

GRADUATES OF GODDARD'S EDUCATION PROGRAM  
ARE CHANGING THE WORLD, ONE STUDENT AT A TIME.

# Pioneers *of the* Future



LAURA GIOSH-MARKOV

For a college that was founded on the progressive, democratic ideals of John Dewey and other educational reformers, it should come as no surprise that Goddard's own Education Program promotes those same ideals today.

The program not only certifies future educators but also nourishes progressive thinkers and critical problem-solvers who are committed to democratic education. Much like other Goddard programs, the low-residency model allows students to work in their communities as "co-constructors of knowledge." The program vision relies on three main components: personal development, interpersonal competence and social responsibility. It is this dedication to social responsibility and personal growth that gives the program its strength.

David Solmitz (MA ED '00), an active proponent of student-centered learning and a visionary of social equality,

**RACHAEL A. M ROLLSON**  
(MFAIA '06)

comes from a legacy of progressive thought forged by such educators as Paul Gehee and Hans Maeder. His own strength as an educator has been his untiring, and sometimes controversial, crusade to find joy and understanding between educators and students while creating awareness and access to diversity. It was at Goddard that David wrote a book on his educational experiences in the field, *Schooling for Humanity*:

Above, students at the Anglo-American International School in Bulgaria perform the school song at the opening of a new building. Laura Giosh-Markov (MA ED '04), the music teacher and an administrator at the school, collaborated with the choir to write the song.

*When Big Brother Isn't Watching* (Peter Lang Publishing).

"My intention as a teacher is to be a facilitator who excites and motivates students to learn," he says. "Within this process, [they] get to know themselves and each other better as they become more caring and compassionate individuals and active citizens who uphold the principles of our democratic society."

The center of continual controversy in his educational climates, David challenged the administration by promoting democratic learning. This included supporting self-directed student activities and assessments, bringing in artists to work with students and helping students create and run courses on "Experiencing Diversity," a project that received resistance from both the administration and colleagues. He once went to court because of the school district's prevention of a lesbian speaker at Tolerance Day.

"I imagine the challenge that I faced as a teacher, even at the college level, was that some teachers felt threatened by my approach to teaching and tried to block my methodology." He says that the current focus in our public schools on accountability—constant testing and judging students and teachers based on test scores—has left behind "education for humanity," or fostering the creativity, motivation, insight and compassion of our students.

Today, after retiring from teaching, David has begun to focus more on writing, watercolor painting and educational consulting.

"We constantly must believe in ourselves," David says, "realize that what we are doing works and continue to try new approaches."

New approaches are exactly what Sara Barber-Just (MA ED '02) created in the public school curricula when she began designing GLBT (gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, transgender) courses in literature in Amherst, Mass. Looking to energize her teaching career, she came upon the Goddard low-residency program in education, which she says fostered an exploratory climate that was socially and personally meaningful.

When she began her research at Goddard, she found that GLBT youth were often "miserable in high school, unsupported, unrecognized, even suicidal," and though there were educators out there using gay

Sara Barber-Just created a healthier environment for gay and lesbian students in Amherst, Mass., by introducing GLBT literature courses into the school curriculum.



David Solmitz chronicled his 30-year struggle as a controversial, anti-establishment teacher in a small Maine high school in *Schooling for Humanity: When Big Brother Isn't Watching*.

and lesbian literature in their classes, they were doing so in primarily hetero-sexist contexts.

Sara felt that this could lead to more GLBT youths being ostracized in unsafe environments. Her mission, then, was to create a safe and understanding environment in which GLBT history, activism, literature and culture were examined in only that context.

"I don't think of this material as 'alternative' at all," she says. "It's powerful, renowned literature being placed in a social and historical context, as any literature can and should be!"

For two years after her Goddard experience, Sara was authorized to teach a small Gay and Lesbian Literature class, on the side and without pay, until she collected enough substantiation to be approved by the school committee. The course was approved as an elective for 11th and 12th graders and is now one of the most popular English courses at Amherst Regional School.

"I have literally seen homophobic language decrease, straight allies increase, more students coming out and more safety for teachers," she says. She also acted as advisor to the Gay/Straight Alliance that organizes a GLBT Awareness Week each year, which has hosted lesbian author Leslea Newman and educational athletics activist Pat Griffin. In 2004, her peers selected her to receive the school's highest teaching award, the Robert Frost Chair, for her outstanding devotion to her school and community.

