

Good afternoon everyone; I would like to begin by thanking President Jane McAuliffe, Elizabeth McCormack, Dean of Graduate Studies and Darlyne Bailey, Dean and Marcia Martin, Associate Dean, of the Graduate School of Social Work & Social Research for providing me the opportunity to share a few words with you today on behalf of Bryn Mawr's graduate students. My name is Laura Tate McHugh and I am a second year MSS student in the Graduate School of Social Work & Social Research pursuing a concentration in Policy, Practice & Advocacy.

It is impossible for me to reflect with you today on what it means to have this opportunity to pursue a graduate degree in social work at Bryn Mawr without touching on what I was doing before I came to graduate school last fall. After working several years in program development for a charter school serving out of school youth in North Philadelphia, I spent seven months immediately prior to starting at Bryn Mawr volunteering with an international women's movement called "The Grail" in Kleinmond, South Africa. The focus of The Grail's efforts worldwide is to harness women's creative energy for spiritual search, social transformation, global solidarity, and ecological sustainability. The Grail in South Africa, in addition to its own local community organizing campaigns, provides intensive training and development education for women, mostly from developing countries, who are committed to organizing for social change in their home communities.

Although I had participated in service-oriented projects over many years, never before had I experienced being part of something as powerful as the movement for social change that thrives in post-apartheid South Africa. Through participation in various trainings and community organizing efforts, across lines of race, class, gender and ethnicity, and in solidarity with women from around the world, I saw clearly for the first time the imperative of interconnectedness in the on-going struggle for widespread social justice in what is becoming an increasingly more intimate global community. As I listened to the stories of the women around me, learned from their experiences, and at times discovered surprisingly similar realities in the U.S., I began to reflect more seriously on the desperate need for collective, policy-driven responses and strategies to address what I now understand are really *global* social problems.

As I observed the still relatively new post-apartheid government continue to evolve right in front of my eyes, and had the chance to witness some of the most charged and complicated social and public policy debates I could imagine, I came to appreciate more concretely the delicate relationship that exists between government, policy-makers, academics, and direct service providers. My experience in South Africa highlighted the complexities and intricacies of the political process in a way that I had not previously appreciated here in the U.S. I came away with a sense of hope – from working alongside people who are diligently building their new democracies from the ground up. I also came to appreciate that the work for social justice, whether at home or abroad, is about more than just "doing what is right." Social justice demands that we intelligently and systematically find ways to secure our collective future stability as a global community. Part of that challenge, of course, is that there are often competing views, which are strongly held, about what is "right."

Problems such as those that South Africa currently faces are not unique to the continent of Africa. The plight of those who are marginalized and focused primarily on survival is becoming a daily reality for even more of the world's population, including too many of those in our own country. Their reality is part of our own. Rich and poor, wealthy countries and developing countries, urban and rural communities, are all interconnected. And we are *all* at

risk if we cannot reverse the negative effects of inadequate and poorly designed and executed national, as well as global, social, political and economic policies. And globalization is, in some respects, as much of a challenge for middle class and working class Americans as it is for the rest of the world. More than ever before, we, an educated generation that is growing into a consciousness of global citizenship, will have greater opportunity and a greater responsibility. Whether we are studying in the disciplines of social work, history, health, or biology, we will be challenged to apply more than our knowledge and capabilities in addressing matters of global injustice and insecurity. We must also develop the will to ask the difficult questions, challenge the status quo, and apply new strategies until we can see results as more broadly shared health and prosperity.

This would be impossible without graduate schools like Bryn Mawr – which has always been at the *forefront* in recognizing the importance of this “big picture” in education, and which is prepared to challenge us as students and professionals, across all disciplines, to find creative, more comprehensive ways to respond to ever-changing, increasingly more complex global issues. Over the last year, Bryn Mawr helped me interpret and ground my South African experience, and earlier experiences, in ways I could not have accomplished on my own, as well as helped me draw appropriate connections to the local social justice efforts I am passionate about here at home. I have relied on my professors and fellow students to channel and provide structure to the new energy I brought with me from my time abroad.

At the Graduate School of Social Work & Social Research I am surrounded by like-minded students and faculty who believe that our ability to process complex information and think critically in the classroom is only as relevant and as meaningful as our commitment to demonstrate *actual* progress and produce *real results* for the people who need it the most. Most importantly, with its Quaker roots and its focus on educating historically marginalized populations, Bryn Mawr has always recognized the critical need for education with a “conscience,” and is forever challenging us as students to think more thoughtfully and critically about the work we do, why we do it, and what we hope to accomplish with our degrees when we leave.

I believe that all of us here today, who have the distinct privilege to attend an institution like Bryn Mawr, have an important legacy to live up to, and I find that Bryn Mawr continues to provoke in me, as I hope it does in you, a sense of urgent social responsibility to utilize my own capabilities to seek out new, more innovative solutions to the problems that we face in our country and our world today. I am definitely looking forward to embarking on that journey in collaboration with all of you present here this afternoon.

I urge you to *recognize*, and embrace, the unique opportunity presented by your time here at Bryn Mawr.

Thank you.