BDIC’s 45TH ANNIVERSARY is only two years away! If you have ideas for how to celebrate this milestone please suggest them to us. We’d love to hear from you! Is anyone interested in organizing or serving on a reunion committee?

In 1968, a group of UMass students proposed the idea of starting an individualized major on campus. After a great deal of consideration and paperwork, BDIC was born in 1970. The first directors of BDIC, both pioneers in individualized education, were Arthur Kinney of the English department and W. Leigh Short of Engineering. During the first semester of BDIC’s existence, 31 students created concentrations in a variety of academic areas. Faculty from 26 different departments served as faculty sponsors, with the largest number coming from the English department. Tom Benedek who wrote the screenplays for “Free Willy” and “Cocoon,” was one of the first graduates of BDIC in 1972.

BDIC’s success can be seen in its role as an incubator for new majors. The departments of Computer Science, Legal Studies, Public Health, STPEC and Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies all started out as BDIC concentrations, and because of popular demand, became separate majors.

Much of the program’s structure remains from BDIC’s early days although important changes have been made. There are still faculty sponsors and supervisors, and students still write proposals for admission to the program. The addition of Peer Advisors and small sections of the Proposal Writing Class have helped students develop an even wider range of concentrations. Even with these changes, the intellectual excitement that BDIC creates is still as obvious in its current students as it was in the early days of BDIC’s inception.

Please help us celebrate the proud heritage that is your own educational identity!

CONTACT US WITH YOUR IDEAS AT: BDIC@BDIC.UMASS.EDU
I had the pleasure of being the director of BDIC in the years 2008-2011. And while there always seemed to be more to do, I am proud that I was able to enlarge the BDIC team.

Today, there are more professors actively involved with BDIC than in 2008. One of these is Michael Sugerman, a senior lecturer in anthropology who is doing a great job as the new BDIC director. As for myself, having ceased to be involved on a daily basis, I now have the luxury of being able to theorize about BDIC.

It is important to establish with precision what this program means in the world of higher education today (versus what it meant in the 1960s when it began).

In an educational system in which a premium is placed on having a “discipline,” what is the value of BDIC?

Here in abbreviated form is the argument as I see it: BDIC plays a role among the academic disciplines similar to the role that the conservationist plays in a world of decreasing bio-diversity.

The key to this understanding is history. For every field of academic inquiry, from anthropology to zoology, there is a history of how the field has evolved: how its questions, methods, and presuppositions have changed. This historical perspective allows the student to gain insight from older schools of thought and to maintain critical distance toward current trends. The history of the discipline maintains diverse points of view.

Unfortunately, many disciplines do not offer a historical perspective on the paradigms that have shaped the field. There is consequently no check on contemporary currents of thinking, which often tend to reduce the field of inquiry to one intellectual model that happens to be in fashion.

BDIC is a way for the student to recover some of the species of insight that would otherwise become extinct. The BDIC student today can focus on religion, even though the modern research university tends to squeeze religion out of the disciplines—not only psychology but philosophy, literature, economics, and political science. It is not easy for the BDIC student because so few courses on religion are offered. But
an odd course on religion in one department, combined with the stray course on religion in another, and another, with the addition of independent study and a period of work at a foreign university, will add up to an impressive BDIC “concentration.”

When the idea for BDIC emerged in the late 1960s, it was based on a perceived shortage of majors at that time. Today, with 80 majors, it is hard to argue that individuality is being thwarted by a dearth of disciplines. The case for BDIC must rest, in my opinion, on analysis of how disciplines in general tend to shrink in substance even as they expand in number—how each discipline replaces its classic and diverse offerings with a specific methodology or ideology. The more we know about how and why this is happening all over the country, the more we will appreciate the wisdom of our university in offering BDIC as an option.

— Daniel Gordon

Daniel Gordon, professor of history, was director of BDIC, 2008-2011 and is the interim dean of the Commonwealth Honors College. He can be reached at dgordon@history.umass.edu.

**BDIC News**

**New Alliances for BDIC:**

BDIC has been a kind of academic magnet this year attracting alliances with other departments on campus. Our staff and faculty have been working closely with other departments on campus to create new interdisciplinary programs, as well as to expand offerings in the programs most in demand by students. Starting this year students can choose from four new major tracks through BDIC: Indigenous Studies; Sustainability; Informatics (in conjunction with Computer Science); and a Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning/Stockbridge track that will allow students to widen their Landscape Design focus to include construction and business-related courses. In each of these tracks, students will take a set of core courses developed by a faculty team. They will combine that core with classes in other departments to create an individualized major in one of these emerging fields. All of these BDIC tracks could very well develop into majors of their own after an incubation period in BDIC. Meanwhile, the collaboration with other departments creates important academic connections for BDIC students and draws additional students into the major.

**Denver IMP National Conference**

March, 2013

In March of 2013, BDIC sent a large cohort to Denver, CO to take part in the Fifth Annual Individualized Major Program National Conference hosted by Metropolitan State University-Denver. Five BDIC Peer Advisors and several BDIC faculty participated in the three-day event and represented BDIC together with many other individualized major programs from across the country.

