 BY DONALD J. FREDERICK

Stan Ching
Chemist and Camel Driver

How did chemistry professor Stanton Ching become head Camel driver at Connecticut College? Ching combined his chemistry background and love of sports to spend time outside the lab and lecture hall as few other chemists have done.

STAN CHING: An unusual combination of excellence in lab, lecture hall, field, and court.

Chemistry professor Stanton Ching (ACS '84) went the extra mile for the Camels at Connecticut College.

Ching served as interim director of athletics at the private New London, CT, liberal arts school, where the teams are known as the "Camels." He was asked to fill the slot after the regular director left in April 2002 and the school decided to launch an extended search for his replacement.

The college found a new athletic director in 2003, and Ching happily returned to his full-time teaching duties last September.

The unusual mix of chemistry and athletics made sense for both Ching and the college. The sports-minded professor knew almost everyone in the athletic department because he had coached the women's volleyball team and been the college's faculty representative to the National Collegiate Athletic Association. Connecticut competes in the association's Division III New England Small College Athletics Conference (NESCAC) against rivals such as Williams, Amherst, and Wesleyan.

Campus-Wide Involvement

Campus administrators had confidence in Ching because, since arriving at Connecticut College in 1990, he has worked on committees touching almost every aspect of campus life, including one involving the future of the athletic department.

"Stan did a fabulous job, and we trusted his judgment unconditionally," said Helen B. Regan, a professor of education and former dean of faculty at the college. "He embodies excellence in teaching, scholarship, and service, and left the athletic department a legacy of commendable attitudes, commitments, and priorities when the new director arrived in July."

By no means an interim figurehead, Ching added three new coaches and two athletic administrators during his tenure. Covering more miles than some of his track stars, he still managed to teach his general chemistry course, look after three independent-study students, and fulfill other professional obligations.

"My chemistry background helped a lot because I was used to working long hours and tackling problems from different perspectives," Ching notes. He usually shows up on campus between 6:00 and 6:30 a.m. and typically comes in on weekends.

Chemists Learning from Athletes

Ching is also convinced that chemists could profit from the teamwork and mental discipline displayed by dedicated athletes.

Of course, the effort expended as chief Camel driver had tangible rewards, such as the time he watched the underdog women's field hockey team defeat heavily favored Middlebury in overtime.

More importantly, the chemistry professor learned a lot about the way a school works by running the athletic department. "It really gave me an appreciation of the contribution people make at all levels of the college, how good they are and how well they do their jobs."

Ching does his job very well. Only 42 years old, he is already credited with 23 papers, and since 1999 he has been secretary to the editorial board of *Inorganic Syntheses*.

The main thrust of his current research

involves microporous manganese oxides. Although the compounds exist in nature, they are difficult to extract in pure form. "It is much easier and less expensive to make them in the lab," explains Ching, "and they have potential as heterogeneous catalysts, toxic waste absorbents, and electrode materials for rechargeable batteries."

"His work is very good and important to his students," observed Marc Zimmer (ACS '87), a chemistry professor colleague at Connecticut College. "More and more liberal arts colleges are now doing top-rate research that gets funded by major institutions such as the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health."

"An Excellent Teacher"

Ching can't imagine doing research without his students. "Not only can you show them how to attack problems," he points out, "but also how to become professionals in their field. They learn the techniques and skills to work in the lab, and most importantly how to interact with other scientists and fellow students."

"The time spent in Dr. Ching's lab prepared us well," said Eric J. Welch (ACS '03), a third-year graduate student at the University of California, Berkeley. Welch remembers the camaraderie at dinners for the lab crew hosted by his former adviser and fondly recalls "an excellent teacher, who had a warm, personal relationship with all his students."

Beyond lab work, Ching emphasizes the importance of writing skills and encourages students to do reports and if possible contribute to publications. But that's often difficult. Time management and prioritizing can be big problems in college, he points out. "Students sometimes overschedule themselves and let vital areas slip."

That's an interesting observation from someone who described himself as a "clueless high school student who didn't even know the college admissions process."

Born in Honolulu, HI, Ching has a Japanese mother and Chinese father, and it's easy to see where he got a lot of his athletic and academic genes. His mother is vice president of student affairs at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, and his father is a retired recreation superintendent for the island of Oahu. His younger brother—an English professor—teaches at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles.

Choosing a Chemistry Career

Ching thought about being a marine biologist or physician while attending a public high school in Honolulu, but a chemistry course got his full attention. And the scales were tipped when he got hooked on inorganic chemistry as an undergraduate at Pomona College and Harvey Mudd College in Claremont, CA. The two schools are closely affiliated.

Mits Kubota, a supportive Harvey Mudd chemistry professor, encouraged him to apply for graduate school at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL. The prospective student from Hawaii arrived to scout the facilities on a bitterly cold and snowy day in the dead of winter.

"It was a frosty reception outside, but a warm one inside," he recalls. "I've been lucky everywhere I've gone and had the good fortune to work with classy, top-notch people. That makes a big difference."

The young graduate student loved Northwestern, despite the snowy winters, and stayed fit by playing on intramural teams of chemistry grad students that competed in everything from basketball to floor hockey. Somehow he even found time to help teach his favorite sport, volleyball, in a physical education class.

Ching soon discovered that he liked the interaction in the classroom as much as on the playing field. After graduating with an inorganic chemistry Ph.D. in 1988 under the guidance of Duward Shriver, Ching decided on a teaching career.

As a change of pace, he did his postdoctoral work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill with analytical chemist Royce Murray (ACS '57). They worked on a project involving low-temperature electrochemistry.

ACS Membership Benefits

Ching joined the American Chemical Society while at Northwestern as "a sort of first serious step in the profession." So when it came time to search for a job, he did what he describes as "his one-stop shopping" in *Chemical & Engineering News*. "If there's a job out there in chemistry, it's listed in the back pages of that ACS magazine," he contends.

Following up on a Connecticut College listing, he arrived at the school on another inauspicious winter day with fog so thick that he could barely make out the handsome limestone and granite buildings adorning the campus. But he liked the people he met inside the chemistry department and the potential for meaningful research.

Balancing two jobs last year made his research more difficult and curtailed his personal physical fitness program, but both are up to speed again.

Ching loved basketball and volleyball, but gave up the sports "when I turned 35 and noticed that a lot of my contemporaries were getting bad injuries during games."

Now he does a lot of bicycling on his 21-speed road bike and thinks nothing of reeling off 100 miles a day on weekends.

But there's a slower, softer, gentler side to the athletic professor, who confesses he loves to do mundane yard work around his modest, two-bedroom home—mowing the lawn, trimming trees, and yanking out weeds. True to his roots, he likes to unwind after his outdoor labors, sipping a cool drink and listening to Hawaiian music. ⬢

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