



Holistic Health incorporates a triad of mental, physical and spiritual health. The goal is to find a harmonic balance between the three within the self. Holism is not a therapy, but a technique to approach a patient's health and their ability to heal themselves without intrusive medicine. The practice has been available for centuries. Only recently, however, holistic health has been making way into the mainstream western medicine. Holism does not search to treat one symptom or make an illness go away, but incorporates a magnitude of elements and gets to the root of a problem that may surface as an unhealthy event. Once an event has been identified, a lifestyle change is incorporated and natural remedies, such as herbs, are used to reroute health in a positive manner.

A class called Health Care For All was the initial stepping stone that opened my eyes to change. As a sophomore at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, I knew I wanted to help move the healthcare industry towards a less abrasive and more holistic realm. Unclear to me, however, was just how to do so. The BDIC department was brought to my attention in Health Care For All and through the opportunity the department presented of designing my own major, I was able to progress towards a natural approach in health.

A first step in approaching Holistic Health is to understand the current and future needs of a patient. Change is a common theme that lead me through my entire BDIC program. The start of change came when I took Health Care For All. Health Care For


All was a well-rounded introductory course to the American health care system. Problems in our modern system are clear, as not enough people are getting treatment and often are not feeling better after treatment. Health Care For All gave an overview of the good, the bad, and the ugly aspects of not only American, but Canadian and other nations healthcare systems for a comparison of the direction we might be headed. The course addressed policies that of our system accepted as respectable practices and alternative practices, such as holistic medicine, which may be on the outskirts.

My major, Holistic Health and Herbalism, shaped itself as courses gradually came into my awareness. Upon taking elementary foundation classes in a variety of departments such as Biology, Nursing and Plant, Soil and Insect Sciences, I found a more directed path towards herbalism. Traditional Herbal Medicine gave an intellectual journey around the world to various climates and the plants that grew there. The course gave an overview of the plant, the location, and the plant use. Missing information about the preparation of the plants and success rates of the herbal remedies was the next step.

Herbs, Spices and Medicinal Plants taught by Dr. Lyle Craker, introduced me to a variety of herb disciplines. The course provided an immense survey of the herb-industry ranging from plant identification, growth, production, uses and chemistry. The course proved to be enjoyable, as the lab portion was different from the scientific labs I was accustomed. Once a week, students would meet in the greenhouse for a mini-lecture, a project for the day and identify a few plants on display. The course was complete with participation in "Herb Fest," which was a student bazaar focusing around projects of interest.

After the Herbs, Spices, and Medicinal Plants course, Dr. Craker had a profound impact on me as he is a wealth of knowledge and connections which ultimately led me to choose him as my BDIC sponsor. He is easy to approach and his life long experiences and drive in the wide industry enables him to give direction to students who may not have the insight that he has.

A large portion of the BDIC experience is being active and present. Utilize the resources such as scholarships, the website, newsletters and BDIC alumni for support. By looking over students' curriculums that were similar to mine, I stumbled across an amazing class called Applied Marketing: the Green Industry. The marketing class, with a focus in the Green Industry was not the course I originally thought it would be. The course was better. I initially thought Applied Marketing was going to be a text-book course that allowed the extended opportunity to attend the Expo-East conference in Baltimore, MD, to see the marketing applications in practice. Applied Marketing actually had each student design and formulate a marketing plan for their own imagined business. If feedback from the drafts was taken seriously, students could actually move forward and use the plan in real-life circumstances. I do not think there could have been a better teaching tool than Cynthia Barstow implemented to get her marketing point across. The trip to Expo-East did indeed display marketing implemented in natural products, however, the experience alone as irreplaceable and should be offered as an independent study itself. Mrs. Barstow had a few clientele at the conference and I enjoyed seeing Mrs. Barstow in action. Seeing other companies marketing strategies gave a good comparison to what I knew and what I could expand on.



