



Bachelor's Degree with Individual Concentration

University of Massachusetts Amherst

<http://www.umass.edu/bdic>

Roads Less Traveled

A Newsletter for **BDIC Alumni and Friends**

Fall 2008



Recent BDIC Press Coverage

“There’s an element of risk in choosing the road less taken.... It’s already paid off for BDIC alumni who have made careers in such once-uncommon vocations as storytelling, conservation management, and venture capitalism. Recent concentrations have included writing children’s literature, primate conservation, and corporate fitness and stress management. The program attracts students who seem to be adept at anticipating trends and employment opportunities.”

— “Jobs of the Future,” *UMass Amherst: The Magazine for Alumni and Friends*, Spring 2008

A Sampling of Concentrations from BDIC’s 2008 Graduating Class

Animal Welfare Studies
Latin American Youth, Culture, and Education
Psychology and Film Production
Labor and the Law
Entertainment and Media Management
Public Health and Epidemiology
Ethnomusicology
Art Therapy
Buddhist Studies
Jewelry Design and Small Business Management
Psychology of the Exceptional Child
Integrated Marketing Communications

For a longer list, see www.umass.edu/bdic/

“Choice and individualization drive our times and are now transforming higher education. That’s because a growing number of college students are rejecting one-size-fits-all majors and literally designing their own degrees. Even better, many employers find that these graduates offer unique and desirable skills.”

“The process of designing your own major raises the level of enthusiasm, and it makes every step toward the degree a choice that the student has made,” says Daniel Gordon, professor of history and interim director of the Bachelor’s Degree with Individual Concentration (BDIC) program at the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Students in the program create curricula that combine disciplines such as anthropology and jazz, or social justice and global health.”

—“Destiny by Design,” *Continental: The In-flight magazine of Continental Airlines*, August 2008

Greetings from the Director, Daniel Gordon

It's hard to believe that I came on board at BDIC less than a year ago. As a history professor, I was unfamiliar with the idea of designing your own major. Since then

I have become an enthusiastic convert to it.



Even so, being a historian has its advantages. In the BDIC archive I found documents from 1970, that exciting time when Professor Arthur Kinney helped students found the program. Arthur is still on campus as director of the Renaissance Center, and I am delighted that he has contributed to this newsletter. With Arthur's inspiration and the recollections of alumni, we will bridge our past and our present.

A BDIC renaissance has begun. What are our goals? One is to create publicity: to ensure that the value of BDIC is recognized campus-wide so that our students are welcomed when they approach potential faculty sponsors in any department.

We wish to expand student scholarships and travel research grants. These are funded primarily by alumni. Each year we distribute about eight such awards, averaging \$500. We hope to make our annual scholarship fund several times larger to support all worthwhile applicants. This newsletter reports on how some of our students have used these scholarships.

We seek to deepen the rigor and scope of BDIC's curriculum. The proposal-writing class and senior summary are due for discussion and reform. We must provide models of super-interdisciplinary thinking to our students. I am committed to creating, starting in 2009-10, a new series of BDIC courses on leadership, the impact of technology on society, and other vital topics. These courses will bring the BDIC student body closer together and help resolve one of our perennial challenges: competing for limited seats in courses offered by other departments.

We seek the support of alumni and friends, whose contributions are vital for our scholarship fund and can help recruit new instructors to jumpstart the course initiative.

BDIC is embarking on new roads—but that's our tradition. As a new leader in this program, I need only follow the example of BDIC students past and present.

Daniel Gordon, a professor of history at UMass Amherst since 1995, became interim director of BDIC in February 2008. Contact dgordon@history.umass.edu.⁹

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Coordinator's Report: Linda Roney

Fall is a time for reflecting on the cycles of life.

Like administrators in other majors, at BDIC we witness many beginnings and endings. Here, however, things are a bit different. Each of our students has a story, a dream, a desire to take the "road less traveled." When that dream materializes, it seems both natural and miraculous.

A few years ago, a timid Kate Cessna stopped by BDIC to inquire about creating a major entitled "Developing Democracy." She saw it through and during her time at UMass Amherst served as a BDIC peer advisor and Massachusetts Daily Collegian staff writer. Kate also won



a number of prestigious scholarships, including a Senior Leadership Award. She graduated in May and will go on to law school after doing grassroots political work.

Elizabeth Oler created a BDIC concentration in "Neuroscience, Behavior and Society" by combining classes in anthropology, biology, psychology and public

health. Like Kate, Liz was awarded a Senior Leadership Award. (BDIC students, we are proud to report, received a tremendous number of cross-campus honors and awards during the past academic year.) Liz will now attend medical school.

We now have about 300 BDIC students, 85 of whom are new and this fall will attend two sections of BDIC proposal writing. All of these students have dreams to realize, and all will have our full support in navigating the "road less traveled."

Linda Roney became coordinator of advising in BDIC in 1998. She was named the campus's Outstanding Academic Advisor of the Year in 2005. She can be reached at lroney@cas.umass.edu.



