

# A Lifetime of Learning

## JOURNEYING TO GODDARD, BEYOND 50

Ellen Grunblatt, a long-time physician, calls herself the product of a “pretty straight-up” education. When it came to fulfilling her lifelong dream of becoming a psychologist, though, the 55-year-old decided to take what she considered a pretty off-the-beaten path approach: she enrolled in Goddard’s master’s in psychology and counseling program.

She arrived in Plainfield for her first eight-day intensive residency and began the two-year journey toward attaining a degree in psychology—something she’d wanted to do for more than 25 years.

“The first time I thought about going into psychology was right around the time I had my first baby,” she says. “I wound up not going through the process of applying [to colleges]. I’m not that crazy—I can’t deal with that many moving parts at once: all the practicalities of raising children, having a career, moving if you have to . . . no, I just couldn’t do it.”

So, the dream got tucked away behind all the joys and pressures of daily life, but it never disappeared.

As the director of a health center at a small college, Ellen saw that many health issues confronting her patients, mostly young, were developmental. Understanding psychology as she treated the whole person remained a part of her life and kept alive her interest in the subject, but she couldn’t “completely switch on that part of my brain and really practice psychology.”

When she finally determined the time had come to get the degree she’d wanted for so long, she felt she had a good grounding in the literature. “I had attended conferences . . . I wasn’t green. So I wanted to find something where I didn’t have to redo everything,” Ellen says. “And I had to consider that I’m an adult, with a life. I looked at lots of options, but many would have had me on the road and in school three days a week. I needed to be able to continue with my life and still get a good education.”

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The low-residency route Ellen chose is one more and more colleges are offering and more and more students are seeking. However, the irony of her decision to take an “unusual path” is that, as new as it is for many colleges, the low-residency option at Goddard has been offered for more

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than 40 years. While many colleges view the concept as a contemporary outgrowth of today’s increasingly complicated demands, it’s a long-standing learning approach at Goddard, completely connected to the college’s simple-but-profound emphasis on acknowledging the whole lives of students and teaching through “thinking and doing.”

In 1963, Evalyn Bates started what was then called the Adult Degree Program (*see article on page 7*). That program, which offered students the freedom to earn a degree without living on a college campus, was the first of its kind in the country and today serves as the model for the intensive residency programs at Goddard.

“I graduated from college in the early ’70s. I had friends who’d gone to Goddard during that stage of its existence, so I think I had a sense of what the place was up to. It all resonated with me, the whole concept of progressive education,” Ellen says. “That combined with a friend in



After working as a physician for many years, Ellen Grunblatt (PSY '06) came to Goddard to earn a master’s in psychology. Here she stands outside her office in Maine.

Farmington who graduated from the program three years ago. I know her well, know her learning style—so I think I just sort of hitched my wagon to it.”

While Ellen came to Goddard to pursue a lifelong dream, Bill Brown (PSY '06) enrolled in the same program because of a nightmare. In July 2000, one of Bill's sons was murdered by an employee of the company he owned.

“The best we can figure is that [the killer] was a drug addict,” Bill says. “My wife and I were devastated. We had to do something. We ultimately decided we could give money to people trying to get help [for drug addiction] or we could get directly involved. We chose to do both.”



Bill Brown (PSY '06) went back for his master's degree to further his work as an addictions counselor. Just a few years earlier, Bill's son had been killed by a drug addict.

Bill became a licensed addictions counselor and knew he wanted to take his counseling work further. He investigated psychology programs and applied to many colleges. “I was accepted to other colleges and universities, but when I looked at the time commitment, it was just way more than I could do,” he says. “I had a business to run. I'm an adult. When I got in touch with Goddard, I started thinking what it offered was much more in line with what I wanted.”

Bill acknowledges that for some people the low residency program is a challenge. Many students need more structure than Goddard provides. “A lot of folks need to go to three or four classes a week, to be told by a professor what they have to do each night. I didn't need that,” he says. “That's not to say there was no pressure. I basically did four courses a semester. I was writing a 30- to 40-page paper every three weeks.”

Like Goddard's other low-residency offerings, the Psychology and Counseling Program requires that students meet on campus to launch each semester with an eight-day

residency. That period of intensive learning is followed by a term of individualized, one-on-one study, in which the student's work is guided by a faculty advisor.

That so many faculty members work in the fields they teach offers another unique aspect to the Goddard learning experience, Bill says. “My advisor, Jim Fitzgerald, was superb. He's a Ph.D. psychologist with a long history in the field.”

Fitzgerald graduated in 1986 from the Fielding Institute in Santa Barbara, Calif., with a doctorate in clinical psychology. He holds both a master's and a specialist degree in counseling and psychological services (CPS) from Georgia State University in Atlanta, where he is an adjunct assistant professor in the CPS department. His professional career has been devoted to the private practice of clinical psychology in the Atlanta area, with more than 15 years spent on the campus of a private psychiatric hospital.

