

# Civic Matters

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*A Catalyst for Community Dialogue*

A publication of  
the Civic Engagement Office  
at Bryn Mawr College

**Issue 2, April 2008**



## Contents

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<i>Introduction</i>	3
<i>Saving Darfur: Berkshire, Buffett and Petrochina</i> by Judith Porter	5
<i>Sustainability in the Transportation Sector—An Activist’s Journey</i> by Emily McGlynn	9
<i>From Theory to Practice: Creating Diversity Awareness Through Athletics</i> by Mike Fratangelo and Greg Rosnick	12
<i>Building and Expanding Community—Two at a Time</i> by Lisa Peterman	17
<i>Reflections on Partnership, Mutual Respect and Community</i> by Amanda Root	21
<i>Procession of Lessons</i> by Shayna Israel	24
<i>International Justice Week: “Stunt” or Beginning of a Change?</i> by Sarah Alibabaie	28
<i>Differential Equations and Civic Engagement</i> by Victor J. Donnay	31

*Civic Matters uses a wide-angle lens to view civic engagement at the College and creates a public space for members of our campus community to tell the stories of their civic involvement and to reflect on the learning, challenges and ideas that emerge from it. It is our hope that this publication sparks conversation and becomes a catalyst for a more dynamic integration of civic engagement within the life of this academic institution.*

## *Introduction*

The *Civic Matters* editorial team is pleased to present to the Bryn Mawr College community its second issue. Conceptions of civic engagement vary widely, and this publication aims to illuminate some of the diverse civic projects and issues with which our community members are involved. Contributors to this issue include undergraduate and graduate students, faculty and staff, and their concerns range from the local to the international.

Judith Porter reflects on shareholder activism in her efforts to change the practices of a stock fund whose investment strategies have implications for Darfur. Environmental activist Emily McGlynn writes about promoting the use of clean energy by Philadelphia's fleet of refuse trucks. Mike Frantangelo and Greg Rosnick describe their efforts to awaken suburban and urban kids to the possibilities of social change by bringing them together over basketball. In companion pieces, Lisa Peterman and Amanda Root consider the generative possibilities for shared learning among students and staff and their implications for the College's educational mission. For students Shayna Israel and Sarah Alibabaie, civic engagement as enacted in an education internship and in a campus-wide consciousness-raising event, respectively, shape their reflections on personal growth through community involvement. And, finally, transforming a math classroom into a space for investigating everyday social problems is the subject of Victor Donnay's essay. Taken together, these essays reveal a community's passion for social change and the many ways that our contributors bring this passion to bear on projects that aim to strengthen campus, society and citizenship.

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*Funding for this issue has been provided through a grant from the Surdna Foundation.*



## *Saving Darfur: Berkshire, Buffett and Petrochina*

by Judith Porter

Warren Buffett, the “Sage of Omaha” and the third richest man in the world, is the CEO and founder of Berkshire Hathaway (owner of Geico, Dairy Queen and many other companies). He is known as an ethical investor, and he has recently pledged his fortune to the Gates Foundation, which is a major funder of world public health. I am a shareholder in Berkshire Hathaway, and I was appalled when I received Berkshire’s annual report and found that Berkshire owned 11 percent of the shares of PetroChina Corporation, a subsidiary of the China National Petroleum Company (CNPC) that provides revenue to the government of Sudan.

China is heavily invested in oil fields in Sudan. CNPC is the major corporation—both in terms of extraction and purchase—involved in oil in Sudan. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, 70 percent of the income for Sudan comes from oil revenue, primarily paid by Chinese corporations. This revenue is used by the Sudanese government to fund the slaughter in Darfur, a region in western Sudan where there has been a long-standing conflict between Arab herders and black African farmers over land. A rebel movement among the black farmers challenged the Arab-led government. The government responded by arming the Arab herders (called *janjaweed*) and encouraging their raids on black African villages, which has led to ethnic cleansing of the African farmers that is now considered the first genocide in the 21st century. It is estimated that over 200,000 have been murdered, 2.5 million are homeless, and 1,600 villages have been destroyed. The Sudanese government protects the *janjaweed* with bombing and air cover. China not only provides the Sudanese government with money and arms, but it also supports Sudan in the United Nations Security Council.

Presidential executive orders impose a trade embargo prohibiting most American businesses from operating in Sudan; however, Americans can invest in European and Asian companies that do business there. When CNPC tried to make a public offering of its shares in the United States, there was a large protest by Human Rights Watch and other activist

groups because of the company's involvement in Sudan. To overcome this, CNPC created an "independent" subsidiary, PetroChina. PetroChina claimed it only did business in China; thus, the shares of PetroChina were successfully offered in the United States. In fact, PetroChina is simply a capital surrogate for CNPC. They have overlapping Boards of Directors, cash flows freely between the two companies and in China they even share the same logo.

Appalled by the conflict between Buffett's ethical reputation and his investment in PetroChina, a facilitator of genocide, my husband and I introduced a shareholder's resolution for the annual meeting of stockholders stating that Berkshire Hathaway could not invest in any foreign corporation or subsidiary that engages in activities that would be prohibited for U.S. corporations. Buffett issued a statement on the Web advising shareholders to vote no on our resolution. He argued that PetroChina did not control its parent company, CNPC.

When the shareholders' proxy information was mailed and Buffett's defense of his PetroChina investment appeared on the Web, the press became aware of the story and called us incessantly. Since the annual meeting is known as "Woodstock for Capitalists" and usually attracts 27,000 shareholders who are treated to barbecues, sales of products from Buffett's corporations and a six-hour session where they can ask him questions, it is a media circus. The shareholders revere him, so any personal attack on Buffett would undercut our mission. Thus, we consistently repeated to the press how much we admired Buffett and thought him an ethical man. We maintained that we only wanted to present the facts to him and appeal to his well-known moral sensibility. We did not veer from the "educate, don't attack or confront" line of argument and kept stressing the urgency of the situation in Darfur in our discussions with the press in the weeks before the meeting.

