

## The 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Issue

The fall 2012 semester marks the ten-year anniversary of the Bridging Disciplines Programs.

We begin this issue by exploring the history of the program with a few key administrators and faculty who initiated and continue to grow the program into what it is today. We then go to Singapore to visit a social entrepreneur and Ethics & Leadership BDP alumnus who joined the program in its early years. You will then read about three distinct Connecting Experiences—an independent creative project, a research assistantship, and an internship—completed by current BDP students in the summer of 2012. The issue ends with the future of the Bridging Disciplines Programs, our May 2012 graduating class, and the exciting directions they have chosen to take after graduation.

We hope that you will join us to celebrate our past, present, and future on Friday, September 28<sup>th</sup> for a reception and alumni panel. To learn more about how we plan to celebrate and to RSVP, please visit our website at [www.utexas.edu/ugs/bdp/about/BDP10](http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/bdp/about/BDP10).

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# Looking Back: 10 Years of the Bridging Disciplines Programs

by Drs. Lucia Albino Gilbert and Jeanette Herman

*Dr. Lucia Albino Gilbert is Professor of Psychology and former Provost at Santa Clara University. While she was Vice Provost at UT Austin (1999-2006), she and Provost Sheldon Ekland-Olson founded the Bridging Disciplines Programs.*

*Dr. Jeanette Herman is Assistant Dean for Academic Initiatives and Director of the Bridging Disciplines Programs in the School of Undergraduate Studies.*

In spring 2000, Provost Sheldon Ekland-Olson and Vice Provost Lucia Gilbert assembled an interdisciplinary group of faculty with a deep commitment to undergraduate education. This group, which would come to be known as the “Vision Committee,” included Pauline Strong (Anthropology), Ray Davis (Chemistry), Desmond Lawler (Civil Engineering), Meme Drumwright (Advertising), Paul Woodruff (Plan II), and Bob Duke (Music). Their mission was to enhance the first-year experience, offer opportunities to students not served by existing honors programs, and provide experiences that would integrate and define a student’s education at UT Austin.

The Vision Committee returned again and again to the idea of interdisciplinary concentrations that would strengthen the traditional major and better prepare students for a career. The committee envisioned programs that would encourage students to pursue interests outside their majors without adding time to their degrees, allowing them to integrate major, core curriculum, and elective requirements around a theme. Unlike existing concentrations at UT, these programs would engage students in research and internship experiences that would integrate the interdisciplinary concentration with the student’s major. The concentrations were conceived as a roadmap through UT’s already rich curriculum, a means to help students construct meaningful intellectual narratives that would connect their studies across disciplines and across their undergraduate experience.

Out of these conversations emerged the Bridging Disciplines Programs (BDPs). In 2001-2002, efforts to develop the BDPs focused on four initial themes: Information Technology, Environment, Children and Society, and Ethics and Leadership. Although they began the year in various stages, each of these BDPs was able to offer a rich curriculum and had one or more students enrolled by May 2002.

From these beginnings, the BDPs have developed over the past decade to become one of the most popular certificate programs and the most visible source of interdisciplinary education at UT. From four concentrations in 2002, the BDPs now offer eleven certificates, with the most recent addition of Conflict Resolution and Peace Studies (2011). All of these certificates are recognized on students’ official transcripts when they graduate. The BDPs serve over 500 students in any given semester, and about 600 students have graduated with BDP certificates since the program’s inception. One of the key reasons for the success of the BDPs has been the faculty who oversee the programs, teach BDP courses, and mentor students in their research and internships. Over 100 faculty from every college and school at UT serve on BDP faculty panels.

The accomplishments of BDP students provide the most compelling evidence that the programs continue to enhance the quality of education at UT. The BDPs have supported over 700 undergraduate research projects, covering such diverse topics as migration in the European Union, medical ethics, and wildlife conservation in Tanzania. Students have also participated in over 700 internships through the BDPs, ranging from the Harry Ransom Center, to the Brookings Institution, to organizations in countries around the world. These achievements testify to how well the BDPs have realized the goals of the Vision Committee, and at the same time offer a glimpse of the programs’ promise as the BDPs enter their second decade.

