A Note from the Director

This will be a busy year for everyone involved in BDIC. We will be completing the Academic Quality Assessment and Development (AQAD) review that we began last year. The AQAD consists of an intensive self-study and an evaluation by an external committee comprised of faculty from other individualized major programs across the country. Once that external review has been submitted, we will complete the process by writing a response in which we lay our vision of the program for the next five years (when the next AQAD review will be done). That whole stack of information and assessment then goes to the provost who, we hope, will agree with our goals and help us find ways to achieve them.

Some of those goals are laid out in the short notes about the program in this newsletter. We have already begun increasing the number of BDIC advisors and raising student scholarship support. We have been working closely with instructors from many departments at UMass to develop new programs for our students, and look forward to even more experiments in interdisciplinary education.

Once the AQAD has been completed, we will shift gears as we become the destination for faculty and staff from across the country. In March we will host the national conference on Individualized Majors Programs – the first time that this conference has been held at UMass.

And, of course, we will be busy doing all of the things that we do at BDIC on a daily basis to support the active, engaged, and audacious students who work so hard to forge a new path through the academic fields of UMass. All of the other work aside – this is the work that keeps us going every day. Over the two years that I have been director of BDIC, I have grown more and more impressed with the students in this program. Each one of them is – as you well know – stepping off the easy, planned path and taking a risk by doing something new. I am continually captivated by their bravery and drive. I am sure that most of you reading this note can empathize with what they’re going through. I wasn’t here when many of you were, but I would love to hear about your experience as a BDIC student, and your life afterward. Write to me at bdic@bdic.umass.edu and tell me about it.

BDIC IS BURSTING AT THE SEAMS!
News From BDIC

THE COUNTDOWN CONTINUES — now we are only one year away from BDIC’s 45th anniversary! We’ll be organizing get-togethers in various target areas, such as Boston, where many of you live, over the course of this year so we can meet with you and get your ideas for a reunion celebration. If you are interested in being part of a celebration in your town, let us know and email us with your suggestions at bdic@bdic.umass.edu. We would welcome alumni volunteers who wish to take a leadership role in the reunion planning!

ADDING SUPERVISORS
BDIC now has 6 faculty supervisors who advise students in broad areas of concentrations. Our goal is to increase that number to 10 in the next two years to accommodate the growing BDIC student population and develop stronger advisor-student relationships. Taking another step in that direction, the supervisors will be present in the BDIC office for an extra hour each week so they can provide more direct, in-depth, and personalized advising to our students.

In surveys, recent BDIC students have indicated a desire to work more closely with their advisors. By bringing in more advisors and scheduling more advising time, BDIC aims to honor that request.

NEW TRACKS
For most of BDIC’s history, students’ concentrations have been designed by students themselves. That’s why “individualized” is at the heart of the program and our name. In recent years faculty from across campus have approached us with proposals to create new interdisciplinary tracks that are built around preexisting classes at UMass. We have worked very closely with the interested faculty and as a result several new tracks are being developed. Each track is comprised of some mandatory core courses relevant to the interdisciplinary program along with room for student-selected courses since that is an important premise of the BDIC major.

We now offer (or will soon offer) tracks in Civic Engagement, Landscape Design and Construction Management, Equine Studies, Informatics, and Native American and Indigenous Studies.

Through these new programs—with more to come—BDIC is expanding its role as the laboratory for new programs and new curricular ideas at UMass Amherst.

SCHOLARSHIPS
In fall 2013 and spring 2014 a record number of scholarships and research grants were awarded to BDIC students thanks to the generosity of alumni. BDIC awarded 10 scholarships in the fall and in the spring, 43! We’ll be inviting alumni donors to visit campus for a thank you dinner this year so they can meet the student recipients who are eager to meet you and share the exciting stories of their research and travel.
Many scholarship recipients used their awards to travel abroad on exchange. Ksenia Ryabin is using her award to study at University of Auckland in New Zealand. There she will be able to take more in-depth communication, business and media classes for her concentration in Integrated Communication and Design. Zachary Hardy, whose BDIC concentration is entitled Writing in the Computer Sciences, used his scholarship to study at the Oxford Summer Seminar Program in Oxford, England.

