berkeley, but the university takes no royalties. No company should make profits from this drug since its users are largely poor populations. So far, as the result of far-reaching international cooperation, 3 million treatments have been delivered to Africa, but more and more are needed.

Searches are also under way in these labs to find in plants sources other than petroleum to produce items as diverse as nylon, paints, aspirin, toothpaste, and soap – a surprising array. Corn and sugar cane, for example, can now replace petroleum to be turned into fuels and chemicals while the plants themselves take up carbon.

Research and development along these lines is

predicted as needing 150 person-years of work at a cost of \$250 million dollars. The biological products developed need to be designed, built, tested, and learned from. The Berkeley Open Biofoundry works to produce such biological products. Such activities, our speaker concluded, constitute a part of the Berkeley promise – producing students who choose to go out to help the world.

- Phyllis Brooks Schafer



## SCHOLARS' LIBRARY PROGRAM

Many Emeriti have home or office libraries that are no longer essential to their professional lives, or whose relevance to current work has waned. But the books could be of use to others. How to get them out into the world again?

Consider giving them to the 2430 Arts Alliance, a non-profit corporation based at 2430 Bancroft Way (housing University Press Books and The Musical Offering), established to promote events and make donations contributing to the promotion of the arts in Berkeley. Over the past five years many in our community have given generously to this organization, and many programs have taken place and grants been given.

For the last couple of years, they have been accepting donations of books that can be marketed through the bookstore – either in the store itself or through its online outlets. This started with a drive to increase their East Asian holdings, and they now accept books in many different fields.

The donors receive a tax deduction, to the extent provided for by law, based on the books' retail value. Donors are often surprised at the value of a rare book or two. If need be, the bookstore staff can arrange for a home pick-up of books. Unless they are extremely rare, there is sadly no market for runs of journals and periodicals.

For more information, feel free to contact me (by phone, 510-705-9951, or by email at phyllisbrookss@yahoo.com) or Peter Burghardt (peter@universitypressbooks.com).

-Phyllis Brooks Schafer

**SHORT TAKES: Emeriti Lunch Table, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursdays of the month at noon in the northwest corner of The Great Hall in The Faculty Club. Pick up a salad or sandwich, and find the table with our reservation sign. All are welcome to join in our informal discussions!**



**INTERVIEW WITH TANIA LOMBROZO: VACCINATION AND OMISSION BIAS – John Swartzberg**

Tania Lombrozo is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology. Her work explores several topics within cognitive psychology. Her area of work in understanding how we seek explanations and what makes some explanations more satisfying than others is particularly timely given the recent measles outbreak that was fueled in large part by parents hesitant to vaccinate their children. The following are her responses to questions posed by Cecilie Bisgaard-Frantzen, a visiting MPH student from Denmark, and me.

**Q: What do you think is the reason for omission bias in parents who choose not to vaccinate their kids?**

**A:** People definitely vary in the extent to which they exhibit omission bias, but not much is known about why some people exhibit it more than others. There is some evidence that people are more likely to exhibit omission bias if they tend to make decisions more intuitively, by going with their immediate feeling or gut reaction, rather than engaging in explicit, deliberate reflection. We also know a bit about the conditions under which people are more *likely* to exhibit omission bias. For example, people may be more likely to exhibit omission

bias when making moral decisions than other types of decisions, and especially when the moral issue involves what's called a "sacred" or "protected" value: an entity that we consider so valuable that we hate to even think about assigning a monetary value to it, or trading it off against other goods. Children's wellbeing is likely a value of this type for most parents, which could make omission bias more pronounced for vaccination decisions than it is for other decisions.

**Q.: How conscious do you think people are about omission bias?**

**A.:** I doubt people are conscious of omission bias. Like many psychological processes, the processes responsible for omission bias likely operate without our awareness. We may intuitively experience an option as more or less attractive than another, or imagine a counterfactual or hypothetical situation as more or less aversive than another, without recognizing exactly why we have the reactions we do.

**Q.: It seems a current in our society is to question authority. How much of a role do you think that plays in a parent's negative attitude toward vaccination?**

**A.:** I think this is one factor in some people's decisions, but it's important to be clear about which authority parents are questioning. People who do not vaccinate often belong to *communities* that do not vaccinate. Individual parents may be questioning the authority of science or of their doctor, but accepting the authority of a religious doctrine, of a particular parenting philosophy, or of other members of their community.