# Faculty Highlight: Dr. Minette Drumwright

Interview conducted by Erin Thomas, Associate Academic Advisor

*Dr. Minette Drumwright is an Associate Professor in the College of Communication. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English with a concentration in Journalism, and a Master of Business Administration degree from Baylor University. She earned a Ph.D. in Marketing from The University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. Dr. Drumwright is particularly interested in social responsibility in marketing and advertising, in addition to business ethics. She has served as the faculty panel chair for Ethics & Leadership since 2002 and was a part of the committee responsible for creating the Bridging Disciplines Programs.*



Photo courtesy of Minette Drumwright

## **Q: What led to you study communication ethics?**

Around the time that I was expecting my daughter, one of the big issues in the media was about the use of cloth versus disposable diapers. This debate led me to begin thinking about how consumers make decisions based on their ethical beliefs. I further considered how companies promote social responsibility to influence purchasing, and the effect that cause-related marketing has on consumers. Since then, my research has been focused on how individuals and organizations make decisions to reflect ethical values. I am also intrigued by studying how good people within organizations end up making choices that they regret, within different contexts.

## **Q: How did you get involved with the BDPs, particularly as a faculty panel chair?**

In the spring of 2000, I received an email from Sheldon Ekland-Olson, who was the Executive Vice-President and Provost at the time. He asked me and other professors from across different colleges to come together to brainstorm about a structure that would enable undergraduates to engage in interdisciplinary study, and allow them to take advantage of the breadth of UT. What was intended to be four meetings extended to two years, and we became known as the "Vision Committee." The result was Connexus—Connections in Undergraduate Studies—and the BDPs were a part of that. One of the earliest BDPs was Ethics & Leadership, and I've been fortunate enough to chair the faculty panel since 2002.

## **Q: How have you seen the BDPs develop in the last ten years?**

Ethics & Leadership has sparked multiple BDP topics, including Social Entrepreneurship & Non-profits, Conflict Resolution & Peace Studies, and even some aspects of Global Studies. Another significant change is that some of the BDPs that have gained the most traction are now degree programs that are interdisciplinary. International Relations, Environmental Science, and the new development of a Health and Society degree program are a few examples.

## **Q: What advice do you have for BDP students?**

The most important thing for students is to learn how to think critically, resourcefully, and creatively. Students should get outside of their comfort zones through the courses they take and engage in areas that challenge their ideas.

## **Q: What do you enjoy most about working with BDP students, particularly as a faculty mentor?**

BDP students have an enormous appetite for the topic they've chosen to pursue. They bring a new degree of intellectual engagement and enthusiasm. They want to read more, talk more, and think more. I've seen Connecting Experiences evolve into theses, career paths, and other unexpected directions.

## **Q: What were you like as an undergraduate student?**

I was an English major; I loved writing poetry. I was also very engaged in campus leadership activities. I was a part of the student council, worked for the student newspaper, and served on the leadership board of the student union. I took journalism courses that forced me outside my comfort zone, especially given the student activism that was going on in the 1970s.

## **Q: What do you enjoy doing outside of teaching and research?**

I enjoy being a parent, and I have been involved in committees and boards at my daughter's schools. I have a real empathy for homeless families, and do a lot of work here in Austin with the Foundation for the Homeless Family Promise Program, and I also volunteer with my church. I enjoy travelling, water skiing, and snow skiing. Fitness is also really important to me; I volunteer to be a guinea pig for the Kinesiology students in their training program through Rec Sports.

## **Q: If you could choose another career, what would it be?**

I would work for a non-profit for a cause that I believe in. It goes back to my research interests of examining how organizations use communication to further a cause. I think social marketing involves a lot of tough communications challenges, particularly when you are trying to convince someone to change or adopt new habits.