Other recipients are using their awards to fund research projects or to work at internships which would not be affordable otherwise. Daniela Kucher, Contextualized Neuroscience, received an award to help fund her honors thesis research during summer, 2014. Alex Bilodeau, Film Studies, is also using his grant to fund his honors capstone project. For his project, Alex is writing and producing a multi-media theater production called “The Gender Fetish.” In his scholarship application, Alex wrote, “Throughout history, art has provided a profound venue to investigate social issues and it is my hope that my production of “The Gender Fetish” will continue in this vein.” Arianna Moscone, Environmental Policy and Advocacy, was awarded a scholarship to do internship and research work in the Mae Caem District of Chaing Mai in Thailand with a group called GoEco. Arianna will “research rescued elephants as they are preparing to be reintroduced into their natural habitat.” Arianna’s research will be compiled in her honors thesis.

**MARCH CONFERENCE**

Last spring when Director Michael Sugerman returned from the Individualized Majors Program (IMP) conference at Drexel University in Philadelphia, he had a big announcement. “I’ve invited everyone to UMass for next year’s conference!” he said. On March 4-6, 2015, BDIC will be hosting the annual IMP conference, a national conference for self-designed programs. Dan Gordon, previous BDIC director, and a few other program directors from across the country developed the conference five years ago. It is a unique opportunity for administrators, faculty and students to share their experience and develop new incentives in collaboration with colleagues from different universities. More and more students have been attending recently, adding a vibrant touch to the sessions. While fewer than 30 people attended the first conference at Indiana University in 2008, the numbers have grown each year. BDIC is expecting a record turn-out at the 2015 conference.

**BDIC LECTURE SERIES**

Last spring, BDIC instituted a visiting lecture series in which people who are prominent in their fields are invited to campus to speak to current BDIC majors. In choosing speakers, we try to target areas popular with students. Last spring, our visitors included journalists, entrepreneurs and a fashion consultant, some of whom were BDIC alumni. It is very useful for our students to hear the visitors’ accounts of career development. Another important reason for having the series is to create community among our students since, as you may remember from your days at UMass, BDIC can be a lonely road. We plan to continue and expand the lecture series in the coming year. If you are interested in sharing your story and advice with our students, please let us know.
Profiles of 2014 Graduates

KEVIN FERNANDES, COMPUTATIONAL ECONOMICS
Kevin was accepted into Albert Einstein College of Medicine located in Manhattan. Kevin writes that his overarching goal is to “integrate my passion for medicine and entrepreneurship to rejuvenate our healthcare system. I want to explore industries related to early detection, infectious diseases, stem cell tissue engineering, or healthcare IT.” Kevin plans to study abroad as a medical school student to investigate medical problems in India.

Kevin was recently selected as Albert Einstein College of Medicine’s Research and Public Service Scholar. Kevin says, “It is an $80K merit scholarship given to individuals with extensive research and/or public service experience. In essence, it is a two-year full ride to medical school. I was awarded it for my four years researching in cognitive psychology, computer science and my eight years of public service work in India. I plan to continue my public service work in India during medical school and look at opportunities in medical technology.”

SARAH WALSH, DEVELOPMENTAL HEALTH
Sarah’s long-time dream has been to go to medical school and eventually practice pediatrics. She explains her approach in her senior summary: “Developmental Health is an interdisciplinary field of study that has recently gained increased attention in the medical field. Developmental Health bridges the domains of biology, psychology and neuroscience, sociology, public health, education and human development.” While Sarah plans to attend medical or physician assistant school one day, she has decided to work for a while first. Even before graduation, she was hired as a research coordinator at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.

REBECCA UKAEGBU, BUSINESS AND CONSUMER STUDIES: FOCUS ON EAST ASIA
Rebecca will be attending UMass Worcester Medical School in the fall. She was on a pre-med track while her BDIC focus was on business. In her senior summary, Rebecca wrote, “If I go to medical school, I would be interested in learning more about healthcare management and administration, and what I learned in BDIC, particularly through my focus on Asian Studies, will prepare me to serve diverse populations. Regardless of which path I pursue, I know my education through BDIC has prepared me to be successful.”

DAVID BARNSTONE, SCIENCE JOURNALISM
David was hired by The University of Rochester as a science writer in the university’s communication department. He will be in charge of writing press releases about science-related topics, specifically in the engineering and computer science fields. David said in his senior summary, “Ultimately, my concentration has prepared me to fill a unique niche in science writing while providing a flexible skill set and theoretical background applicable to all fields of science.”