While Sara's challenge has been changing the cultural environment in her school setting, Terry Holmes' (MA ED '00) biggest challenge is more fundamental: adult literacy. As evening school principal for Granby High School in Norfolk, Va., he oversees programs for high school seniors and adult learners enrolled in General Education Development (GED), English as a Second Language and Adult Basic Education.



"Most of our students' basic education test scores show deficiencies in reading and writing, math, science and social studies," he says. "Many of our adult students' test scores fall in the range of 8th grade or lower."

One of Terry's biggest challenges is letting adults know about all the programs that are available, and he spreads the word via radio, TV, the Internet, bulletin boards and local literacy groups.

"We make every effort to inform the public of our extensive literacy course offerings for adult learners," he says. "More must be done to close the achievement gap."

When he came to Goddard, his primary directive was to learn more about the Harlem Renaissance era and its subsequent "manifestation of black consciousness in the U.S."

"I focused on an era that had eluded me as a child," he says, "listening to my parents speak of the key black figures who were major players in the performing and visual arts and literature of the period."

Terry returned to the classroom to foster the strength and inspiration of that consciousness through more student-directed learning. As an administrator, he now encourages his teachers to do the same.

"As I returned to my classroom [after receiving my degree from Goddard], my teaching modality changed," he says. "I experienced a total paradigm shift. I became more of a facilitator and allowed my students more freedom of expression in the classroom."

Terry has won a host of awards to mark his impact on his students, including Teacher of the Year and Virginia Student Advisor of the Year. He has instituted a statewide Race to GED initiative to combat local low literacy rates and has earned School Bell awards for his dedication and contributions to education.

While Terry's students have flourished with more freedom in the classroom, Laura Giosh-Markov (MA ED '04) has found that not everyone is ready for democratic learning.

As the music teacher and school guidance counselor at the Anglo-American International School in Bulgaria, Laura has found that her American ideals—her desire to "make things happen"—are in deep contrast to the political oppression that Bulgaria is just beginning to shed.

In her own school, the children are mostly international, and the teachers hail from primarily English-speaking countries and follow an American/British curriculum. The Bulgarian school system, however, is still set in its post-communist-era mold, in which low government funding and adherence to traditional teaching methods continue to block development.

"It is clear that major change needs to occur in Bulgarian schools to give students the social and emotional skills to



As an educator in Norfolk, Va., Terry Holmes has collected many awards for teaching and advising. He says his studies at Goddard transformed his style in the classroom, leading him to encourage more freedom of expression from his students.

truly compete," she says, especially now that the country has joined the European Union (EU).

Goddard's education program helped Laura hone her intuitions and theories, especially with the experiments she had already been doing with students combining music, drama, dance, counseling and art. By teaching the children in a variety of holistic approaches that include creatively moving and exploring, Laura promotes "the perfect counter-balance to the emphasis on academic achievement."

Laura also creates professional development programs for the teacher's assistants, launching pilot programs that engage them to participate democratically, choose their own topics and offer feedback. Her vision is to further this with progressive teacher training in the Bulgarian school system, to promote self-directed modes of development for both the teachers and their students.

"I have talked with some people who are involved in reforms with Bulgarian education who agree with my ideas," she says, "but [they] said the Ministry of Education wasn't ready to incorporate such new ideas."

Laura finds that taking "baby steps" to introducing new modes of teaching and learning is the best way to manage. There are many political transitions yet for Bulgaria, but Laura is already seeing how the country's new democracy and the transition into the EU have affected students. "More and more Bulgarians are getting the training they need to compete with the new demands of their expanded borders."

Democratic learning has its challenges and rewards, and as these Goddard educators have seen, the challenges are never easy, and the rewards are greatest in our communities. Laura sums it up well, as she promotes her democratic ideals overseas.

"The big enlightenment for me has been that we are all at different levels in our learning," she says, "and only when we are ready can we make a step forward." ■

Laura Giosh-Markov is a teacher and guidance counselor at the Anglo-American International School in Bulgaria. She is hoping to work with the Bulgarian school system to begin to introduce more progressive, democratic teaching methods.

