

May 1, 2008

Bryn Mawr seniors win \$10,000 Davis Grant to fund arts project involving homeless men

Bryn Mawr seniors Lucy Edwards and Adaobi Kanu believe in the power of art to transform the lives of those who practice it. This summer, a \$10,000 grant from the Davis Projects for Peace foundation will enable them to put that faith to work in West Philadelphia, where they will collaborate with homeless men on an ambitious project to generate income, self-esteem, and community understanding through artistic production.

Edwards and Kanu will work with Project H.O.M.E., a Philadelphia nonprofit that provides housing and services to chronically homeless people, to give daily lessons in dance, visual arts, and creative writing to a group of 10 to 15 men at one of Project H.O.M.E.'s shelters. The instruction in all three art forms will concentrate on storytelling and encourage the men to share their personal narratives.

After eight weeks, the collective will give a dance performance and publish a chapbook containing the men's writing and color reproductions of their artwork. Fifteen hundred books will be printed and distributed to the artists, who can sell them on the street or at the performance in Clark Park that will mark the completion of the project.

The books, say Edwards and Kanu, will serve several purposes.

"Most of us have seen homeless men in the streets begging for money, and people generally try to avoid looking at them and hurry past them as fast as they can," says Kanu. "But the whole dynamic is altered when the exchange is business instead of charity. Most people will feel more comfortable making a contribution to the future of someone who's taking an active role in improving his condition."

But the content of the books is critical, too, Edwards adds.

"Homeless men are one of the most stigmatized populations in the world," she explains. "People make all kinds of assumptions about them, and the average person isn't willing to engage a homeless person in conversation. Without a voice, they have no way of dispelling misconceptions and stereotypes about homelessness."

They cite a conversation they had with a homeless man in West Philadelphia who feels deeply isolated from the people who pass by him every day without acknowledging his presence.

"By the end of the conversation, he was crying," their project proposal reports, quoting the man: "We're homeless, but we're humans! People, they don't see that. I try to tell them but people don't even talk to me."

Edwards and Kanu hope that a book filled with the stories of homeless men will help readers "see the human under the 'homeless' label."

They chose to focus on men for their project because, as their proposal states, "They are the people most often asking for change on the sidewalk. They are the majority of the homeless, and those who are most feared by society. Also, men are an underserved population: in the United States, homeless women and children receive much more funding than do homeless men. "

Edwards, who is a painter, will teach visual arts; Kanu, a dancer and choreographer, will provide instruction in movement. A third partner, Lovella Calica, will teach writing; Calica is the director of a writing project for the nonprofit group Iraq Veterans Against the War.

Both Edwards and Kanu have taught before (Edwards taught in Argentina and is currently enrolled in a [Praxis](#) course titled "Arts Teaching in Educational and Community Settings," taught by Associate Director of Dance Mady Cantor; Kanu has completed an independent study focused on dance teaching and has experience teaching dance in a variety of settings); and each has worked with homeless people.

Over the past academic year, Kanu has been conducting dance and expressive-movement workshops with children at Women Against Abuse, a Philadelphia shelter; she has also founded Voices Unleashed, a dance group that addresses community problems and exposes children in inner-city schools to dance as an art, and Street Outreach, a group that coordinates the delivery of excess food from Bryn Mawr's dining halls to a Philadelphia shelter.

Last summer, Edwards taught art and co-curated an exhibition of a homeless artist's work in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Her co-curator was also a homeless man, and Edwards says that she anticipated having to struggle to overcome her own ingrained prejudice against homeless people.

"But I found that when we talked about art, all of that fell away and we were really able to approach each other on level ground. I had no trouble respecting him as an equal," she says.

A Hanna Holborn Gray grant funded her trip to Argentina to research artists' responses to gentrification.

"The Hanna Holborn Gray internship really changed my understanding of what's possible," Edwards says. "I had personal experience of art as a source of empowerment, and I thought that it could work to improve the lives of people in very difficult situations. But before the internship, it was just a hypothesis. In Buenos Aires, I saw the evidence."

The exhibition Edwards co-curated featured the work of an artist who, Edwards said, had not spoken for several years before he became associated with Arte Sin Techo (Art Without a Roof), the organization that Edwards was researching. After he began painting with Arte Sin Techo, he began to speak.

Edwards also cites a woman from a squatter settlement in Buenos Aires who told her that working with Arte Sin Techo made it possible for her to return to school to earn a high-school diploma and then a degree in social work.

Kanu, too, has stories about the transformative power of art. She recalls a little boy in the shelter where she taught.

"At first, he was very uncommunicative. His range of motion was very limited, and he hardly spoke. Eventually, the dancing really opened him up. He became so much more confident in his body and with his voice—he always wanted to talk to me about what he had learned in school and what was happening in his life."

Kanu's work with Axis dance, a company that integrates able-bodied dancers and dancers with disabilities, will likely inform her work with homeless men this summer.

"People who have spent time sleeping on the street tend to have physical problems and may feel alienated from their own bodies," Kanu says. "Encouraging people to tell their stories through movement shows that all bodies can move in beautiful and expressive ways. Dance helps people feel

more awareness of and control over their physical presence in the world—it helps you take ownership of your body. That's especially important to homeless people, who really don't own anything else."

If the project is successful, Edwards and Kanu hope to extend it into a long-term program.

"If the participants are interested, we will support them in forming an artists' collective. They can contribute a set percentage of their book earnings to a pool of funds that will enable them to buy more supplies and continue creating their books," they write in their proposal. "This project is a springboard for innumerable offshoots, only a few of which we have already imagined."