“Jim really knew how to help people. He shared real-life experience in the field, practical thoughts about running a private practice. He put so much thought into responding to my work,” Bill says. “Nearly every page I wrote was marked with such thoughtful response. And all of this was offered with such humility. I learned so much with him. He is a fine, serious teacher.” Bill adds that he heard much the same from other students about their own advisors.

“The faculty of this program has been chosen with a great deal of care,” he says.

For Ross Brown, the faculty was an enormous consideration in his decision to make the trek from California to Vermont to enroll in Goddard's Master of Fine Arts in Writing Program. But unlike the others, Ross's decision to return to school was practical—to further his college teaching career. A sitcom writer for many, many years, Ross began teaching in 1998 at Chapman University in California. To further his career, he needed a terminal degree. Like Ellen and Bill, the demands of career and life made full-time school difficult, and for Ross, the idea of “sitting through courses I was already teaching was mind-numbing.”

Of the 14 low-residency programs he looked at, only a few offered screenwriting, something Ross needed. Goddard's writing program is one of the most comprehensive low-residency programs in the country.

“I went to the Goddard website and saw that Neil Landau was on the faculty. I recognized his name from a UCLA Extension where we'd both taught part-time, though we'd never met,” Brown said. “As luck would have it, I got an email from UCLA announcing that Neil was speaking at a local book store. I went to hear him speak, liked him and went up afterward to ask about Goddard. He was so enthusiastic that I applied there, and only there.”

Ross graduated last year and has already been offered a

tenure-track position at Chapman. But what started as a pragmatic step in career advancement turned into much more.

"I loved my time there," Ross says. "It's meant so much more to me than just the degree. The time there broadened my world as a writer. Neil made me read plays, and I loved it. It got me stimulated enough that I started writing my first-ever stage play in my final semester."

He says the work was the most challenging he'd ever attempted. His first play, "a straight drama, as opposed to comedy, my usual comfort zone," was a largely autobiographical piece that centered around the absolute worst time in his life. "Only the supportive atmosphere of Goddard gave me the courage to tackle this material," he says.

Ellen echoes Ross's sentiments. "I just really enjoyed doing this, in this different way. Every day of my life experience and who I was mattered," she says. "What Goddard offered was so affirming of me as a thinking, developing human being with something new to offer."

For Bill, Goddard was "the most challenging learning

After teaching for a number of years at Chapman University in California, Ross Brown came to Goddard for his master's degree. He graduated last year and was soon offered a tenure-track position at Chapman.



experience" of his life. "I couldn't have done it differently. Nothing else would have worked really," he says. "And looking back now, I wouldn't have wanted to do it differently. I was able to see my learning as a part of my life, instead seeing school as something apart from my life." ■

## In January, right on the heels of her 80th birthday, Emily Neal received her master's in health arts and sciences from Goddard.

Below, she shares a few of the thoughts she prepared for the graduation ceremony in Plainfield.

"I'm no Nancy Pelosi, but like Representative Pelosi I had my marriage, children and homemaking experiences during my first adult life. Then I began the fulfillment of my dream.

"When I was in the 10th grade of high school, I told my mother that I wanted a college education. Her reply was an honest response: 'Well, you'll have to earn it yourself, because I certainly can't afford to pay for it.'

"Sixty some-odd years later, my great granddaughter, Victoria, handed me my B.A. diploma at Vermont College. That was in 2004, when I was 77. At that time my beloved friend and roommate all through Vermont College telephoned me to say that she had been accepted by Goddard College for their master's program. She said, 'Call them, they'll accept you too.' And she gave me the Goddard telephone number.



ANN CARDINAL

"After bustling around to get a recommendation letter and write an essay that expressed my desire to work for my M.A. degree, I was accepted. A lot of marvelous reading and writing, along with many other facets of study, prepared me to begin writing and zeroing in on the study of the cosmic world and the electromagnetic energy that I have used in the healing work of massage and bodywork therapy.

"The thesis, 'Our Healing Universe,' proved to be a study that fulfilled my dream of healing through touch—not just any touch, but the touch that encompasses universal energy, the same energy that fuels the galaxy. When 'Our Healing Universe' is published, I hope you will read it and remember the joy the author had in writing it.

"No, I won't go on for my doctorate degree. I will teach my registered modality that comforts and strengthens the practitioner as much as it does the recipient. I promote the course with this phrase: Work until you're 80. I did, and so can you." ■

Emily Neal now teaches symbiotic body therapy to licensed and certified massage therapists.  
[www.symbioticmassage.com](http://www.symbioticmassage.com)