DAVID KE, SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EDUCATION
David was awarded both the prestigious 21st Century Leaders Award and the Senior Leadership Award at the 2014 Commencement as well as a Social Justice Award. He has been accepted into the Social Justice Education graduate program at UMass Amherst. In his senior summary, David said “One of my goals is to work with a non-profit that focuses on issues in civil rights, immigration, or poverty. I have to be able to know how systems of oppression and privilege provide access and opportunity so that I can fight for human rights with the goal of providing equity and equal rights for all folks of all identities.” David described his background in the following: “I am a proud, first generation American of Cambodian, Thai, and Chinese descent. My parents escaped to the United States as refugees from the Cambodian Genocide. From an early age I learned quickly the challenges of growing up as a person of my identity. Some of my earliest memories are of being treated differently because of the color of my skin, or if I didn’t speak English well enough, but this never stopped me from moving forward towards making change in the community. Going into college there was a lot of pressure to succeed. My father is a drug addict, and my family survived years of violence from him until he left the family. Along the way I found myself as an activist, working to end racism, sexism, rape culture and domestic violence. I did this through the power of dialogue, theater and performance.”
News From Alums

David Fine, Creative Writing in Entertainment Administration, 2013, is enrolled in an MFA program in Writing and Producing for Television at the Brooklyn campus of Long Island University. David says that the founder and head professor, Norman Steinberg, was a co-writer of the famous film *Blazing Saddles* and one of the head writers for the *Cosby* show. David states “I want you to know that I could never have dreamed of being accepted into a program like this without BDIC.”

Jed Winer, Animal and Environmental Multimedia Production, 2013, was hired by National Geographic Kids Digital division as a special projects assistant. Working at National Geographic has been Jed’s dream since the time he first began BDIC.

Julia Lisa, International Relations Through Film and Television, 2013, is living in Los Angeles and working in production and theater. “Everything I wanted to do.” Julia says.

Emily Susan Gaylord, Non-Profit Administration, 2011 is the Co-Founder and Creative Director of Chikmedia, a women-focused marketing and design firm that seeks to empower women through “creative messaging and innovative design.” Emily won the *Western Mass Women Magazine* Top 25 Women to Watch Award for her work, and her company appeared on the cover of *BusinessWest* magazine.

Tom Kelsey, Stage Performance and Business Management, 2014, performed this year in a show called *The Brink of Us* in Brooklyn. The show is self-produced by the actors and funded through donations.

Glenn Johnson, Creative Writing and Social Change, 1994, won second prize at the 2014 League for the Advancement of New England Storytellers conference at UMass Amherst story slam. The theme of the contest was “scarred for life,” and Glenn’s story was based on personal experiences.

(continued)
Peter Merzbacher, Globalization and Entrepreneurship, 2011, recently won the Lightning in a Bottle Competition sponsored by ab+c Creative Intelligence marketing communications agency in Philadelphia for his bakery, Philly Bread. Finalists were evaluated on criteria such as how the idea would help Philadelphia grow, its potential impact and whether the idea is marketable, sustainable and realistic. In an interview, Peter said “San Francisco has the sourdough loaf, New York has the bagel and Paris has the baguette. My intention is to make the Philly Muffin (made at Philly Bread) as world famous as our cheesesteaks.”

August Cohn Thomas, The Ancient World, 2009, recently won the prestigious Jack Kent Cooke Graduate Fellowship and will be studying in Edinburgh. She previously studied in Turkey on a Fulbright Scholarship.

Nikki Tishler, Civic Engagement and the Politics of Representation, 2011, after graduating from Brandeis with a joint master’s of Public Policy/Women and Gender Studies, was recently awarded the Massachusetts Women’s Leadership Fellowship. Nikki is beginning a one year appointment as associate director of planning strategies at MassDOT.

Alumni, please tell us what you’re doing so that we can share it with the rest of the BDIC community. Just go to the BDIC website (bdic.umass.edu/alumni) and click on the “alumni update form” link. The current majors love to hear stories from “the other side” so take a moment and let us know.
Contact us with your ideas at:

BDIC@BDIC.UMASS.EDU
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In today’s economy, your donation is more important than ever. Your donation will help support student research projects and travel opportunities, career advising forums with alumni, senior celebrations, and of course this newsletter. Please consider investing in our students and their future goals.

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Linda Roney
BDIC, 607 Goodell
140 Hicks Way
University of Massachusetts
Amherst, MA 01003

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