# Catching Up with James Norris

By Erin Thomas, Associate Academic Advisor



Photo courtesy of James Norris

*James Norris is a former Ethics & Leadership BDP student who is now a social entrepreneur residing in Singapore. While at UT, he pursued three majors, one minor, two certificates, and participated in the Intellectual Entrepreneurship program.*

James Norris will be the first to admit that he posed many challenges for his academic advisors at UT. Propelled by his aspiration to be a **polymath**, he made the decision to major in Psychology, Sociology, and Philosophy, to create an individualized minor in Youth-Led Psychotherapy through the Texas Interdisciplinary Plan, and to pursue certificates in the Business Foundations Program as well as the Bridging Disciplines Programs.

In Spring 2004, James was admitted to the Ethics & Leadership BDP. The program's focus on ethics was a good fit for his philosophy major. The leadership component gave James direction for starting organizations on campus, including the American Red Cross Club, Mass CPR Training, and the Community Emergency Response Team, and for restarting the Alternative Spring Break program. "The Bridging Disciplines Programs were the best representation of what I was trying to do. Its interdisciplinary nature embodied what I was trying to achieve as an aspiring polymath. There was finally a label for who I wanted to be," James said.

Fast-forward to eight years later.

James has been living in Singapore since 2009, and as a social entrepreneur motivated by curiosity and altruism, he is engaged in several start-up companies. As James puts it, "I am deeply drawn to the space between personal change and social change." His work reflects this mission. James is the founder of Self Spark, a platform for helping people build healthy habits through fun, science-based events. He is also working closely with The Polymath Foundation to establish a physical interdisciplinary university for self-directed learners and "Renaissance thinkers," who design their own course of study. This summer, James worked as a freelance social entrepreneur to help UP Singapore, an initiative that launched 30 early-stage startups to address urban challenges related to education, tourism, creative arts, community engagement, and healthy and sustainable lifestyles.

James cites two distinct BDP experiences that led him to where he is today. In his final semester at UT, James completed a Connecting Experience internship with the RGK Center for Philanthropy and Community Service. He worked with Dr. Sarah Jane Rehnborg and Heather Alden to plan a conference on healthy aging, as well as help with what is now the Dell Social Innovation Competition. Through this experience, James said he learned what it really meant to be a social entrepreneur, which in turn cemented his life's passion.

The second influential experience was when Associate Professor Dr. John Butler introduced James to Gary Hoover, an Austin entrepreneur whom James first encountered in the Ethics & Leadership forum seminar. (In 2009, Hoover became the first entrepreneur-in-residence at the Herb Kelleher Center for Entrepreneurship in the McCombs School of Business. He is now the Entrepreneur-in-Residence for the School of Information.) James had the opportunity to accompany Hoover on a business-consulting trip to Southeast Asia. James was so fascinated by what he learned in Singapore that he stayed two additional weeks to explore social innovation within the city-state. Hoover remains James' mentor to this day. Following graduation, James moved to Singapore, which he refers to as a potential "social Silicon Valley," a place where change agents can go to network with others, generate solutions to social problems, and connect with investors.

James believes that the most pressing issues of today are "wicked problems"—deeply rooted, systemic, and interconnected. It is this notion that sends him in seemingly different directions, but these directions are all focused on tackling important social challenges and training leaders to develop innovative solutions. "Be strategic about how you spend your time," James advises other students. "And don't shy away from being different."

To read more about James' story, visit [www.jamesnorris.org](http://www.jamesnorris.org).

## Polymath:

/pòleemath/ n. 1. person of much or varied learning  
2. great scholar

•The Oxford Dictionary & Thesaurus



# Connecting Experience Spotlight: The Yellow Wallpaper Project

By Nidhi Reddy, Digital Arts & Media BDP

Nidhi Reddy is a senior Mathematics and Radio-Television-Film double major pursuing a Digital Arts & Media BDP certificate. This summer, she completed an independent creative project based on *The Yellow Wallpaper* by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. This short story is a popular title in American feminist literature.