We headed for Omaha, Nebraska, the site of the annual meeting, in May 2007. The six-hour question-and-answer session with Mr. Buffett was attended by 27,000 shareholders. We were amazed that 17,000 people remained for the business meeting where we were to present our resolution, since usually only 500 stay. The Save Darfur Coalition and the Sudan Divestment Task Force played an important role in creating awareness of our

proposal by leafleting outside the meeting site on our challenge to Buffett. They also did an enormous amount of work putting up billboards and doing all the background work on the relationship between PetroChina and CNPC. Their backup support for our resolution and their publicity of Berkshire Hathaway's investment in PetroChina were extraordinary.

As the proposers of the resolution, we were entitled to speak on its behalf. I began by thanking Buffet for allowing us to speak and then I explained that I had introduced the resolution because my family was personally affected by the Nazi genocide. The world was silenced when my grandparents were murdered, but genocide has since occurred in Rwanda, Bosnia, Cambodia and now Darfur. It was time to act. My husband, Jerry, introduced the resolution and spoke about the relationship between CNPC and PetroChina. We brought three other speakers with us: Jason Miller from the Sudan Divestment Task Force, an expert on Chinese investment in Sudan; a Darfuri who was personally affected by the genocide; and Bob Edgar, then head of the National Council of Churches, who cited ethical reasons for divestment. We only received 2.5 percent of the vote, due, in part, to the fact that most people had voted by mail prior to the meeting. Despite this, we each got a big round of applause, and many people afterwards told us that they had been unaware of the situation and were disturbed by the conflict between Buffett's ethical reputation and his investment in a company that was helping to perpetuate genocide.

Although our proxy lost, we had a far larger impact than we anticipated. First, we had a chance to directly educate 17,000 people about the situation in Darfur. We also, in a small way, embarrassed Buffett. Over 700 articles mentioning our resolution appeared in presses around the world. Despite differences in points of view, most of them mentioned Buffett, Sudan and genocide in the same article. Although Buffett denies that he divested in response to our resolution, Berkshire Hathaway has recently sold all of its PetroChina stock. As *The Wall Street Journal* stated on October 12, 2007, "Even some longtime Berkshire watchers suspect the controversy over Darfur ... had some impact on Buffet's decision to sell."

It seems that the odds of a few people making a difference are insurmountable, but it's important to try. It is clear, moreover, that if no one makes an effort, change will not occur. As Elie Weisel stated in his 1986

Nobel Peace Prize acceptance speech, “We must take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented. Sometimes we must interfere.”

**Judith Porter** is professor emeritus and research professor of sociology. She is currently teaching “Sociology of AIDS” and advising “Sociology of AIDS Internship.” Her research focuses on AIDS risk behavior and service utilization among injection drug users.

*Sustainability in the Transportation Sector—An Activist’s Journey*

by Emily McGlynn

Last spring and summer, I was an intern at Energy Vision (EV), a national nonprofit organization that researches, analyzes and promotes pathways to pollution-free renewable energy sources, especially focusing on phasing out the use of petroleum in transportation. I met Joanna Underwood, the chair, president and founder of this organization and an alumna of Bryn Mawr College, in the spring of 2006 at a talk she gave about EV’s sustainable transportation initiatives. I was really inspired by her presentation, which outlined the strategy for converting the nation’s garbage trucks to run on natural gas, thereby paving the way to a completely sustainable, hydrogen-fueled transportation sector.

I contacted Joanna at the end of that summer, wanting to find out how I could help with EV’s work, and we immediately discovered a shared mindset: environmental activism requires real action. I knew I wanted to take on a significant project to continue the process of integrating compressed natural gas (CNG) refuse trucks into waste-hauling fleets across the country, but Joanna said this level of involvement would require a lot of time and dedication. She believed the work I did for this project would merit college credit, and so I looked for a way to structure my plan for activism within an academic class. While many of the Bryn Mawr departments I approached were uneasy at first about allowing so much of an independent study project to be field-based, the Civic Engagement Office was instrumental in helping me arrange a Praxis III independent study course and was very welcoming of an atypical internship format. The structure of the Praxis III Learning Plan lent legitimacy to what I was trying to do, and both Nell Anderson and Julie Zaebst were encouraging throughout the process of fleshing out the goals and learning objectives of the project. I was able to work with Joanna as my field supervisor and biology lab instructor Wil Franklin as my faculty advisor. As an EV intern, I spent the spring 2007 term researching the scope of the Philadelphia refuse fleet and its emissions, ways the city might benefit from natural gas garbage trucks, and options for funding and organizing such a program.

That summer I continued this work by writing a report on the results of my research and distributing it to the many city decision-makers I had been in contact with during the course of the research. In August, Joanna and I went to Harrisburg to discuss our initiative with Secretary Kathleen McGinty of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and members of her staff. Generally, we found interest and support there, as well as in the State Policy Office and from staff of the environmental organization Penn Future. In Philadelphia, we also engaged individuals in the city council, the campaign staff of Michael Nutter, the then-Democratic candidate in Philadelphia’s mayoral election, and some officials in the Philadelphia Fleet Management Department.

The work I did over the summer came to a head last fall at an exhibition event in Philadelphia. I helped organize this event, co-sponsored by EV and the Greater Philadelphia Clean Cities Organization, at which city officials and fleet managers could actually see a natural gas garbage truck demonstration. They had the opportunity to ask questions of leading natural gas and refuse truck experts (from Clean Energy and Hallahan Truck Sales) about the technology, the funding and the process of designing a natural gas refuse truck program for the city. The final outcome was very encouraging: participants in our event, from both the fleet and the political ends of the spectrum, are independently taking the process further. The fleet officials are going to visit facilities where natural gas trucks are produced, and the city officials are considering policy proposals used elsewhere to support alternative fuel refuse truck initiatives. The results of this past year’s work thus were very promising, and we are now moving quickly forward as many of the city decision-makers are conducting their own investigations into how they can go about purchasing these trucks.