BDIC Peer Advisors presented along with students from other universities on such subjects as their personal areas of interest, how research has played an integral role in their concentrations, the function of peer advising in gateway courses such as the BDIC proposal class, and where they hope to use their education either in graduate programs or in specific fields of interest. One of the satisfying parts of the conference was the sheer number of faculty from other institutions who wanted to adopt our Peer Advisors and bring them back to their departments.

The IMP Conference was a great learning experience for all in attendance. The opportunity to foster connections between similar programs from across the country is an excellent way to access information and resources to help these unique programs continue to thrive.
News from BDIC Alumni

From David McGavern (2011, People and Computers, former BDIC webmaster)

“When I started my job at Apple in September 2011, I was mainly working on the engineering side of our products (the “computer” side of my major). One year ago, I made a significant change in my career and transferred to the Human Interface design team at Apple, which creates the look and feel of all of Apple’s products (this is the team that invented the user interface of the iPhone). A transfer like this almost never happens at Apple. Rarely does someone go from engineering to design. I think the BDIC program is a large part as to why I was able to pull it off. The multidisciplinary education and entrepreneurial spirit that drives BDIC has made me think that anything can be possible, and so far it’s been true. So, two years later, I wanted to say thank you :-). I couldn’t have done it without BDIC.”

From Joshua Kaplan (2013, Program Management of Government Operations)

“Today I received an official offer for a GS-7 level Program Management position at Hanscom Air Force Base. This is the exact job I had in mind when I created my BDIC major. My major consisted of Management/Project Management, Political Science, Criminal Justice, Legal Studies, Army and Air Force ROTC leadership. Through all of this I was able to create a major that successfully got me my dream entry level job for the Air Force. I will be using information learned from my classes to successfully manage programs and acquisitions as a result of learning about project management, management, and the government, from the political perspective as well as the ROTC perspective. I have BDIC to thank for making my major and future goals possible!”

Michaela Pommells (2002, Communication with a Concentration in Dress and Gender. Winner of Distinguished Young Alumni Award, 2013)

In 2011, Michaela, is a social justice strategist, organizer and educator, co-founded The Coalition for Racial Justice, a growing collaborative of neighbors, leaders, and institutions organized to eliminate race-based disparities in Philadelphia. The Coalition works collaboratively to shift organizational culture, analyze public policy with an anti-racist lens and organize communities to build their capacity to lead change. Michaela is also a 2012 State Political Leaders Fellow with The Center for Progressive Leadership, a political training institute that develops diverse leaders to effectively advance progressive political and policy change.

Michaela completed an M.S. in Women’s Studies and Public Policy at Towson University.

BDIC Students in the News

This year BDIC students received honors and awards from the Alumni Association, the Honors College, and other programs across the campus.

The Alumni Association presents awards based on academic excellence, leadership in public service, and contributions to UMass student organizations. This year BDIC students won almost 10% of the awards, even though they comprise only about 1% of the UMass student population.

Seniors Tracy Gebhart (Civic Engagement and Public Health Education Through Media Production) and Stephanie Ozahowski (Social and Economic Development) both achieved Senior Leadership Awards, one of the highest awards given to undergraduates at UMass.

Seniors Aram Bedrosian (Healthcare: From the Cell to the Community) and Julian Gensler (Buddhist Inspired Psychotherapy: Buddhism, Psychology and Finance) were both awarded “Class of 1941 Humanitarian Awards.”

Recipients of this award are selected from among junior and senior Honors College students who demonstrate academic excellence combined with community service.
Julian Gensler was also the recipient of an “Honors Dean’s Award,” and three more seniors—Aviv Celine (Civic Engagement, Education and International Justice), Ariel Geist (Diplomacy: Politics in Cultural Context – Latin America), and Blaine Stillerman (International Business and Spanish)—were all cited as having completed the CHC International Scholars Program.

Senior Will Saltus (Music Marketing and Management) was also recognized for the work he has done on campus. Will is the co-founder and director of the Jewish Student Union—a Registered Student Organization or “RSO” here at UMass. Last month that organization won two “Sammies.” The Sammies are awards that are given for extraordinary contributions to student life on campus, and Will and his organization were voted “Outstanding RSO of the year” and “Outstanding RSO event of the year.” As Will pointed out, the event was so successful because he leveraged all of the connections he made through BDIC in the Music Industry over the past four years.

Another senior, Lindsay Deschenes (Ancient Culture and Archeology), won a number of grants and scholarships in support of her concentration in Ancient Culture and Archeology, including grants from The Explorer’s Club and the Maya Field Research Program in Belize.

Jed Winer, senior (Animal and Multimedia Production) received an award for his film “Campus K-9” at the UMass Film festival.

Younger BDIC majors are already making their marks on campus. Juniors Emma Mulvaney (Higher Education Administration), Michael Caudill (Acoustical Studies), and Sarah Walsh (Developmental Health) were all recognized with Alumni Association awards.

Sophomore Tyler Clayton Appel (Acting and Filmmaking) won first prize in the annual competition for the Michael S. Roif Award in Film Studies. This is the second year in a row that the award has gone to a BDIC major, who were ranked ahead of 250 students in Journalism, Communication, and other film and video oriented majors.