Photo courtesy of Nidhi Reddy

I read *The Yellow Wallpaper* in high school when I was urged to read it by my sister, who was taking a course titled *Literature in Madness*. The story is set in late 19th-century America, at a time when women did not have the right to vote, much less disobey their husbands.

The main character, Jane, is a deeply depressed woman. Her physician husband directs her to remain inactive in order to cure her condition. She gradually develops an obsession with the yellow wallpaper in the room to which she is confined, which eventually pushes her into psychosis. For my independent creative project, I decided to create a rotoscoped animation based on this story.



Photo courtesy of Nidhi Reddy

Rotoscoping is a technique in which you trace over each frame of a video. I did this by recording most of my animation, editing it into a short video, dropping each sub-clip into Adobe Flash, tracing the contours of each frame, creating backgrounds and various props in Photoshop, and finally putting all the frames into AfterEffects to add textures. In total, I have drawn about 1,980 frames, and much of my journey is documented in my [blog](#).

One of the most difficult things I encountered during the development of this animation was adapting the story to a shorter time span for an animation. While the original story is more gradually paced and has many details, I had to find a way to condense the details and pace of the story into a few minutes. This was done by adding certain details to the audio rather than including them in the digital paintings. I also created allusions to other creative works such as literature and paintings throughout my animation in order to add an additional meaning, which became more difficult as the rotoscoping itself took up the bulk of my time.

My main goal for the project was to create an animation that looks like moving art, rather than a cartoon. I am very inspired by painters and I love utilizing texture and other media in order to evoke a more three-dimensional, exciting aesthetic.

This creative project has given me more practice with Adobe programs, and it has allowed me to try a new animation technique. It has also been advantageous in that it has forced me to draw daily, something that I have attempted to do for a long time. Overall, this project has furthered my interest in digital media and has expanded my perspective for new ways to visualize stories.



Photo courtesy of Nidhi Reddy

# Connecting Experience Spotlight: The Center for Urban Ethnography Summer Internship & Mentoring Program at the University of California-Berkeley

By Christopher Robertson, Cultural Studies BDP



Photo courtesy of the Bridging Disciplines Programs

*Christopher Robertson is a senior Sociology and Philosophy major. He is pursuing a BDP certificate in Cultural Studies, with a concentration in Identities and Communities. He spent his summer as a research assistant at the University of California-Berkeley's Center for Urban Ethnography. This third and final Connecting Experience built on Chris' earlier research on the Tea Party movement. Chris' faculty mentor was Dr. Javier Auyero, professor in the Department of Sociology.*

I first came across the Center for Urban Ethnography (CUE) while conducting archival research for a previous Connecting Experience on the campus of UC-Berkeley. The collection I was working with had been compiled by the Center for Right-Wing Studies, a research center connected to the CUE within a larger interdisciplinary center called the Institute for the Study of Societal Issues (ISSI). When I found out about the undergraduate internship they offer each summer, I contacted the center to see if they accept students from outside UC-Berkeley, and discovered that they occasionally do. This summer, I was accepted to attend as one of two students from outside the university.

The Center for Urban Ethnography summer program was a wonderful mix of coursework, research assistantship, and independent research. In many ways the program is designed as a crash course in qualitative research methodology and an introduction to life as a graduate student. Each week we were assigned readings and then met for a three-hour seminar for discussion of weekly assignments. Additionally, we were given an independent research assignment, determined by each intern. In my case, I focused on laying the groundwork for a future project that will examine the influence of New Age and alternative spiritual practices on political activism. This project overlaps with previous BDP research on the Tea Party Movement. I am interested in examining activism through the lens of culture by drawing from qualitative methods collected from multiple disciplines within the social sciences and humanities.