The most valuable thing I learned during my work with EV was a very personal realization. I found that I am able to accomplish things that initially seem utterly impossible. There were many times during the course

of this project that I thought I had hit a dead end: dealing with busy city employees and fleet managers, many of whom were disgruntled at having to deal with a nosy college student; getting hung up on; not getting most of my calls returned; getting lost in the city; and having people tell me that I was absolutely wrong and that my research was unfounded were all obstacles that were very draining emotionally. The energy sustainability and economic issues facing our country and local governments are very difficult to maneuver, always involving complex political relationships and the bottom line as the ultimate deciding factor. It is definitely a bucket of cold water in the face to come out of the “Bryn Mawr Bubble” as an enthusiastic idealist just to have busy, hardened city officials brusquely reject your ideas. Nevertheless, I benefited greatly from Joanna’s expertise and strategic thinking in this area in which she has worked for over a decade. I have truly grown stronger and more confident by working through these problems, learning to stay positive at all times and to keep my main goal driving me forward.

What is now required for the success of this project is to raise awareness about the importance and feasibility of taking immediate steps toward energy sustainability. This is why I am involving more students at Bryn Mawr in the CNG refuse truck initiative by developing and advising a class taught by Joanna this spring. The course guides students through the same process I navigated in researching and campaigning for the use of CNG trucks in Philadelphia, while simultaneously allowing them to practice the skills they will need as influential environmental activists.

Although the results I have seen from my work are rewarding, it is certainly not the end of the road. If there is one thing I’ve learned from my involvement with Energy Vision, it’s that the road never ends. There is always a next step, and it’s my job as an activist to find it and push forward, both inside and outside the classroom.

**Emily McGlynn ’09** is a biology major who is involved with a variety of environmental groups and initiatives, including increasing renewable energy use on campus, reducing waste and expanding the recycling program.

*From Theory to Practice:  
Creating Diversity Awareness Through Athletics*

by Mike Fratangelo and Greg Rosnick

*The decision making and social action approach extends the transformative curriculum by enabling students to pursue projects and activities that allow them to take personal, social, and civic actions related to the concepts, problems, and issues they have studied.*

—excerpt from *Curriculum Transformation* by James A. Banks

The Praxis program is a community-based learning experience that combines academic study with active and relevant fieldwork. The goal of Praxis is to help students link the theoretical aspects of a course to the real world. While in-class material, such as assigned readings and discussion, deals mainly with the theoretical, the Praxis component of the course is concerned with the practical. The program allows students to see the everyday, real-world workings behind theory and, ultimately, provides them with a comprehensive learning experience. Although this objective may seem like an obvious benefit, it is not always seen as such by students. Amid written assignments, exams and journal entries that Praxis courses require, weekly field site visits can feel more like an extra burdensome assignment, rather than a helpful learning tool. As past Praxis participants, we can attest to overlooking the program's true value. In fact, it wasn't until mid-March of last year that we fully understood the significance of the Praxis program.

That semester, we both enrolled in two education courses: "Critical Issues in Education" and "Multicultural Education" (taught by Marsha Pincus and Michele Muñoz-Miller, respectively). The two courses were grounded in educational theory and also required a weekly field site visit to schools. Through this interplay of coursework and fieldwork, we became fully engaged with the material. After reading James A. Banks' *Curriculum Transformation*, we began contemplating feasible ways for educators to move away from the "Contributions Approach" of multicultural education (focusing on heroes, holidays and discrete cultural elements) toward the "Social Action Approach" (having students grapple with social problems

related to race, gender, sexuality and culture and then proposing ways of creating awareness about these issues). We wondered, “How can the social action approach be effectively structured into a curriculum? What types of students are willing to be ‘agents of social action’? Is this even possible?”

And then we had an epiphany.

In both courses we had been discussing residential segregation by race and socioeconomic status and how it affects schooling in America. Since schools are a microcosm of society, the student populations of schools reflect the racial and socioeconomic dynamics of neighborhoods. Segregation ultimately limits the interactions between children of different backgrounds. Students from inner-city schools (predominantly poor minorities) and students from suburban schools (mostly white middle-class students) rarely, if ever, have the opportunity to interact with each other. To address this problem, we wondered what if we could create a program that would bring together students from the suburbs of Philadelphia and the inner city—two groups differing in racial and socioeconomic background? And, moreover, what if we could connect this program to something that we both love: basketball? With these questions, and several meetings with our professors and various members of the Bi-College community, *DiverseCity* was created. Our pilot program consisted of a basketball camp, a choice we made because of our knowledge of, experience with and love for the sport—and because it is played by children of all backgrounds.

However, *DiverseCity* is more than a typical summer basketball camp. Along with athletic instruction, the program provides an educational experience by conducting group discussion sessions and classroom activities that delve into issues of race, socioeconomic class, gender and other aspects of diversity. The goal of the program is to facilitate meaningful and enriching dialogue so that every camper has an opportunity to understand himself and the other campers better. Athletics, then, is utilized as the main thread through which campers learn about these essential societal issues.

The program’s first year was nothing short of a success. The campers, middle school boys and girls from West Philadelphia and the immediate

suburbs, participated in a program that included highly individualized basketball instruction from college players and coaches, multicultural classroom activities and discussions, and visits from distinguished guest speakers. The speakers



included Jameer Nelson, a current NBA star of the Orlando Magic and Philadelphia area native; Bob Krech, an award-winning author of the young adult novel *Rebound*; Dennis Stanton, a European professional basketball player; and former basketball coach Dr. Ross Gay, who is now an associate professor of poetry at the University of Indiana at Bloomington. The speeches varied in content, but all of the speakers discussed their respective professional fields and how their experiences with diversity have influenced their understanding of the world.

The most rewarding portion of the program, for both campers and counselors alike, was the classroom discussions and activities. Every morning we would introduce a fundamental basketball concept that was applicable to our classroom sessions. For example, if the basketball concept of the day was “teamwork,” we would structure the day’s drills around passing, sharing the ball and winning as a team. During our classroom session we would then reinforce this idea by having the campers work in groups, co-present their work and make decisions collectively. Each theme of the day served as the vehicle through which we facilitated discussion about the more abstract, underlying concepts of diversity. On “teamwork” day, for instance, campers participated in a “partner rap” activity. Campers were paired and asked to compose and recite a rap song that 1) complimented their partner’s skill as a basketball player and 2) shared a special quality about their partner that was not obvious to the rest of the class. This exercise segued into a discussion about assumptions (our diversity topic of the day) and the implications of “judging a book by its cover.”

