



PHOTOS THE HERALD-SUN/WALT UNKS

The Symposium editorial review board (clockwise from bottom) Duke sophomore Anna Skorupa, editor; Duke freshman Andrea Oland; UNC grad student Leila Plummer; adviser Georg Buehler; and Duke graduate Doug Friedlander meet at Raleigh Group International as they debate the material submitted for an upcoming edition.

Symposium stirs spiritual talk

Student-run magazine helps students pursue spiritual quests, explore their beliefs and discuss faith issues

By JENNIFER CHORPENING
 The Herald-Sun

Editor-in-chief Anna Skorupa knew she didn't like something about a submission to her group's student-run spirituality journal describing the writer's 10,000-mile walk through Europe.

"The problem is, most of the comments are 'I'm so changed.' It doesn't tell you what happened," Skorupa, a Duke University sophomore, said at the March editorial

board meeting for The Symposium magazine, he waited off to the side, as the group decided whether to publish his interview with Buddhist monk Fleet Maul.

Maul spent 16 years in prison for drug running before becoming a monk and working as a spiritual consultant in Colorado, Lane said. "It [the interview] was indeed a spiritual task," he said. "But the best part was you rarely get to do spiritually-based journalism that is not dismissed. It was an incredible experience for me, personally."

Lane, from Wilmington, described his spiritual past as "recovering Methodist." But he also said he's always been "fascinated with God." SKS allows him to explore his beliefs and find a community that is also interested in the same, he said.

"In terms of my demographic, going to college is about who you are and what you want to do with your life," he said. "SKS just takes a spiritual angle on that."

Lane's interview received a "yes" in early voting by the editorial board. A personal essay by Duke's Cheely wasn't as well received. But in an interview later, Cheely shrugged it off.

"I've sort of established a general routine of not getting my work accepted. It's a group joke," he said. "But I keep pounding away at stuff. I get a lot out of just writing the stuff, my experiences and reflecting on them. ... An SKS principle is, you set your goals high, because you get a lot more out of life. This is going to help be become a better writer."

It also, he noted, "definitely proves it's not biased."

Students who read the magazine, which may be the only student-run, nondenominational spiritual journal in the nation, can learn more about themselves in the process, Cheely said. "A lot of people are questioning things, but when you sit around the dining hall, or a fraternity party, you think you must be crazy because no one else is thinking about the same things you are," he said. "If you pick it up, you see you aren't crazy, and maybe these are legitimate questions to ask. The Symposium has the potential to bring students together from a lot of different places and perspectives."

"But it definitely has a niche. If we tried to make it something everybody would like, we'd have nothing left."

A one-year subscription to The Symposium costs \$20, but is free for students. For information, write to The Symposium at 1003 Bryan Center, Duke University, Durham, NC 27708 or see their Web site at www.self-knowledge.org/symposium/symposium.htm.



Editor Anna Skorupa talks with other editorial review board members as they plan an upcoming issue of the Symposium magazine.

board meeting for The Symposium magazine.

"It doesn't tell you what you can do with it," fellow board member Doug Friedlander, a recent Duke graduate, agreed.

Skorupa and Friedlander are members of the Self Knowledge Symposium Inc. The group, which encourages people to consciously develop their own personal, moral and spiritual values, distributes its magazine at Duke, UNC and N.C. State University to get students talking about spiritual issues, from a variety of faith perspectives.

The Symposium asks the millennial questions, mysteries that people have been trying to unravel since Socrates. "Who am I?" "Why am I here?"

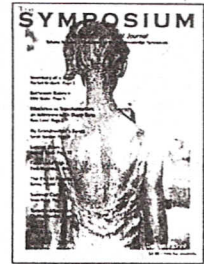
But it also wants answers, or at least a glimmer of one, now. Otherwise, what is the point? Readers can't wait until they're on their deathbeds to discover how best to live.

It's spirituality for the multi-cultural computer-age, where life moves at the speed of a mouse click.

Little wonder then that SKS was founded a decade ago by August Turak, part owner of two software companies. The editorial board for the student-run, 1½-year-old Symposium meets next to his office, tucked into a corner of Raleigh International Group, a software company.

At the most recent board meeting, Skorupa and five staffers were sorting

Learning time, space



It takes me a long time to "come home" — at least a week before I feel natural, before the comparisons slow and the missing becomes passive. For at least a week, I am between roles, identities, and meanings. During that period I am miserable; I cry. I'm like a little kid who wastes a trip asking, "How much farther?" How much farther until my identity solidifies again? Ambiguity is not something I handle well — at least not in real life.

"If God exists, He's in the spaces between us, in the attempt to connect," said the protagonist of the movie "Before Sunrise." Science teaches us that most of matter is empty space. So there is something to be learned from this time in transition. There is something to be said for being content with uncertainty and instability and for enjoying not being solid. Somehow, I must learn to live without a part definition of who I am.

— By Leila Plummer, graduate student in computer science at UNC.

I thought back to the previous evening. We watched a video on the Vipassana technique, given by S. N. Goenka, who is the head teacher and founder of the movement. The first words he spoke on the tape were, "The first day is over, you have nine days left to work." Nine days. That seemed to me an unending desert, an interminable purgatory. There is nothing to look forward to — no talking, reading, writing, no looking at other people. Normally I look forward to eating, but for whatever reason, that first meal was insipid, tasteless.

I had contemplated escape. There was a short path outside the meditation temple, where students can take a short walk. I could see a partly frozen stream on the other side of the wire fence which marked the course boundary. I mused that I could follow that stream for awhile and keep the dogs off my scent. I was sure that I could somehow find a squirrel or some bark to eat. But peer pressure kept me on that tiny path, and I took a few slow steps on the crunching snow back to the dormitory ... I had given my commitment at the outset of the course, that I would see it through.

Before the course began, I had proudly announced to some of my friends that I had hoped to experience the truth of anicca — a Pali word expressing the idea that everything is changing, that all phenomena arise, then pass away. My current state seemed to indicate the opposite. The snow did not melt, the icicles did not get longer.

Then, with the sounding of the gong, at last there is something to do — namely to lace up the boots for the short, brisk walk to the meditation temple. A distraction. My mind was ready instantly to focus on this small task; it was a relief. I even looked forward to the cold. I was genuinely grateful for it.

— By Eric Clark, treasurer of the Self-Knowledge Symposium Foundation.