After the Expo-East conference, I was distraught about how wide the herb industry was. In an attempt to keep my focus around the health industry, I hoped to create "Herbal Pharmaceuticals" (my original title for my BDIC program) by taking Pharmacology in Nursing. I thought the course would cover more of the pill-preparation, statistics diagnosis and possible alternatives. Pharmacology, however, listed drugs for each human system and how they interacted with the body. The lessons were important concepts that I do not regret learning; however, I opted against taking the second semester upon talking with the professor. Pharmacology II was explained as being more list-like. I could not foresee the motto of "Learn these drugs and their dosages" helping me in my path towards holistic medicine at the present time.

Any title with the word "Pharmaceuticals" would surely have laboratory relevance. Molecular Model Systems provided a lab experience that gave me the proper lingo and skills to feel comfortable in the lab-setting. The course asked student-pairs to design their own experiments and assisted in walking the personal experiments through from design to presentation. The course provided irreplaceable lab-skills which allowed my partner and me to test the medicinal effects of *Gingko biloba* and the pharmaceutical contrast of Gabapentin on embryonic zebra fish. The instructors were hesitant to allow my partner and I to continue forward with the herb portion, as they were not sure we would see results. However with perseverance, we had profound results that Ralph Karlstrom ended up displaying our poster outside of his zebra fish lab. Little research has been performed to determine the effects of herbs on organisms and I feel my study may have advanced the awareness that alternatives without rash side-effects exist.

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More alternative health methods were introduced to me in Holistic Health and Complementary Medicine, an honors course taught by Mary Anne Bright. The course provided the class an intimate environment for exploring the different and often rejected alternative treatments. The alternative healthcare included music therapy, aromatherapy, massage, reiki and the importance of maintaining a centered mind. The importance of feeling balanced led me to an independent study under Mary Anne as well as selecting my senior capstone. Mary Anne provided a different approach to teaching such that she wanted to promote self directed learning rather than a competition for grades. Mary Anne seemed to be in-tune with all of her students needs and provided a flexible schedule, while maintaining an intellectual learning environment.

The opposite was true for Elementary Biochemistry, which proved to be a more difficult course than I expected. I have a firm background in biology and after taking organic chemistry, I felt Elementary Biochemistry should have come easily. The concepts of interlinking the chemical make-up and biological aspect of organisms were simple to understand, however, what was difficult to comprehend come exams, was how the two disciplines worked together to explain the function of organisms. Looking back now, I feel I may have better utilized the information presented to me if I had pursued an additional credit in an Independent study somehow incorporating the biochemistry of plants and the effects on the biochemistry of humans.

Also on the chemical spectrum was the course Food Chemistry taught by Eric Decker. Food Chemistry was hands down the best course I have taken at UMass Amherst. The course is a graduate level, however, with determination and the will to learn, Eric Decker has a lot of knowledge and experience to offer to his students. Dr.

Decker walks through the entire food processing industry and ties together all of the concepts from biology, chemistry, animal and plant sciences together. The loose concepts that have been introduced since high school such as pKa, pH, types of chemical bonds and the health of certain foods is explained how and why they work the way they do in Food Chemistry. The course had a deep impact on my holistic program as it opened my eyes to the good and (mostly) bad practices of the food processing industry. Eric Decker's course emphasized the importance of fresh food and knowing the source your food comes from, which I believe is a valuable lesson that often American's take for granted, thinking that all of our food consumption is monitored and healthy for us.

Knowing where your food comes from may also apply to knowing from where your herbs originate. In Ethnobotany: Shaman's Pharmacy, Chris Kilham emphasizes the importance of supporting homegrown products and not going for the cheapest source. The cheapest source not only may be of poor quality, but has a large effect on the little-farm producers whose entire life (including their families) relies on the sales of the products. Chris Kilham opens students' eyes to the importance of sustainability and fair wages. Chris also addresses the fact that there are miracle plants in the world that we, as Americans, have no idea exist and, because of our deforestation, may never know of these plants. For a one credit course, Chris Kilham, who is well respected around the globe, offers an immense selection of alternative remedies instructing their identification, location, uses, preparations and growth.

Growth of plants is something that must be monitored. Americans often misconstrue that there is an endless supply of the plants they use. Often overlooked are humans' actions on the ecology of plants and their habitats. Plant Ecology provided a

hands-on experience with ecological field work around the Pioneer Valley as well as analysis of the statistics we found. Plant Ecology is important when determining the supply of herbs and in addition, to habitats where researchers could potential find new medicines such as the rainforest.