Creating and directing DiverseCity was an exhausting yet rewarding experience. The biggest problem we encountered was securing the funds to run the camp. We knew our idea was special, but we had literally no money to run the activities. We sought help from former Haverford basketball players, and with their generous contributions we were able to collect enough money to host the first year. A second problem was finding campers to attend. We proposed the idea rather late in the spring semester, and after attempting to spread publicity, we realized that many students already had their summer schedules booked. To overcome this obstacle, we contacted middle school principals and coaches, visited churches and passed out brochures at local basketball courts and summer league games. On the first day of camp, thirteen campers registered; this number was relatively small compared to other summer camps, but it was the perfect size for our pilot year. Having a small group allowed us to test the program, evaluating what worked and what needed to be discarded.

The entire project was a true learning experience. In the months leading up to the camp, we learned skills in organization and project management; during the camp, our lesson plans and our ability to facilitate discussion improved immensely. We are truly indebted to the Bi-Co community for the help and support we received in making this project work. We are grateful for the knowledge and expertise that our professors, the Education Department, the Praxis Program and Haverford College passed along to us. Haverford's longstanding commitment to diversity and social justice was instilled in us early in our undergraduate years, and when we presented our idea to members of the administration, they believed in us and were eager to help. Above all, we must thank the campers who participated in the inaugural week. They helped us bridge together "theory" and "practice" and enabled our vision to become a reality.

In "Critical Issues," we ended the semester by reading "A Talk to Teachers" by James Baldwin. In this piece he tells the educated that it is their job to change society. In light of this message, the two of us are doing all we can to maintain and to grow DiverseCity in the future. We are seeking increased support from our donors, reaching out to additional alums, applying for grants and planning to increase our enrollment. Next summer, we intend to offer multiple sessions at venues in Philadelphia and

Pittsburgh, with the hope that more campers will be able to take part in the experience. Should the goals that are set forth be achieved, we firmly believe that DiverseCity will leave a small mark on the global society.

**Mike Fratangelo** earned his B.A. in race and cultural studies from Haverford College in 2007. Presently, Mike is pursuing a master's degree in social service from Bryn Mawr's Graduate School of Social Work and Social Research.

**Greg Rosnick** is currently a junior at Haverford College, working toward a B.A. in political science, with minors in economics and education.

## *Building and Expanding Community—Two at a Time*

by Lisa Peterman

### Editor's Note

*The Bryn Mawr College Teaching and Learning Initiative's Staff/Student Education Program (SSEP) project has two components. The Empowering Learners Partnership Program (ELP) pairs staff, students and faculty in teaching and learning relationships. Computing I, II and III are courses in which staff and students are partnered in mentoring relationships built upon the teaching of computer literacies. These components both emerged in spring 2006 out of discussions among administrators, faculty and staff, who subsequently delegated the task of program design and implementation to various campus actors. Staff, students, faculty and administrators alike have contributed to the design and implementation of this initiative, creating a collective vision that works toward connecting all members of the Bryn Mawr community to the College's educational mission. In November 2007 a conference sponsored by the Katherine Houghton Hepburn Center (KHHC) was held to explore "Community Engagement and Learning: Within and Beyond the Campus." Members of the SSEP formed a panel, led by Professor Alice Lesnick (faculty coordinator of the SSEP and director of the Bi-College Education Program), to discuss what it means to participate in these programs. One of the panelists, staff member Lisa Peterman, who works in partnership with Maggie Powers '10, wrote the following reflection for the KHHC panel.*

When I attended community college in the mid-1980s, I did not have the opportunity to work on, or with, computers—there weren't any! I possessed an electric typewriter. Some of you may remember those: the things without a monitor and with the loud, but comforting, hum.

I majored in hotel and restaurant management and became a professional cook. There was no need for computers there, either. I spent the next 10 to 15 years as a cook, and the computer explosion passed me by. I always thought I would be a cook, and perhaps one day a manager, although I

loved the cooking part of it too much to seriously consider management. So, the fact that I knew nothing about computers didn't bother me at the time.

By the mid-to-late 1990s computers were everywhere: the workplace, the home and even on phones. I began to feel insecure about having no knowledge of them and thought about taking a course or two, or enrolling in a computer school. But being a single mom, always with two jobs, I had neither the time nor the inclination to take out a student loan and get into more debt. Besides, I thought I would always be in the food business.

More time passed, and by the time I came to the College in early 1998, I was unqualified for many of the jobs I applied for because of a lack of computer skills. I had decided at that point for a number of reasons to give up cooking. Luckily, the job of house manager/personal assistant to the then-new president just opened, and I was hired. But again, there were virtually no computer skills needed outside of knowing how to turn one on and read and send e-mail.

I did pick up a class or two here, like basic Microsoft Word, which turned out to be hugely beneficial, and I learned from a few friends how to navigate the Internet, but beyond that I knew virtually nothing.

Then along came the Empowering Learners Partnership Program, and at the suggestion of my boss, President Nancy Vickers, I contacted Alice [Lesnick]. This was a program that would work for me, because the College allows us to learn at work, and it's free. That was a "win-win" situation for me. After telling Alice what I wanted to learn—Excel and PowerPoint in depth—she put me in touch with Maggie Powers, then a freshman, and we began working together last spring.

One of the truly great and amazing things about this program is that each person is at once a teacher and a pupil. Maggie wanted to learn more about cooking, and I could do that; I wanted to learn about computer programs, and she could do that. I swear she was born with a mouse in her hand! She is certified in all kinds of Microsoft programs and is thoroughly knowledgeable about computers. We spend two hours together once a week, with one hour on the computer and one hour cooking.

Maggie wants to teach in a Montessori school, where kids learn at their own pace, and teaching me is definitely good practice. I make so many mistakes and do some pretty silly things, and she is always patient and kind—although I do give her a few good chuckles now and then. So we each are able to teach and learn from one another.

