Graduate education: A growing reputation for excellence

Dear Friends,

In this issue of Mosaic, we highlight graduate education in the College of Liberal Arts by featuring students in our distinguished graduate programs. The graduate programs’ reputation is growing. In May, we graduated a PhD candidate in Environmental Geography, Fenda Akrami, (picture below), who is a citizen of three countries—Great Britain, Sierra Leone, and the United States. Fenda’s mother holds a PhD from Columbia University, her father, a PhD from Harvard. Her brother has one from Cambridge and her sister, one from Yale. Fenda’s two other degrees are from England, but she chose Texas State for her PhD because of its highly ranked graduate program in Geography. Students like Fenda are choosing our graduate program more and more, as evidenced by the program’s rapid growth.

The Liberal Arts graduate program has grown by over 45 percent in five years. In Geography, many of our degree programs are recognized nationally for excellence. The faculty in all programs are noted for training students to apply leading-edge theories and techniques to research and writing, and for guiding students in their research and publications, and for helping them to obtain internships and jobs. Consequently, our graduates have received placements in the Federal Executive Office for Management and Budget, the Presidential Management Internship in Washington, D.C., and the Fulbright Fellowship. After graduation, students can expect to find well-paying employment and admission to the nation’s most prestigious PhD programs.

Based on the current trend, we expect our graduate program to continue to grow significantly. This fall, we introduced new degrees in the College of the Arts and Communication in the Department of English, we added new certificate programs in Public History and Professional Ethics, and we expanded the placement stage for a Master of Arts degree in Applied Philosophy. Within the next two years, we hope to receive planning authority from the University to begin developing another doctoral program in the social sciences. In anticipation of growth in our graduate programs, we are seeking the additional resources that will be necessary to maintain program excellence—additional faculty, more paid assistantships for graduate students, and additional fellowships to help students with the cost of education.

I am very proud of the College of Liberal Arts’ graduate programs and for its faculty, whom I applaud for their strong tradition of dedication to excellence in teaching, research, and service. I am also proud of the successes of our talented graduate students, whose profiles I hope you enjoy reading. You can learn more about our graduate programs by visiting our website, http://www.tstruc.edu/liberalarts, or by calling (512) 245-2317.

Sincerely,

Ann Marie Ellis, PhD
Dean

Jo Ann Jarl
Master of Arts in Technical Communication

Jo Ann Jarl, an English and writing teacher in Wimberley, TX, was inspired by the many job opportunities available to Technical Communication graduates. So, she enrolled in Texas State’s new Master of Arts program in Technical Communication while she continued to teach and became its first graduate in 2001. The software applications and technical writing skills that she learned in the program helped her to obtain an internship as a technical writer with IBM Corporation, writing and editing manuals for software installation. After she graduated in 2001, IBM offered her a permanent job as a technical writer, a job which has evolved into a project leadership and training position.

Scholarships give students the opportunity to learn, to see what others have accomplished, and to plant the seeds of their own accomplishment.

To find out more about establishing a scholarship, please contact Jo Ann Jarl, Development Officer, College of Liberal Arts, (512) 245-8215 or edbatim@texasstate.edu.

Patrick Evoe - Master of Arts in International Studies

Patrick Evoe is working passionately toward two goals: a career in international relations and professional status as an Ironman distance triathlete. Patrick, who ranked fifth in his age group (25-29) in last year’s Ironman World Championship, has set his first exposure to international relations working for the Austin-based semiconductor company Applied Materials. He managed the government’s intelligence program. Outside of class, Patrick spends 25 hours each week training for his endurance sports: triathlon, which features a 2.4-mile swim, a 112-mile bicycle ride, and a 26.2-mile run. Patrick hopes to compete as a professional triathlete a year or two or while he finds a job and establishes himself in his new career in international relations.

Ashley McNabb - Master of Applied Geography

Ashley McNabb and Steven Gray are making an impact by pursuing their interests in environmental geography and community services. Ashley, a master’s degree candidate in Applied Geography, is working with Texas State faculty under a National Science Foundation grant to prepare and design a land use planning program for the Navajo and Hopi tribes. Steven, a Master’s degree candidate in Geography, recently created an educational website for the Environmental Protection Agency’s Office of Indoor Environments and Radiation. Both student’s experience in this research has bolstered their geographic, in government or higher education. They also consider community service important to the quality of their educational experience. They’ve organized a program to teach children about land use planning and have presented a paper at an international conference. Ashley helps low-income families fill out their tax forms, and Steven volunteers with the Texas Watch program.

Charlene Gill - Master of Arts in English

It’s marvelous to watch students learning to express themselves in writing,” says Charlene Gill, a student in the Master of Arts program in English. Charlene entered the program in 2003 to learn to teach literature, but she discovered a keen interest in writing when she was offered an assistantship to teach first-year courses in composition. Charlene hopes to continue as a writing teacher after she graduates. She adds that her teachers have taught her the importance of her own writing strategies and encouraged her to examine her writing for its content and interest to readers. The quality of her writing was affirmed this spring when she presented a paper at an international conference.