—Michael Sugerman, BDIC Director
PROFILE of a Commonwealth Honors College

BDIC major: ARAM BEDROSIAN
(2013, Healthcare: From the Cell to the Community)

The interdisciplinary major enabled me to better understand the multifaceted nature of health care. I can view health care through a microscope, data collection, statistical analysis, and a psychological mindset. There was no other major where I could have integrated such a variety of sciences to understand health care systems and the people who make them up.

I am intrigued by the stepwise fashion of traditional majors, but find solace in the freedom of BDIC. If I had not gone through the at-times frustrating proposal writing course I would not appreciate the design of majors. It is similar to how an architect can admire another building style while still keeping their creativity at the forefront. If I had not done an individualized major I do not think that I would have come to enjoy the dynamics of a university. It is this appreciation for education, at its core, that I will always have and that is thanks to the program. I learned how to actively pursue education and to develop more academic curiosity.”

Aram designed his BDIC major in his junior year while also majoring in Psychology with a neuroscience focus. The courses Aram chose to take for BDIC were primarily at the graduate level, including one for UMass Worcester Medical School. He is applying to medical school for fall, 2014.

Aram’s achievements while at UMass far outstretched the arena of his academic success. Aram was a leader in the CHC. He often spoke at special events and organized many guest lectures for the benefit of honors students. Because of Aram’s extensive service to the CHC, as well as excellent academic work, he was awarded the Class of 1941 Humanitarian Award.

Daniel Gordon, Acting Interim Dean of CHC said of Aram in a recommendation he wrote:

“—this is a student who is unique in my experience for his ability to interface with several different disciplines related to medicine and public health, and his ability to articulate his multi-disciplinary interests in relation to specific humanitarian goals. Based on what he has accomplished in two years at UMass Amherst, I expect him to emerge, in twenty years, as a world-class leader in medical science and administration.”

— Excerpt from the Senior Summary of Aram Bedrosian.

This Year, Thanks to generous alumni donations, BDIC was able to give a record number of scholarships to support study abroad, research projects and internships. Here are some examples of what BDIC students are doing with the grant funds:

Shannon McDonough (2014, Foreign Policy and Tourism) will be interning at the School of Language Studies, Foreign Service Institute at the Department of State in Washington, DC.

Kathryn McNall’s (2014, Creative Communication) grant will cover the expenses of her summer internship at the New Century Theater at Smith College. Kathryn will be working closely with professional directors and designers on theater productions.

Megan Healy (2014, Civic Engagement with International Education) is doing research while working over the summer with the Nanubhai Education Foundation.
Kyle Rodd (2013, Ecopsychology) is using his BDIC grant to study at the Pathfinder School in Ohio to participate in their wilderness skills and survival series. Experience working with specialists in his field will help Kyle prepare to become an outdoor educator.

Guillaume Pagnier (2013, Neurobiology) will be expanding his Honors Thesis work into a publishable paper with the help of his BDIC scholarship. Guillaume will be working closely with Psychology Professors, Andrew Cohen and Heather Richardson on the laboratory experiments necessary to extend his thesis.

A new scholarship fund was instituted in the fall of 2012 with funds donated by BDIC alumnus, Surya Prakash (2003, Management Information Technology) and his wife, Aditi Prakash, a UMass alumna. The Prakash scholarship is intended to encourage students involved in entrepreneurial endeavors. The 2012-13 recipient was Timothy O’Brien (2013, Entrepreneurial Studies and Marketing) who used his award to develop his fledgling snowboard company, Juke Snowboards.

The Rosa Luxemborg Fund instituted by alumnus Gary Roth (1978, History, Economics and Education) continues to help students who are involved in humanitarian efforts. Karen Bui (2014, Animal Behavior and Human Interaction) was this year’s winner. Karen is participating in an internship experience in Hartebeesport, South Africa through an organization called GoEco. Karen will be working with African animals, such as cheetahs, lions, zebras and elephants and getting hands-on experience directly related to her BDIC concentration.

Give back to BDIC
donate at bdic.umass.edu/alumni
The scholarships and grants listed on page 7 would not have been possible without alumni support. Alumni gifts also enabled us to send faculty and five student peer advisors to the Individualized Major Conference in Denver this past March. The students said that presenting at the conference and having the opportunity to meet their counterparts from similar programs across the county was one of the most memorable experiences of their academic careers.

Some of the alumni fund was used to purchase much-needed furniture for the BDIC office and to begin refurbishing a nearby room in Goodell Hall that will be used for faculty and alumni lectures and other events to bring BDIC students together. Without the support of alumni, BDIC would not be able to sponsor special events that benefit our students, such as the Spring Alumni Networking event which brought BDIC alumni from all over the country to campus.

And a new use for alumni funds: we have hired a graduate student to compile a history of BDIC! Rachel is bringing together BDIC files, university archives, and conducting interviews with current and former faculty, staff, and students. With her work, we will have a resource to help us review where we have been, and to guide us to where to go from here.

So thank you, alumni, for all you have done through your generous support not only to keep BDIC going, but to keep it growing!