Maggie has become rather popular in her dorm as she feeds her friends the food we prepare. Every other week I try to come up with a dessert (usually involving chocolate in some way) or an appetizer; then we also prepare entrees of some sort on alternating weeks. I let her do the actual work while I act as her prep cook and coach. I incorporate the principles of classical French cooking as much as I can to teach her the basics, such as how to make different sauces from scratch or quickly dice an onion, because once you know the basics you can make anything, and you can invent your own recipes.

I think too often staff members here don't get the chance to get to know very many students. I know I don't. We are often separated from one another, each busy with our own day-to-day responsibilities. By bringing us together, the Empowering Learners Partnership Program has given all of us the chance to get to know one another better and to see why we are all here. As staff, we are here to support these students and make this college the very best experience it can be for them—some of the very best and brightest young people in the world. And we want them to get to know and appreciate the work we do on their behalf and to understand that there is a population here that is committed to making their college experience as easy, fun, satisfying and memorable as possible, so that they may go out into this world and impact it in a positive way. This program builds community, which has many, many benefits, all of which make this institution stronger and more productive for faculty, staff and students alike.

I can't say enough about what this experience has given me: more confidence about computers and my knowledge of them; a chance to cook for fun and prepare some really delicious food (the president also benefits here!); and, most specially, the chance to get to know a student and work with her. These young women amaze me with their intelligence and poise,

and I feel so very lucky to have gotten the chance to get to know such an incredible young woman and to be able to call her my friend.

Thank you for such a wonderful opportunity, President Vickers and Bryn Mawr College, and Alice and Maggie.

**Lisa Peterman** is the house manager at Pen y Groes and the personal assistant to the president of the College. She holds an A.A. in hotel and restaurant management from Delaware County Community College and has been employed as a cook and/or manager in various institutional settings, including nursing homes, hospitals and Haverford College. Lisa is a single mom and lives with her 15-year-old daughter in Northeast Philadelphia.

*Reflections on Partnership, Mutual Respect and Community*

by Amanda Root

I arrived at Bryn Mawr College, as a McBride Scholar, with a weak academic background. I had dropped out of high school and founded a nonprofit organization, which I ran for five years. I came to Bryn Mawr to strengthen my academic voice and deepen what I had learned through founding an organization. Though I entered college with a strong civic mind, I was unsure how I would develop it through my education. The Bryn Mawr College Teaching and Learning Initiative's Staff/Student Education Program (SSEP) has given me the opportunity to engage in theory and practice in such a profound way that I have been able to further my own understanding of what it means to work in partnership and within a community. Working collaboratively with Professor Alice Lesnick and getting to know a number of campus actors as a student coordinator within these programs opened up the space for me to do this. Previous to my Bryn Mawr experience, I would not have sought to name conceptions such as an "ethic of mutual respect" (whose explanation follows); I would have simply practiced it in my community work without trying to name it. Through the following reflection I mean to illustrate a change I see in myself, which has emerged out of engagement with this community and in dialogue with a variety of literatures. I wish to convey this personal change as catalyst towards engaging the entirety of the Bryn Mawr College community in a dialogue about what it might mean to include all campus actors in the educational mission of the College.

A broad spectrum of people are involved in and associated with the SSEP. Staff, students, faculty and administration make up the initiative's advisory board, and staff, students and faculty are involved in teaching and learning partnerships. The program's leadership is made up of faculty and students working collaboratively to complete administrative tasks, to foster connections among campus actors, to conduct research and to ensure that people on campus receive information about the programs. The structures of these programs are infused with an ethic of mutual respect—everyone is valued for who they are and what they bring to the table. Though these programs mean to connect all actors to the College's educational mission,

implementing and making public this intention challenges traditional liberal arts education. Liberal arts education is geared toward students. Who teaches and who learns is typically confined to teacher and student. Deep social connections are not wholly encouraged among people in diverse roles on campus, nor is it easy to shift perceptions about who gets to engage in the educational mission of the College. The challenge of changing perceptions, I imagine, is not unique to the college campus—every institution establishes roles with the goal of accomplishing necessary institutional tasks. At the same time, when people are defined according to their institutional roles, something about their humanity is lost. The SSEP provides the space for people to get to know each other, and getting to know someone means seeing and feeling the humanity among us.

Two experiences stand out in my mind and illuminate the potential for fundamentally changing how people interact on this campus. In November 2007 I helped organize a panel of SSEP participants for the Katharine Houghton Hepburn Center (KHHC) Conference on Community Engagement and Learning. Organizing the panel was a piece of cake. I loved listening to everyone express his or her experiences in the program. For me, seeing staff, students and faculty coming together like this reflects a shared purpose among campus actors. While participants vary in their experiences of and in the programs, it seems that we share the goal of creating connections among faculty, staff and students and of linking everyone on campus to the College's educational mission. When participants in the programs are in an explicit position to share their experiences, I see a community born that is different from what I have highlighted above. I see a community compelled to action for a common purpose, in which everyone is seen and respected for what she or he brings to the table. Where does this respect come from, and how are people able to get to this place of shared goals or ideals? I believe that the answer lies within the partnership model.

Through partnerships individuals are able to strengthen social connections (among other things), and that leads to a desire to be more active within the institution. Working with Professor Alice Lesnick is the second personal experience that stands out for me in my understanding of how people interact on this campus. Through program coordination and

academic advising, Alice and I have shared in and cultivated a teaching/learning/leadership space between us where each of us brings unique experiences and expertise for the purpose of program growth, personal and academic growth and connecting all members of the community to the College's educational mission. I feel like my own experience evidences a sharing of authority and mutual respect—each of us values each other for what we bring, and we are able to assist and complement each other. Having completed three independent studies, all associated with the SSEP and each involving Alice's consultation, I have been able to reach into myself and cultivate an academic voice that embraces theory and practice and makes me feel like I can bring my whole self to this work. While Alice and I have very different roles on campus (faculty and student), we work together and utilize what each of brings to the program and the leadership relationship.

Emerging on this campus is an opportunity to reconsider how we interact and view all members of the campus community. I hope that people on campus will first be seen as multidimensional humans rather than outsiders, strangers, experts and novices—as bodies filling institutionally constructed roles. By creating and engaging in spaces where multiple campus actors share a common purpose and may act together on equal terms, such as the KHHC panel and within teaching and learning partnerships, I believe the SSEP can foster an ethic of mutual respect and promote shared participation in the educational mission of the College.