**Q.: In addition to omission bias, what other psychological mechanisms do you think play a role in causing parents either not to immunize their children or to be hesitant about vaccination?**

**A.:** A variety of factors play a role. Some of them have to do with the persistence of misinformation: people often have inaccurate beliefs about the actual risks and benefits of vaccination, and psychological research suggests that simply presenting them with accurate information is rarely enough to make them reject those beliefs. Other factors are more social in nature: they

have to do with the community that people belong to and how different decisions are valued within that community. One factor that's received only a little attention, but that I suspect plays a role in many personal and policy decisions, is a preference for what people consider to be "natural." This could manifest as hesitation to intervene on a "natural" process when it comes to vaccination decisions, and also in many other issues, like attitudes towards genetically-modified foods.

**Q.: What are your ideas of how individuals can guard against omission bias?**

**A.:** One suggestion is to be very explicit about your decision-making process. Write out the costs and benefits of each option, and think about how you'd weigh each possible outcome, without focusing on how each outcome is brought about (i.e., by an act versus an omission). Another suggestion is to try out some thought experiments. Instead of approaching a decision in a single way, try thinking about it in different ways. For instance, would you feel differently about your options if you swapped which outcome was associated with the act and which with the omission? Would you feel differently if the norm in your community were one decision, versus the other? These mental exercises can sometimes clarify why you're attracted or repelled by a given option, and whether that reaction is really tracking what matters most in this case: what's best for your child and your community.

**SHORT TAKES: Remember John Swartzberg's warning on the danger to us all during flu and pneumonia season. Two new pneumonia vaccines are available and taking both is recommended! First, Prevnar 13, and then Pneumovax 23 (6 to 12 months later). See the November 2014 *Emeriti Times* for more details.**



**Caroline Kane**

**PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

**Greetings esteemed Emeriti,**

March enters with all of us hoping for many rains this next 31 days, and we won't even mind a spillover into April and May. I am sure you are all conserving water, and "California showers" have now become a term that my family understands in the hygiene department.

I can tell you that the budget negotiations for our University, let alone our campus, are ongoing with the Committee of Two. The Legislative Analyst's Office just released its report on university funding. None of this at the moment impacts Emeriti or retired Staff except to increase angst about health insurance in the future. There are no changes anticipated now that Sutter Health and Blue Shield have made amends this spring. There is also research afoot about whether the University DOES have a commitment to continue assisting with health insurance costs implicit or explicit in agreements prior to the 1990's. Stay tuned on that one, but don't worry for now about any loss in health insurance supplements to the Medicare addendum plans.

Here is an opportunity to volunteer: University of the People, an online accredited no-tuition (yes, no tuition) University awarding both AA and BS degrees in limited areas is interested to recruit interested Emeriti to develop courses in business or health sciences, to evaluate curricula, to mentor students online, and generally be a part of this endeavor. Their goal is to make higher education available to those who might not have the opportunity in their own communities or their own countries, and to those who could not afford to enroll or attend Universities whose costs are prohibitive in the undeveloped world. Contact your UCBEA President, Caroline Kane, [kanecm@berkeley.edu](mailto:kanecm@berkeley.edu) for more information, or visit their WEBSITE: [uopeople.edu](http://uopeople.edu)

Our informal lunches are once again ongoing on the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursdays in the Great Hall. Join us...the

conversations are wide ranging, and you can have the topic go wherever you like. Also, our March 21<sup>st</sup> lunch with Ed Wasserman (Saturday, Faculty Club, RSVP form at the end of the newsletter) will spin your head about the new media...yes, you should know about this too.

Best wishes for a pleasant March!

Caroline, President UCBEA



**Cary Sweeney**

**RETIREMENT CENTER  
UPDATE**

**Remember the New Retirement Center Location  
and Walk-In Hours**

The UCB Retirement Center is at 101 University Hall, on the ground floor of the tall building located at the corner of University Avenue and Oxford Street. Drop-in hours are Mon.-Fri., 1pm-4pm.

**Announcing the Retirement CenterExpress**

The UCB Retirement Center is excited to announce a new resource—the *Retirement CenterExpress Newsletter*! This new format will enable you to access online content easily, as well as find out about upcoming Center and campus offerings.

The *Retirement CenterExpress* allows us to offer a greater variety of news including resources, webinars, and more from the campus and the community. eNews articles will be user-friendly, interesting, and relevant to you, the retiree. Delivered on a regular schedule you can expect to see the premier issue this spring.

Don't miss out on this great new service! Send your name and email address to [ucbrc@berkeley.edu](mailto:ucbrc@berkeley.edu) and ask to sign up for the *CenterExpress*. Retirees who currently receive our weekly emails will be automatically subscribed.

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2014-2015**

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