

Jacqui Lamer: the official Gopher Handler

From the position of shelver in the Athenaeum's library to working for the secretaries of Van Meter, Goucher offers students a variety of jobs on campus. One in particular, however, may go overlooked: the job of Gopher Handler, created last year.

The Gopher Handler fulfills a range of unique tasks required to help the gopher function during sporting events on and, more recently, off-campus. Behind the scenes, it's the handler's responsibility to get together a comprehensive list of sporting events to send to the Gopher Squad— as Women's Tennis Coach Sally Baum calls it— meaning the group of gophers who take turns as the gopher during events. This team of gophers has increased in recent years from just one individual to over seven regular gophers on duty this year. As a result, the number of events covered has increased. At first, the gopher only appeared at basketball games. Today, just about all sports teams enjoy appearances from the gopher. Other events, such as Midnight Madness and off-campus sporting events and community outreach projects also fall under the gopher's increased presence. This year, "we've covered more events than ever," said Coach Baum.

Along with providing greater visibility for the gopher, the handler holds many behind-the-scenes jobs. For example, the handler selects the individual who is to be the day's gopher, sometimes choosing a back-up gopher as well. When it's game day, the handler acts as a sort of babysitter, mentor, and ally to the mascot, prompting the anonymous person to play to the crowd, give handshakes and random backrubs, grab the attention of young children (or offer protection from those that attack), keep the gopher's identity a secret, excite the crowd, and more.

During half-time, the handler ensures that the gopher is hydrated because, after all, the fur gets hot and sweat collects in the suit, sometimes profusely. Therefore, the handler performs another job: that of gopher-suit launderer.

Before all this, the college had a "Gopher Squad, and we'd get them dressed and send them out on their own," said Coach Baum.

Things changed after a gopher froze during a basketball game approximately two years ago, probably due to stage fright. Coach Baum decided future gophers needed help. While working the microphone for

the game, a person from the crowd told her that the gopher was "frozen." She remembers the gopher's head tilting to the side, and the student inside the costume just standing there. "That's one of the nights we [realized] we needed to have someone around in case," said Coach Baum.

Coach Baum called Jacqui Lamer '11, an English major with a Pre-Law concentration, over the summer two years ago. Alongside her job as Gopher Handler, Lamer serves as *The Quindecim's* Sports Editor and



Jacqui Lamer '11 is the Gopher Handler. (Photo: Jessica Hallstrom)

co-Captain of the Women's Tennis Team.

As Gopher Handler, Lamer has learned about people's reactions toward the mascot. "People are really curious as to who's in the suit, and they're really upset when they don't find out," she said. Additionally, "a lot of people are afraid of mascots. And some of that fear comes from not knowing who's in the suit," Lamer said.

Lamer also serves as the official translator for the gopher during events. "If the Gopher is trying to have a conversation with people often they'll call me over and do their hand signals. Apparently, I speak gopher. I'll translate to tell them what the gopher's saying," she explained.

At first, she wasn't sure what to expect after taking the position. "I

didn't know how much would actually go into this, especially the organizational aspect. Aside from being an athlete and a student, this takes up a large amount of my time as well when I don't have everything organized as I should," she said. Regardless, Lamer continued that she's learned how to manage her time well.

As a result of her position, Lamer has gained some notoriety as being the "girl with the gopher," although she doesn't believe that's the case. "People don't know me or remember

my face apparently...but I did walk past a parent [on October 26], and she said, 'every time I turn around you two are there.' She knows I'm the girl with the gopher."

Coach Baum expressed a different perspective about Lamer's visibility as handler. "I think she's the one who's recognized more so than the gopher because you don't know who is in the suit.... People know she's with the gopher, so she's more of a face

than the gopher in some ways. I think she gets a kick out of it," said Coach Baum.

On that note, Lamer gave insight about her love for the position. "Well, one of my goals in life is to be famous by association. I want to be known as the girl with the gopher, or like, if and when someone I know becomes famous, I want to be known as that person's friend or that person's sister. I don't want to be necessarily [known by] name, but rather as the person who's been with that person and [is] seen with them a lot," she said.

Lamer's almost constant association with the gopher at games serves as one of the main benefits of her position as handler, according to Coach Baum. She explained that by working with all of the gophers and

making suggestions about how they can improve, "she's the consistent piece" of the larger Gopher Squad. "I have a feeling the experience is better now for everyone with the handler," said Coach Baum. "It's good for the handler in terms of leadership skills and working for a squad and all that management stuff. It's good for the gophers because they have a rapport with her," she continued.

"It's important to have a good relationship with the members of the Gopher Squad because as the handler, I am the only person who knows who's in the suit, so I'm the only person they can go to for anything while they are working" said Lamer.

This "rapport," Coach Baum explained, embodies the evolution of the position over time. "At first [the job of gopher handler] was just to protect the gopher. Now, it's much more of a team thing.... I think the gophers who froze [in the past] felt like they didn't have that ally. Now, you have someone who can get you over those first couple of humps. After that, you feel pretty comfortable," she said.

The rapport and comfort, however, go both ways. "Amongst my friends, I joke that the gopher is my boyfriend, but I always clarify that it's not the person in the suit, but rather it's the gopher himself... It's a very professional relationship," said Lamer.

As Lamer is a senior, a new handler will be trained during the spring semester. Coach Baum also expressed that more additions to the Gopher Squad are always welcome. To do so, contact her at sbaum@goucher.edu, or Lamer at jalam001@mail.goucher.edu.

Looking towards the future, Lamer said that her time as Gopher Handler will be a good addition to her resume, but that "I'm actually really sad about not having the gopher in my life next year."

During student check-in this year, students received bumper stickers with the phrase, "I [heart] my Gopher" on them to give to their parents. After her position as handler these past two years, Lamer put hers right onto her car. Said Lamer, "I feel like I'm one of the only people that can truly say, 'I love my gopher.'"