**Amanda Root '08** is working toward an A.B. in political science. Since the spring of 2006, Amanda has worked alongside Alice Lesnick as a student coordinator for the Staff/Student Education Program component of the Teaching and Learning Initiative. In this role she has assisted with program development, research, participant recruitment and instruction and has developed three independent studies associated with the program.

## *Procession of Lessons*

by Shayna Israel

An enthusiastic and bright-eyed me entered the Civic Engagement Office with high hopes on the day of my Summer of Service interview. Answering each question, I spoke passionately from my heart. In retrospect, I can diagnose myself with an acute case of idealism. Two semesters later, I still consider myself an idealist, but my idealism is matched by a sharp realism that has made my vision—my vision for my life and my vision of life—more acute.

Sponsored by the Civic Engagement Office, Summer of Service is a funded opportunity for students to live, serve and learn together. Five students live together in a house on campus, spend 32 hours each week volunteering for a service or activism organization in the Philadelphia region and spend an additional three to five hours each week in service-learning activities. My service field site was the Chester Education Foundation (CEF). Located in Chester, Pennsylvania, the CEF is a nonprofit educational partner established in 1988 by a consortium of local and state leaders. Its mission is to support educational excellence and promote community revitalization in the Chester-Upland School District through providing direct services and capacity-building initiatives. There, I interned for a few weeks and then co-taught Language Arts—reading comprehension, spelling and grammar—to ninth and tenth graders in their School to Career Program.

My field site was the place of my greatest struggles and my greatest joys. I loved working with my students, my co-teacher, my supervisor and other employees of the CEF. We laughed, joked, shared personal stories, praised each other, thanked each other and helped each other in ways that made our days go much faster. However, it was difficult to be socialized into the rules and culture of the professional world when much of the world that I had experienced thus far as a student was so different. Throughout the summer, I began to appreciate both the struggles and the joys only after I realized how each experience, difficult or easy, worked to strengthen my character and perspective.

Before I became acclimated to the organization's inner workings, I thought that the CEF could do this or that better. As I gained more exposure to and experience with the organization, I realized that the organization had a logic that worked very well for its context. Once I saw all the things the CEF had to deal with—limited resources, school districts, attendance problems—its strategies and methodologies made perfect sense. This taught me to reserve judgment when encountering a new setting and to observe first, taking in the entire context, before being critical.

After the internship ended and the teaching began, new challenges emerged. I had to learn quickly to become a disciplinarian, educator and counselor for my students. They did not warn me before they acted in ways that required me to shift roles. I was thankful for my co-teacher, Mrs. Johnson, who was a teacher in Chester High School. It was hard for me to learn to discipline students if they broke rules or acted out of order, so Mrs. Johnson mostly took on that role, allowing me to watch and learn, until I was ready to do so myself.

I really loved my teaching and counseling roles because I was not only giving advice or presenting lessons, but I was also becoming a better student and listener. I acquired the ability to sense when a student needed someone to talk to and would pull students aside in class or in the cafeteria and let them know that I was there to talk if they needed me. Doing this eased my job as a teacher because the students knew that I was not only telling them what to do, but also was willing to listen to them and change lesson plans or activities to suit their requests or needs.

It was rewarding to see how much the students appreciated my teaching. One student told me that she did not know before this class that she used nouns when she spoke. Another student told me that I was making him a better writer. Yet another student said that I made learning to spell words fun. It was beautiful to know that one experience could heavily affect those students, especially since this experience profoundly affected me. This experience affirmed the idea that service is not when a particular group or person acts on or for another, but when both parties are engaged in service and learning with and for each other.

Despite the sense of achievement I felt and that I think my students felt, too, I often wondered if I were losing myself and my convictions. For example, there was a strict dress code that required pressed, professional clothing. I did not own any professional clothing, and ironing wasn't a skill I was eager to acquire. I had not bought clothes for a year because my financial resources were limited and because I had promised myself to reduce the amount of clothing I owned. I thought that the notion of making workers buy professional clothing was elitist and classist. Aside from that, I had made a conscious decision not to follow fashion conventions. I consider my self-presentation a political statement about the importance of making choices.

I addressed this challenge in three ways: one, I saw the professional world as having a culture, and I imagined it asking me to respect its mode of dress even though I may not agree with its beliefs; two, I thought of my work attire as a costume that I had to wear temporarily; and three, I bought my professional wardrobe from thrift stores and spiced up my outfits a little bit. I felt reasonably comfortable on this middle ground.

Through the Summer of Service program, I have grown tremendously as a person and have made invaluable connections. The opportunity to make mistakes, struggle, grow and learn with the support of the Civic Engagement Office was a vital blessing. This same office continued to support me by sponsoring a Praxis III course that allowed me to sustain my work with the CEF throughout the school year.

Participating in Summer of Service was like marching through a procession of lessons. I began with so many ideas and expectations, but I had to come to terms with a world of different ideas and expectations. This procession of lessons has helped me prepare for a career devoted to bringing peace, possibility and beauty to the world. While this may seem as idealistic as I sounded the day of my Summer of Service interview, I assure you that there is a big difference. I bring a fresh perspective to my work—a new 20/20 vision built on idealism and realism, hope and practicality, dream and honesty.

**Shayna Israel '08** is working toward a degree in sociology. She currently leads a poetry/rap club for high school students through the Praxis program and participates in the Teaching and Learning Initiative. Shayna is a member of the Bryn Mawr College feminist rap crew 3X a LADY CREW and is actively pursuing her career as a rapper, teacher and performance poet.