As part of the internship, the research assistants were paired with graduate fellows affiliated with the Center for Urban Ethnography. While the actual experience of conducting research for a designated project was invaluable, even more so was the mentorship we received from the graduate fellows. I spent much of my time with the graduate students discussing my future plans for research and seeking their advice. Through our discussions I was able to narrow down the topics I want to explore in graduate school. I have increasingly come to see culture as one of the most important mediators between the knowledge, ideas, and beliefs people hold, and action in everyday life. This process of cultural mediation is what I've worked on with my BDP Connecting Experiences and what I want to continue learning about as I pursue graduate school next year.

I was fortunate to be awarded a very generous scholarship to offset most of my expenses for this experience. Had it not been for the scholarship, I'm not quite sure how I would have been able to take part in the program. Needless to say, I'm overwhelmingly grateful to attend a university and take part in a program that values and supports its undergraduates so much. I advise any BDP student who will be conducting research or an internship for their connecting experience to consider applying for a BDP scholarship. The next connecting experience a student undertakes might just be the one that forever alters their academic career; I know this has been the case with my summer in Berkeley.

# Connecting Experience Spotlight: ACTIVE Life

By Erin Dooley, Children & Society BDP

*Erin Dooley is a senior Psychology major pursuing a certificate in Children & Society, with a concentration in Children & Health. She spent her summer interning for ACTIVE Life, an Austin-based non-profit organization whose mission is to “make health the norm by generating a persistent demand for healthy living among all sectors of society.” Associate Professor Fred Peterson in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Education served as Erin’s faculty mentor.*



*Photo courtesy of Erin Dooley*

For my first BDP Connecting Experience in Spring 2011, I was a research assistant for Dr. Darla Castelli, an associate professor of physical education pedagogy in the Department of Kinesiology and Health Education. The purpose of her research project was to study the impact of physical fitness on cognitive factors in children. Results showed that children with low physical fitness had lower cognitive functions. When I sought out an internship Connecting Experience for this summer, I knew that I wanted to have an immediate impact on children’s health, and with ACTIVE Life, that was a possibility.

ACTIVE Life is a non-profit organization in Austin that aims to make healthy the norm. This is a huge task as American culture is rapidly becoming unhealthy, which can be seen in the ballooning obesity rates and rising health care costs. Obesity has become a full-on epidemic that has made today’s generation the first to have a lower life expectancy rate than its parents. ACTIVE Life is working to make the community aware of this problem and to make a change.

While at ACTIVE Life, I worked in the After School Program for elementary school students in the Austin area. ACTIVE Life developed a program for schools to teach nutrition lessons and incorporate games that reinforce the topics of health, and physical fitness. Through my internship, I worked to make this program more effective. I created an instructors manual to guide the instructors on how to teach different age groups, and I also designed multiple interactive teaching utilities. I was able to see these projects in action when I went to the schools to observe and teach. It was a wonderful way to directly impact the youth in the community and to help them live healthier lives.

I also had the opportunity to attend multiple conferences, which was a wonderful bonus. I helped host the IT’S TIME TEXAS Summit, ACTIVE Life’s initiative to get communities across Texas excited for healthy change, especially as we aim to make Texas the healthiest state in the nation! I was able to meet people of all professions working together to impact the health of our society.

This Connecting Experience allowed me to have a direct impact on the health of children in the community. I was able to use the knowledge I obtained from various psychology, kinesiology, and biology classes. I never thought that I would be given the opportunity to impact over 1,000 youth in the area at this point in my life. It has truly been the most rewarding experience I have ever had.

Nidhi, Christopher,  
and Erin were each awarded  
scholarships for their Connecting  
Experiences this summer.

To support Connecting Experiences and other BDP  
program initiatives, go to our [online giving page](#) and select  
“Bridging Disciplines Programs” to make a donation.