The BDIC Edge

“Designing my own BDIC major was one of the best educational decisions I’ve ever made,” says Natascha Saunders ’01. “The process is like creating a proposal for a multi-million dollar business. You must write as if you are a grammarian, negotiate as if you are a salesperson, and research as if you are an analyst. Whenever I show my résumé I’m asked what BDIC is. I then tell the story of how a teenager in college was able to design her own major while forecasting economic trends. BDIC helped me gain an edge.”



Natascha, whose BDIC concentration was “Independent Image Consulting,” was Miss Black Rhode Island in 2006 and 2007. After working as a career coach and inspirational speaker in numerous high schools, in August 2008 she accepted a position as Assistant Director of Undergraduate Career Services at the Boston University School of Management. See www.nataschasaunders.com/index.cfm

A Triple Threat . . . in Service to Others

Peter DiGiammarino graduated in 1975 with a concentration in “Computer Science, Economics, Mathematics.” For his senior thesis he designed and implemented CASPER, a course-registration computer program. Peter went on to help several start-up companies achieve long-term growth. He currently serves as Chairman and CEO of Compusearch USA, a Carlyle Group portfolio company, and advises several other high-tech firms. His big-picture thinking and thoughtful guidance have enabled many businesses to increase their odds of success.



Peter is a member of the UMass Amherst Foundation. He is also on the advisory board of Commonwealth College, which now houses the BDIC program. With other family members he created the Frank and Helen DiGiammarino Citizen Scholarship, which provides summer stipends to UMass students pursuing community service. Peter often serves BDIC as an informal adviser. He has coached and counseled many adolescents and young adults. He exemplifies George Bernard Shaw’s precept that there is no limit to how much good one can do if one does not care who gets the credit.

BDIC Student Scholarships

During the academic year 2007-08, contributions enabled BDIC to fund a number of scholarships for students. They included the following:

Jamie Grasso (“Green Rooves”) used a scholarship to help fund a 3D-design conference hosted by Google. In his unsolicited note of thanks: “The conference at Google was a three-day intensive series of workshops and instruction in SketchUp, [Google’s] software that has become an industry standard for architects and designers. ... This was one of those fantastic moments of awareness: a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to put myself on the map as a creative thinker and doer. Thanks for helping me make this possible.”

Eliza Pesuit (“Public Health and Science”) used a research grant able to help fund an honors research project on the incidence and treatment of pre-eclampsia (a hypertensive disorder characterized by high blood pressure during pregnancy) in the Dominican Republic. Eliza spent several weeks there doing field research.

Jennifer Hast (“Herbal Pharmaceuticals”) used her BDIC grant to pay for a tropical field-study class in St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. The trip was sponsored by the Biology 491H class in which she was enrolled.

Louise Houlden (“Development of Concepts in Interior Design and Wood”) received a BDIC scholarship to help defray the cost of attending a two-day wood structures symposium at UMass Amherst. At the conference Louise learned a great deal and made several important professional contacts.

New BDIC Team Members



M. J. Alhabeeb, professor of Resource Economics, became faculty supervisor in the growing management cluster in September 2008. M. J. has won several prestigious teaching and scholarly awards, including the Academy of National Leadership's 2004 Outstanding National Teaching Award for Innovative Technologies and Creative Teaching. In addition to his expertise in economics, M. J. is a graphic artist and calligrapher who has given shows and designed postage stamps.



Daniel S. Gerber became the new public health faculty supervisor in September 2008, and is serving simultaneously as director of the undergraduate Public Health Sciences major. Dan was awarded the campus's Distinguished Teaching Outreach Award in 2007. His teaching focuses on community health and community building. Dan has 30 years' experience in planning health education programs internationally.

The Founding of BDIC

By Arthur F. Kinney

From the start, BDIC has been an exciting collaboration requiring vision, imagination, reason, common sense, and hard work. It all began at an annual convention of administrative, faculty, and student leaders held during a retreat at the Charlemont Inn in the fall of 1969. There students told us of their desire to forge independent courses of study that would match their skills and aspirations in ways not otherwise possible at the University.



Thus was born the idea for BDIC, and we had only to work out the details: who would be eligible, who would evaluate the plan of study, and so forth. It was meant for self-motivated students—not honor students necessarily, but anyone with a good idea of what should constitute his or her education. With the help of Bob Woodbury, the Associate Provost for Special Programs, and his assistant, Pat Crosson, I planned a presentation for the Board of Trustees to hear and approve such a program—experimental not only for our campus but for the country at large.

It was a time of expansion at the University and the trustees were open to new ideas. I remember pointing out to some of the skeptics on the board that whenever we had a cluster of 10 to 12 students interested in the same sorts of things, with faculty and courses on our campus, we had the makings of a new program

or department without further initial investment. They especially liked that wrinkle, and within three years we were proposing new programs and, in time, departments in Women's Studies, Computer Studies, and Dance. All of them came into being.