*International Justice Week: “Stunt” or Beginning of a Change?*

by Sarah Alibabaie

When I think about International Justice Week (IJW), I do not say that it is something that I “did”; I say that it is something that I went through. It’s more than a clever quip—IJW dominated my thoughts and actions for months, and even after it was over I found it hard to stop relating things to the issues it explored. It made me cry, laugh, think, and, when I slept, it took over my dreams. Why did I devote so much of my time, energy and self to co-coordinating IJW last year? A large part of it was that IJW was something I could take on naturally through my interests and work as a Community Diversity Assistant. It soon moved beyond this, however; IJW surpassed anything that had been done before at Bryn Mawr. It was exciting to be part of its creation, to discover and test the limits of student organizing on campus, both in terms of what students could pull together and in terms of what the campus was willing to take, over what turned out to be a period of nine days. IJW events focused on the issues of Darfur, education, environment, North Korea, Palestine, poverty and sex trafficking. I think the overarching importance of IJW, for me personally and for the campus as a whole, was learning about boundaries—and breaking some boundaries—as well as creating new linkages and spaces for knowledge.

IJW developed out of a club discussion and the realization that we at Bryn Mawr could benefit from learning about global realities from perspectives other than the U.S. media or academic classes. Previously, Bryn Mawr’s social justice events included academic lectures, movie screenings, discussions—and small crowds. Our vision of a cohesive week’s worth of activities and action for the community was based on the confidence that other students would not only want to pursue such awareness and change, but that they also could provide innovative ways of effecting it. Many meetings and exchanges took place to brainstorm how people and groups could be involved and what we could achieve—a fun and heady stage where ambition knew no bounds. The activities were wide-ranging in structure and style, as well as at various times throughout the day, since we sought to present the issues and insert them into as much of the Bryn

Mawr community as possible. In addition to movie screenings, presentations and discussions, we organized intentionally atypical events: stick and sheet tents on Merion Green, a mock checkpoint at Pem Arch and a mock funeral procession. We wanted people to get a taste of a new idea or message without committing to attending something. Events were not only organized by extant student groups, but also afforded space for individual students to come forward and work together, which proved very productive.

Of course, there were obstacles and challenges from beginning to end. There was the challenge of getting people to commit and follow through or to sell ideas to people in various capacities, from the administration to the faculty to busy students. Moreover, the aspects of IJW that departed from the norm in content or in form drew extra fire. General reactions were skepticism and reticence about the week. Out of actual and potential mistakes, but also for no good reason, we were blamed and patronized by people in the administration and campus offices, it seemed simply because we were students. As IJW drew nearer and came to pass, there was discontent and hostility from individuals and student groups. Some objected to specific events; others found the week as a whole to be "a bad approach" and too "in your face." Flipping through editions of *The Bi-College News* and *the college news* from last spring and listening to different people's stories can demonstrate well enough the contention we encountered.

In a survey my co-organizer and I conducted, one person responded, "In high school we would have been expelled for such a stunt" as putting bomb threat signs on building entrances (with disclaimers, of course) to simulate the reality of the danger of girls going to school in Afghanistan. In some ways, discontent with the aspects of IJW that clearly departed from campus norms extended to questioning even the more conventional things that were a part of the week, such as a movie being screened in the Campus Center main lounge.

In high school, I myself did not imagine that I would be in the position of defending such "stunts," but back then I also did not imagine what it would be like to have my ID card determine where I can or more likely cannot go, as is done in the Occupied Territories. In all honesty, I did come through the semester with a more confrontational attitude toward the

community’s usual level of responsiveness, communication and cooperation. As much as I would like to promote continuing to confront the status quo, I would like instead to pass on the value of working in coalition with others to address issues. Through the course of planning and implementing programming, IJW’s co-coordinator and I discovered many contacts and resources at the College that we had no idea existed before—and now as former co-coordinators we do our best to share lessons learned. A large part of the mission of IJW within Bryn Mawr was a focus on students as organizers and the campus as a whole as a consumer. One of my favorite things to do is refer or link up one student to another, knowing that they might find a way to work with one another. I hope that very soon the information about resources at Bryn Mawr—where to go, who to see, what to ask for—as well as information of past involvement or initiatives from students will be compiled and available for all on campus.

I would argue that IJW simply presented a different approach, rather than an inherently bad approach, to doing things on campus. As organizers, we simply wanted to be creative, to support students, and to show that we do care about these issues. Although I did not expect to encounter so many boundaries when I first began with IJW, as long as it provoked and will continue to provoke thought, discussion, collaboration and action, then it was worth it. Ultimately I believe that IJW was important and useful; I am glad that it happened and that I went through it. It really was only the beginning of a change in me and in the way we learn and work with each other on campus.

**Sarah Alibabae ’09** is working towards an A.B. in anthropology at Bryn Mawr. She and Jenny Kim ’09, who is pursuing an A.B. in sociology, coordinated the spring activities of the first annual International Justice Week in 2007.

## *Differential Equations and Civic Engagement*

by Victor J. Donnay

What are some problems facing the world today?

This provocative question has become the standard opening gambit in my math teaching. Students' responses include climate change, terrorism, HIV/AIDS, Asian flu, energy dependence, overpopulation, animal extinction and pollution. I go on to explain that a major goal of our math course will be to see how mathematics can be used to address these important societal issues. All too often, mathematics courses focus exclusively on the mathematical content without making linkages to such larger issues.

In his book *What the Best College Teachers Do*, Ken Bain observes that highly successful teachers often start out their courses by painting the broadest possible picture of the importance of what they are going to teach so as to stimulate student interest and motivation. As their courses progress, they continue to show the broader implications of what they are teaching. Many quantitative literacy courses, courses that aim to teach basic quantitative skills to the general college student, incorporate this best practices approach by teaching mathematics in the context of meaningful real-world problems. Here I describe ways that I make such real-world linkages in more advanced mathematics courses: calculus and particularly differential equations. In these efforts I make use of the book *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* by Jared Diamond. The book examines human societies throughout history that have died out, the factors that led to their collapses, and the lessons we might learn to prevent a collapse of our present-day global society.

The differential equations course is taught to between 15 and 20 sophomore, junior and senior math and science majors. I use the text *Differential Equations* by Paul Blanchard, Robert L. Devaney and Glen R. Hall. Over the past several years, I have been focusing the course more on mathematical modeling than on physics and engineering applications. Since Bryn Mawr is a liberal arts college without an engineering program and

our physics department teaches its own mathematical methods course, I have the freedom to replace some traditional topics with material on modeling.