Meaghan Dell - Master of Arts in History

Meaghan Dell recently graduated from the Master of Arts program in history and wants to become a college history professor. One of the things that attracted her to the MA program in history was its national reputation for preparing students with the research and presentation skills they need to successfully complete PhD programs at prestigious schools. She also appreciates the History faculty’s attention to students’ needs. During the process of applying to PhD programs at several major universities, Meaghan was hired to teach college history at a local university. One of her Texas State professors helped her prepare for her first job interview, and others have given her pointers on teaching her first courses. In describing her professors’ valuable assistance, Meaghan says, “I want to be like the professor whom students can use as a reference and a resource.”

Itona DeLima - PhD in Geography

Itona DeLima, a PhD in Geographic Information Science from Brazil, is interested in the relationship between health and the environment. Her doctoral research has taken her to New Zealand, where she is studying diverse environmental problems and their effects on health. Itona’s dissertation work, analyzing data on birth defects, enabled her to join a university research team in New Zealand. Her work drew the attention of New Zealand’s prime minister, who recently issued a commendation to her for the work. New Zealand team is studying whether people who live in areas isolated from community services such as churches, libraries, parks, and supermarkets are more prone to health problems.

Adam Richard - Master of Arts in Anthropology

Adam Richard and several other Texas State graduate students in forensic anthropology were having lunch recently with their major professor—the well-known forensic anthropologist Dr. Jerry Melbye—when two Texas Rangers came to Dr. Melbye’s office carrying a bag of bones they wanted help in identifying. “The bones turned out not to be human,” fortunately,” said Adam, explaining that law enforcement officials often bring bones to Dr. Melbye for analysis, which could help them in establishing the identities of crime victims. Forensic anthropologists support the criminal justice system by looking at recent skeletal remains to determine a person’s sex, age, and cause of death. They also research and develop new techniques for extracting information from badly-decomposed skeletal remains. In fact, Adam spent last summer observing the effects that burning has on blunt force trauma fractures to bones in order to identify such trauma in remains that have been badly burned. After receiving his master’s degree in forensic anthropology in 2007, Adam plans to obtain a PhD and become a university professor and a forensic anthropology consultant to law enforcement.

David Hadbawnik - Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

Before he entered Texas State’s Master of Fine Arts program in Creative Writing, David Hadbawnik was living in San Francisco and working two jobs to support his up-and-coming writing career. A published poet, David had read and performed his poetry around the country, and he was working to improve his writing by taking university courses and studying privately with well-known poets. David also curated poetry series, hosted readings, and created Habenich Press (www.habenichpress.com) to publish small editions of young poets’ work—activities that he says are part of the time-honored tradition of being a poet. His two jobs left him little time to read and write. So, when he was awarded the Rose Fellowship ($50,000 over three years) in Texas State’s Creative Writing Program, the decision to accept the fellowship was an easy one to make. To David, the Rose Fellowship has meant the chance to be a more amateur, to have the time to write, and to receive productive criticism from other good writers.
A bicycle accident two years ago injured Daniel Frouman's arm so badly that he had to quit playing piano and guitar and drop his plans to be a professional musician. Feeling the need to do something useful, Daniel—from Argentina—decided to pursue a master's degree in biology and Latin American literature at Texas State, because he loved literature and wanted to stay connected to his native language. Curious about science, he also enrolled in biology and chemistry courses and discovered a passion for internal medicine. In August, Daniel began medical training at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical School in Dallas. "It's a calling," he said. "I need to be someone who can help the patient to understand what's going on. Having had an injury that I'll live with the rest of my life, I realize the critically-injured patient's need to understand what he or she can do to make existence more bearable. That's one of the reasons I continue reading Spanish literature and exploring complex ideas: it helps me to understand my experience and to know that it isn't unique."

When they study the Texas legislative process, students in the Master of Arts program in Political Science can draw on the firsthand experience of one of their classmates, former Texas Senator Bill Haley. Sen. Haley entered the MA program in Political Science in 2005, following a history-making tenure in the Texas Legislature (1979-1989 in the House and 1989-1995 in the Senate). As Chairman of the House Public Education Committee, he guided the passage in 1984 of House Bill 72, the most extensive revision of public education law since the late 1940s. House Bill 72 established a 1-2-2 teacher-student ratio in grades 1-4 and included the famous "No Pau, No Play" rule. Sen. Haley also passed the 1987 AT&T deregulation bill that opened the telecommunications market to wider competition. In the Senate, he served as Chairman of the Senate Administration Committee, and after leaving the Senate, he became the executive director of a non-profit association. He is currently a lobbyist for education and healthcare clients.

Before serving in the Legislature, Sen. Haley taught history and government in public schools in Houston and in his hometown of Center, in Deep East Texas. The Senator enjoyed teaching so much that he hopes to teach again. He is pursuing a degree in Political Science, in preparation for obtaining a PhD and teaching at the college level.

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