

Faculty Profiles

By Barbara Lane-Brown

I visited Robert M. Bushman on a Friday afternoon in his Rosenwald office. He sat at his desk, surrounded by pictures of his family, the computer and software he's having so much fun with, and a skull with an exposed brain. Bushman is like his surroundings: fun, serious, full of surprises.

He was born in Cleveland, Ohio, did undergraduate work at Ohio State University, and then graduated from Ohio University in Athens. "It took me six years." He started the process in 1969, which he characterized as "a strange time." "During my first year, the campus exploded in anti-war riots. It was easy to get carried away with it. I don't think I learned one academic thing during my tenure, but it was a very interesting time."

Later, when he entered Ohio University, he "discovered accounting." "I opened an accounting book and it all made sense to me right away. It was one of those moments...." He referred to the masterwork of Hermann Hesse, *Magister Ludi*. "It was, as Hesse called it, an 'experience of vocation.' I've had three or four since then, but none as strong as that first one. I've tried to escape accounting, but I get naturally drawn back to it...it just seems the right thing to do."

After graduation, Bushman spent about three and a half years at Arthur Andersen in Cleveland, and made senior auditor before he left. I asked why he chose to leave. "Burn out. I was so driven to succeed

that I kept assuming more and more responsibility...it got to the point where I was working tremendous overtime." He spent a period of close to eight months when he averaged 75 hours a week. "I ended up hating the job. It took a long time to recover from that. It takes a particular person to deny everything for the job." He discovered he wasn't that kind of person. "I've never forgotten that lesson."

After leaving Andersen, he "took several years off and traveled, read a lot of books and had a lot of adventures."

I wondered how he found his way back to accounting. "I ran out of money, and took a job as an internal auditor at Trans Union Corporation." But he "detested" the job, so he applied to graduate school, was accepted to the University of Minnesota in the doctoral program, and "got turned on by teaching."

"The great thing about Yoga ..."

I asked him to characterize the most colorful experience he had while working on his Ph.D. "There were a lot of colorful moments, but for a while I worked as a private investigator."

When asked how he felt about teaching at the GSB, he replied: "I've taught for almost ten years now. The distinguishing feature here is the intensity of the



Photo by David Frankel

That's what academia is all about... the exposed brain!

students and what that does to you as a teacher...it brings out a much higher level of performance. I feel I can achieve my objective of developing the best accounting courses I'm capable of here as opposed to somewhere else because of that level. The downside is teaching here requires a lot more work than at a lot of other places. It's one package...to achieve a lot, you have to work a lot."

Bushman isn't all accounting, though. He has a wife and three children; the boys are aged 19 and 15, and the girl is 8. As for what else he does for fun outside of his professional life, he's been practicing Yoga for about eight years. "It's a great way to relieve stress. The great thing about Yoga is that once you get your practice up, you can do it anytime. As it relates to my job...being an academic or intellectual, you basically get rewarded for coming up with ideas. I don't know where ideas come from, but in some sense they're associated with having the body at its peak. So I've chosen certain asanas (positions) that are geared

toward improving and enhancing the efficiency with which my brain operates. By working with my body and my mind to get them working at a peak as a mechanism, I feel I can better assure I'll come up with the best ideas I'm capable of." He then grinned and added, "Besides, it makes me feel good, energetic, in control."

He's indifferent about food. As for entertainment, he likes live music concerts—reggae or hard core rock 'n roll.

By this point in our interview, I felt I knew how he'd answer my last question, but I asked anyway. Do you have fun with your work? "Oh, yeah, a lot of fun! Not always, but, yes—it can be a lot of fun. I have a lot of good colleagues here. We have great discussions—that are really fun—that are about accounting. Having colleagues you respect and have a good chemistry with makes a job much more fun. Not frivolous fun...it's an enjoyment that comes from the intellectual interchange that occurs."

Talking with Robert Bushman is a lot of fun. If you get a chance to, take it.