The first time I used the *Collapse* book, students were assigned to read the entire book, a chapter or two per week, and write a page-long reaction paper for each reading that responded to the prompt, “How does the mathematics we have been learning relate to the topics discussed in the book?” Students were able to find connections for every chapter in the book. On the end-of-course survey, though, the majority of students reported that they felt reading the entire book was too time consuming when combined with their other assignments in the course. Last year I had the students read a few select chapters that had particularly strong links with important topics in the course, specifically various aspects of population modeling. The student evaluations for this modified approach were nearly uniformly positive.

The first model of population growth that we study involves the exponential function. After asking students to read the chapter “Malthus in Africa: Rwanda’s Genocide,” I then give them an assignment that was developed with the assistance of Wen Gao, a Bryn Mawr math major, and was inspired by our participation at the 2006 Mathematics of Social Justice conference at Lafayette College. Using data from the chapter and from international population Web sites, students are asked to calculate for Rwanda the growth rate of population in the decades before the genocide and the population doubling time and then predict what the population will be in later years. For the years after the genocide, they find that their predications significantly overestimate the actual population and are asked to account for the discrepancy. They realize that their overestimates are due to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people during the genocide period and face the sobering fact that numbers arising from mathematical calculations can have a very human dimension.

A topic that I have made a particular focus of my differential equations course is modeling population growth where the population being studied also undergoes harvesting. As an illustrative example, imagine fishermen in the Grand Banks region near Newfoundland who each year harvest (catch) some amount of the fish population. To start with, there are a cer-

tain number of fisherman involved who each year catch roughly a constant amount of fish. Should we allow more fishermen, perhaps equipped with sophisticated fishing technology, to join the hunt? A reasonable response might be that, to avoid the danger of over-fishing, we could allow a small number of additional fishermen to join in. We expect that such a change would increase the catch by a relatively small amount and hence decrease, by a similarly moderate amount, the level of fish remaining in the Grand Banks. However it turns out that such a seemingly reasonable strategy can be dangerously misguided.

Mathematically, one can model population growth with harvesting via a differential equation of the form:  $dP/dt = kP(1 - P/N) - \lambda$ , where  $P(t)$  is the population,  $k$  is the growth rate,  $N$  is the carrying capacity and  $\lambda$  is the harvesting level. A study of the solutions of this equation for various harvesting levels shows the existence of a critical fishing level; technically, it is called the bifurcation value. If the fishing level is increased beyond this critical value, even very slightly, then the model predicts that there will be a drastic crash in the fish population, potentially leading to extinction or near extinction.

The moral of the story is that, if one happens to be unlucky enough to be close to the critical harvesting value, then even a small additional increase in the harvesting level can have cataclysmic implications for the population. Thus great care needs to be taken when increasing harvesting levels even by small amounts, lest we inadvertently cause a population crash. Here is an example where mathematics provides us with a key insight that runs counter to our natural intuition.

Sadly, the implications of a critical harvesting level have not been well understood and acted upon: there are numerous examples in the world of fisheries that have been over-fished, leading to a precipitous decline in the fish stock. Such situations continue today and are regularly in the news.

The phenomenon of over-harvesting is not limited to fishing situations. In its general form, it is often referred to as the “tragedy of the commons.” Consider a community whose citizens let their sheep graze on a shared tract of land, the commons. In this situation, no one individual has any incentive to limit the amount of grazing done by his sheep. Over time, the

commons will become depleted of grass and cease to be usable for grazing. In the language of our previous example, over-harvesting has caused the population of grass to crash.

To prepare my students to better appreciate the amazing ability of mathematics to explain and predict population crashes, I want them to first experience for themselves how seemingly reasonable human behavior can lead to over-harvesting.

The students read the chapter “Twilight at Easter” that examines the collapse of the society on Easter Island, home to the famous stone statues. They learn that a major factor in the collapse was the complete deforestation of the island, and they are left to wonder how a society could be so shortsighted as to cut down all of its trees. Did no one notice that the tree population was drastically diminishing? Why did no one take steps to address the issue? They feel, a bit smugly, that they would be smarter than the Easter Islanders.

We then have a special three-hour evening meeting of the class in which we play the simulation game *Fishing Banks, Ltd.*, created by Dennis Meadows. In this game, teams of students manage their own fishing fleets with the goal of maximizing profit. Over time, what invariably happens is that the teams build up large fishing fleets to maximize their short-term profit, over-harvest the fish population and cause the fish stock to crash to extinction. At this point, with no more fish to catch, the fish companies go bankrupt and hence fail to meet their goal of maximizing profit. The population crash happens even though the teams get feedback after each round on the amount of fish they have caught. By the time they notice that the stocks are decreasing, the corrections they make are too little and too late to stop the extinction. As we debrief this experience, the students realize that they have fallen into the same trap as the Easter Islanders: by over-harvesting a valuable resource, they have driven it to extinction.

Now that the students have a visceral understanding of the over-harvesting phenomenon, I introduce the differential equation  $dP/dt = kP(1 - P/N) - \lambda$ , mentioned earlier, that models the situation, and we undertake its mathematical analysis. Students learn that mathematical modeling can

be used to predict and explain the population crash phenomenon and can thereby serve as a counterweight to the many pressures encouraging over-harvesting of resources.

We finish the unit with a discussion of the interplay between mathematical modeling and government and business policy making. Why is it that even though modeling can predict negative consequences, as with over-fishing or climate change, it is so hard to get society to take preventive action? Society might be better served by leaders with a firm understanding of mathematics in the context of policymaking. By including in our math courses components that link mathematics to issues of social relevance, we can prepare and inspire our students to become these future leaders.

**Victor J. Donnay** is professor of mathematics. He is also co-principal investigator of the Math Science Partnership of Greater Philadelphia (MSPGP), 13 colleges and universities and 46 school districts working together to improve math and science education. Donnay's education course, "Changing Pedagogies in Math and Science Education," gives Bryn Mawr students the opportunity to participate in the educational reform activities of the MSPGP. Further information about Donnay's differential equations course can be found at his Web site: <http://www.brynmawr.edu/math/people/donnay> .