# Where Are They Now? Spring 2012 Graduates Profile

*In May 2012, 60 students graduated with BDP certificates. Following is a report on what some of those graduates have been up to since graduation.*

Sharon Abraham, Children & Society  
4th Grade Teacher  
Teach for America  
Houston, TX

Noor Al Sharif, Ethics & Leadership  
Sales & Trading Analyst at Bank of America  
Merrill Lynch  
New York, NY

Emily Callinan, Human Rights & Social Justice  
M.A. Candidate in Counseling  
St. Edward's University  
Austin, TX

Margaret Cannata, Social Entrepreneurship & Non-profits  
Partnership Activation Associate  
Spurs Sports & Entertainment  
San Antonio, TX

Tiffany Chen, Environment  
Group Leader  
Target Distribution Center  
Dallas-Forth Worth, TX

Anna Crockett, International Studies  
Research Intern  
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars  
Washington, D.C.

Darbi Donaldson, Digital Arts & Media  
M.A. Candidate in Media & Communications  
London Metropolitan University  
London, England, United Kingdom

David Donatti, International Studies  
J.D. Candidate  
Harvard Law School  
Cambridge, MA

Laura Herring, Innovation, Creativity & Entrepreneurship  
Founder  
Red Herring Productions, LLC  
Austin, TX

Christina Leal, Environment  
Core Crew Member  
Food is Free Project  
Austin, TX

Kate Ergenbright, Ethics & Leadership  
J.D. Candidate  
University of Texas School of Law  
Austin, TX

David Fisher, Environment  
J.D. Candidate  
University of Texas School of Law  
Austin, TX

Kelli Fuqua, Ethics & Leadership  
J.D. Candidate  
University of Texas School of Law  
Austin, TX

Alexa Garcia, Environment  
M.S. Candidate in Environmental Management  
The University of San Francisco  
San Francisco, CA

Lynda Gonzalez, International Studies  
High School Journalism Teacher  
Teach for America  
Harlingen, TX

Rachel (Whiteley) Henry, Ethics & Leadership  
Algebra 2/Math Models Teacher  
Teach for America  
Dallas, TX

Jessica Jose, Social Entrepreneurship & Non-profits  
Associate  
Apple, Inc.  
Houston, TX

Grace Kong, Social Inequality, Health & Policy  
M.D. Candidate  
Baylor University College of Medicine  
Houston, TX



# Where Are They Now? Spring 2012 Graduates Profile

Rachel Loewenstein, Social Entrepreneurship & Non-profits  
5th Grade Teacher  
Teach for America  
Atlanta, GA

Melissa Macaya, International Studies  
M.P.S. Candidate in International and Political Journalism  
Georgetown University  
Washington, D.C.

Katie Martin, Human Rights & Social Justice  
Corps Member  
City Year San Antonio  
San Antonio, TX

Preston Nix, International Studies  
Community Officer  
Randgold Resources Ltd.-Kibaldi Mine Gold Project  
The Democratic Republic of the Congo

Felicia Peña, Social Entrepreneurship & Non-profits  
Campaign Associate  
United Way for Greater Austin  
Austin, TX

Ariel Perez, International Studies  
M.S. Candidate in Global Supply Chain Management  
Brunel University  
London, England, United Kingdom

Olivia Reed, Children & Society  
M.A. Candidate in Speech-Language Pathology  
The University of Texas at Austin  
Austin, TX

Andrea Tapia, Environment  
Marketing Intern, South By Southwest Eco  
Intern, Go Local LLC  
Austin, TX

Louisa Torrance, Environment  
8th Grade Science Teacher  
Lamar Fine Arts Academy  
Austin, TX

Johnny Sompholphardy, Environment  
Staff Process Consultant  
Smith & Burgess  
Houston, TX

Kristen Stephenson, Children & Society  
M.D. Candidate  
Texas A&M Health Science Center College of Medicine  
College Station, TX

Caleb Wiley, Ethics & Leadership  
Human Resources and Payroll Consultant  
Paycom  
Washington, D.C.

Christina Wright, Ethics & Leadership  
Teacher  
Teach for America  
Atlanta, GA

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