We were given all of Tillson farmhouse, with the bedrooms taken over by student peer advisors and program offices on the first floor. That there was a widespread need for such an endeavor became apparent as we began being imitated across the nation.

BDIC was always meant to be an imaginative and creative program with an imaginative and creative environment. To keep that happening, I proposed a term limit for the Directorship. I cycled myself off in three years to be replaced by Professor Stanley Moss.

I can still recall some of our more imaginative students, including one in medical illustration who combined zoology with studio art and counseling for the mentally handicapped using sociology and psychology and education. As a senior she ran a cottage of students with special needs just outside London. I always found BDIC full of such thoughtful surprises, and it has remained an important part of my academic life on our campus.

Arthur F. Kinney is Thomas W. Copeland Professor of Literary History and Director of the Center for Renaissance Studies at the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Thanks for your support!

This list of BDIC donors covers contributions received from January 1, 2007, to August 1, 2008. A warm note of appreciation to all of you who have supported our program.

2007

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2008

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Elizabeth
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Hawes, Katherine
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Kelley, Kenneth

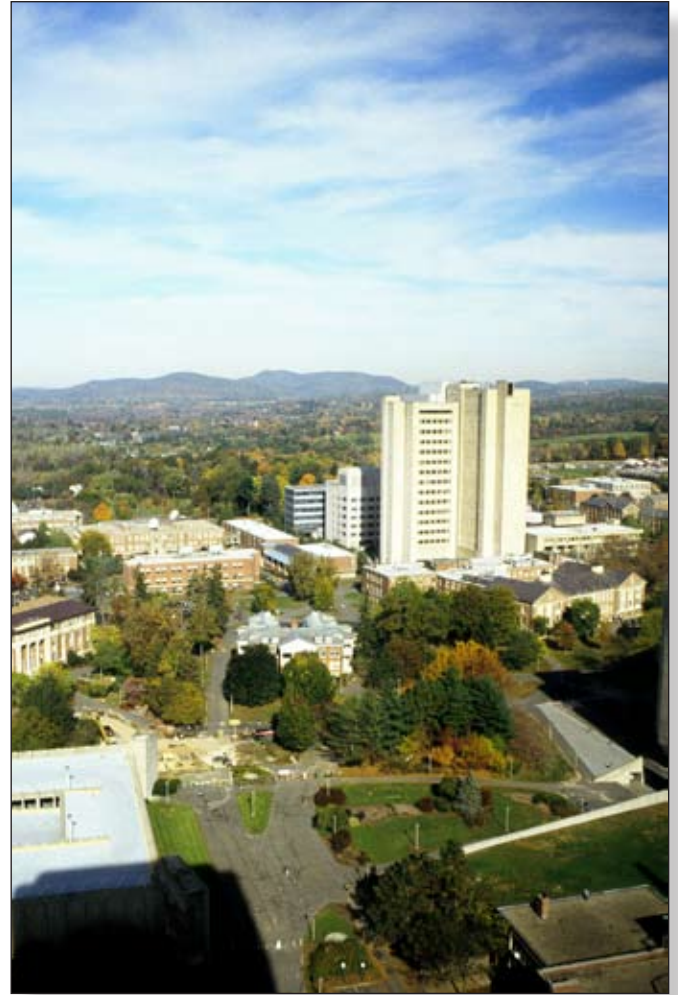
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Koritsky, Toby
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BDIC would like to stay in touch with you. We send news updates about the program and our alumni several times a year by email and are interested in hearing about your career and how your BDIC education has shaped it. Please send your email address and any news of your doings to bdic@bdic.umass.edu.

Students from every background are enriched by BDIC; we have many testimonies to crucial life changes as a result of our unique program. BDIC is planning to expand its student scholarship and to pilot new interdisciplinary courses. We can do this with your generous commitment and support.

Those interested in helping BDIC should visit <http://www.umass.edu/bdic> and click on the donation button. You may also send a check made out to UMass Amherst/BDIC to: Linda Roney, BDIC, 608 Goodell, UMass Amherst, Amherst, MA 01003-3232.



*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.*

—Robert Frost,
“The Road Not Taken”



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Senator Stanley Rosenberg, Keynote Speaker at BDIC Senior Celebration, May 2008

Massachusetts State Senator Stanley Rosenberg, a 1977 UMass Amherst alumnus and former BDIC major with a concentration in Arts Administration, was the keynote speaker at the BDIC Senior Celebration on May 23, 2008. Senator Rosenberg has long been a strong proponent of higher education and a friend to UMass.



In his address to the seniors, he talked about his path through BDIC in the early years of the program's existence. "It was clear I was not going to make it in a traditional program," he recalled.

"Being able to form my own major and chart my own course made all the difference in the world." As the end of his inspiring speech, Senator Rosenberg referred to Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken" and encouraged the graduates to pursue community service.