I was fortunate to maintain a second major in Biology alongside my BDIC program. I was able to complete my junior-year writing requirement in the biology department which provided me the experience of writing scientific research papers and doing field work. Having the writing requirement aside, I was able to include both semesters of my honors capstone: Energy Healing. Energy Healing, also taught by Mary Anne Bright, focused on developing a centered mind and a therapeutic touch practice during the first semester. During the second semester, the twelve students (including me) went into the elderly community of Amherst to do clinical work of therapeutic touch on volunteers. The practice of Therapeutic Touch (TT) incorporates the ability of people to heal themselves, but having therapeutic touch practitioner opens any blockages in a patient's electromagnetic field that may be preventing healing from within. The course gave a deep state of relaxation and ease. The experience incorporated a variety of medicines that I have studied. I encountered people of many backgrounds and understandings and I learned how to interact with their needs without stepping beyond my bounds. Before administering TT, a confidential dialogue took place between healer and healee asking questions pertaining to physical, mental and overall health. The clinical work allowed me to incorporate the holistic theme I was looking for, as I could observe connections between the triad of health (this is what I have come to call the link between physical, mental and spiritual health).

A large portion of holism is being able to recognize unhealthy states and return the body back to normal. An unhealthy state often refers to ones mind. I performed an Independent Study that allowed me to experience Vipassana, a ten day silent exploration meditation. I went into this course knowing the meditation was going to be difficult, however, I was not prepared the intensity of the situation. From four am to nine at night with intermittent breaks to eat for breakfast, lunch and tea for dinner, all of the students were in a trance-like meditation performing a mind over matter exploration. I was originally disappointed that I left the course five days early, however the learning curve I was able to observe in myself was the struggle to quiet my mind, the stubbornness to stick the experience out, to put aside pride and recognize that my mind was telling me "enough," that I had learned what I needed to – personal observation of feeling connected to the present time.

Exploration seemed to be a common theme in my definition of Holistic Health and Herbalism. Tropical Field Biology allowed me to explore the scientific realm once again (without limits) in the Virgin Islands. Each student was required to select an organism, design and execute an experiment and present their results to a panel of teachers and students. Tropical Field Biology was different from the lab experiment execution performed in Molecular Model Systems in ways such that adaptation was required when dealing with circumstances that aren't as predictable in a lab setting. Students were guided, but given little information about the experiments they were about to undergo. If each student had performed the appropriate background research and prepared ahead of time, the experience provided the foundation for potentially writing a scientific paper or doing future research on the matter. I felt adequately prepared for my

week of research in the Virgin Islands, however after a traumatic experience with quicksand in a mud-flat, I was forced to change to approach of my project quickly. The learning experience for me was not about the end result, but the importance of knowing the possibilities that things are often not what they seem and having more information than needed is never a bad quality.

My advice to future BDIC students is to learn to adapt and be patient. Classes are often discontinued, offered inconvenient times, and often classes are not what you initially thought they were. As students advance in their curriculum, insight of personal goals may also change. Certain events and situations may even turn student entrepreneurs away from their program, however through perseverance and relating actions back to the students' initial feelings, a clear path will shape itself with time. Observe how situations make you feel mentally, spiritually and how the situation reflects on your physical body. Put in the time to do proper background research before committing yourself to independent studies, programs, internships and classes.

Be active, yet patient in dabbling in a variety of experiences to formulate exactly the path you wish, which I can assure you will present itself in due time. I was able to experience several classes such as Clinical Herbalism, an Independent Study helping to rewrite the Medical Botanical Safety Handbook and human physiology that also enriched my BDIC program. I was disappointed to not include them in my core curriculum however, these fundamental experiences helped to shape the program, Holistic Health and Herbalism, that I am graduating with this 2008 year. By taking classes in the subject matter that I hope to educate others about, I was able to observe and create a balance

within myself and incorporate the triad of health while utilizing natural remedies to assist in imbalances.