Howard Hughes Medical Institute awards \$1.2 million Undergraduate Science Education Grant to Bryn Mawr

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute has awarded a \$1.2 million Undergraduate Science Education Grant to Bryn Mawr College to help fund a host of initiatives. Chief among them are two yearly \$5,000 fellowships to help matriculated Bryn Mawr science and math majors complete teaching certificates in secondary education; two postdoctoral fellowships; physical upgrades of classroom/laboratory space; and two scholarships for Science for College, a residential summer program for high-school girls considering careers in science, medicine, and technology.

"The rigorous requirements for science majors often make it impossible for students interested in careers in education to complete the Bi-College teacher certification during their four undergraduate years. Hopefully this grant will encourage more of our best and brightest students to pursue teaching as a career," said Peter D. Brodfuehrer, professor of biology and program director of Bryn Mawr's grant.

"A lot of our students go directly on to graduate school or into industry, and we haven't done the best job possible of promoting teaching as an option," Brodfuehrer added. "But science teachers are in very high demand and it's a career that doesn't preclude someone from going on and getting an advanced degree."

The grant starts Sept. 1, 2008, and runs for four years. Brodfuehrer plans to have the first fellows in place at the start of the 2009 academic year and hopes to have the postdoc positions filled by fall 2010.

One postdoctoral fellow will be associated with the education program and the other with the mathematics department. Both fellows will work with faculty to help evaluate and shape innovative teaching methods at the college level and examine the efficacy of interdisciplinary approaches to science and math education.

"We're always trying new approaches in the classroom, and across disciplines, and we get anecdotal evidence about what works and what doesn't. We're hoping the science-education postdoc will be able to provide us with measurable evidence," said Brodfuehrer.

The grant will also help fund the continuation of the [Science Horizons Fellowships](#), which give five Bryn Mawr students the chance spend the summer conducting laboratory research at off-campus sites, including medical centers, universities, and government facilities.

One recent change to the Science Horizons Fellowships program is that Brodfuehrer is hoping to make it easier for students to take the first step toward finding placements by increasing outreach to alumnae working at institutions where placements are possible.

This is the fifth HHMI grant the College has received. Previously funded programs that will benefit from this new grant include the Targeted Science Partnerships Program with Lansdowne Friends School and Delaware Valley Friends School; the Serendip Web site; and the Summer Institutes outreach program for precollege teachers.

Bryn Mawr College was one of 48 of the nation's best undergraduate institutions that received part of the \$60 million HHMI awarded to invigorate science teaching at liberal-arts colleges.

The 2008 grant winners were selected through a stringent review process by distinguished scientists and educators that narrowed the 192 applicants down to 48 winners. HHMI invited 224 colleges with a track record of preparing undergraduate students for research careers to submit proposals.

For more info go to

<http://www.hhmi.org/news/college20080422.html>

Senior math majors chat with J. Crew CEO

At the end of every semester Helen Herrmann Professor of Mathematics Rhonda Hughes likes to take some time out of her senior seminar to inspire her students as they go off into the real world.

She happened upon the perfect thing April 21 when she caught J. Crew CEO Millard "Mickey" Drexler on *The Charlie Rose Show*.

Drexler talked about how he came back from being fired as CEO of Gap to take over and revitalize J. Crew and advised young people to not be afraid of the "big shots" who probably don't know any more than those just starting out.

The next day Hughes and her students watched the show online. Just as Hughes had hoped, her students were indeed inspired; however their inspiration led them to a much more immediate call to action than Hughes had anticipated.

During the interview, Rose talked about Drexler's renowned accessibility, asking "If I called J. Crew right now and asked to talk to Mickey Drexler what would happen?"

"You'd get through to me," he said.

"So they said 'call him' and I did. Next thing I know we're making plans for him to talk to the class," said Hughes.

After a few frantic calls to the Telephone Services Department to make sure she could get a speaker phone, Hughes and 14 of her students huddled into her office at noon last Friday and called the J. Crew headquarters in New York.

"I can't believe he agreed to do this, it's so cool," someone said as the phone rang. "Do we call him Mickey?" another student nervously asked.

After a few rings, Drexler's assistant answered the phone. Yes, Mickey was expecting their call but he couldn't come to the phone at the moment and would have to call them back.

The phone rang a few minutes later and, true to his word, Drexler was on the line.

Drexler started the conversation by telling the students that he doesn't give many speeches at Ivy League schools because he feels many of the students have an unearned sense of entitlement and that one of the most important things he looks for in young employees is a drive to succeed.

"I like young people who have worked as waiters and waitresses because I know they'll work hard and they've gotten their butts kicked," he said.

For the next 30 minutes Drexler entertained the students' questions on everything from having a five and ten-year plan...

"If you have a plan, that's usually your first problem."

To what to look for in a first job...

"Try to find a culture you can fit into. But don't worry too much about your first job. Figure out what you can get out of it, do it for a while and get out. The most important thing is knowing when to get out."

June Lee '08 asked Drexler if he'd consider Bryn Mawr College for his high-school-age daughter.

"You guys are one of those small cool colleges," Drexler said. "But she's young and I don't want her to worry about it. There's too much pressure on young people to be perfect."

Drexler got a cheer from the students when talking about the importance of putting together a good team in business.

"I've got a great team and nine out of my 10 senior executives are women," he said.

Drexler finished up the call by telling the students that the best advice he could give them is the same things they'd probably heard many times over, "don't forget your roots, treat others as you'd want to be treated, and work your a-- off."

"I've e-mailed Charlie Rose many times, and never made contact," said Hughes after the call. "On this occasion, one call to J. Crew resulted in a phone conversation with the CEO less than 24 hours later.

"I truly admire Mickey Drexler's commitment to manage his life so that he is able to respond to a request from a professor and her students for some words of wisdom. It really was amazing and the students couldn't have been more excited or impressed," she added.