

Heller

A MAGAZINE FOR THE HELLER SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL POLICY AND MANAGEMENT

HACKING

BIAS

IN

THE

TECH

INDUSTRY



Heller Magazine

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Heller

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Dear Friends,

In August, more than 250 new students arrived for the start of Orientation. At our opening reception, I looked out on a sea of happy and eager faces. These students hail from 36 countries around the globe. They have unique stories about



how Heller became their choice for graduate school and about what their aspirations are for the future. It was a beautiful, inspiring sight.

How did they get here? Clearly, we offer stellar academic programs that speak to these students' aspirations. Our faculty is first-rate and dedicated to student success. But equally important is our incredible staff. Heller's administrative staff is the glue for all we do in our academic programs and in the classroom, in student support and services, in our research enterprises, and in the maintenance of our buildings and grounds.

Admissions staff members travel across the United States and the world to tell prospective students and funders about our unique programs. They work with individual applicants throughout the application process via webinars, chat rooms, personal emails and on-site visits. Our academic program administrators coordinate every detail of students' academic requirements on an individual basis and counsel them when extra support is needed. Career development staff members work with students before they come to campus, to help them start thinking about their future careers. The depth and range of administrative staff focused on ensuring a positive, supportive and inclusive environment for all of our students are key to the Heller experience.

The Heller School boasts another group of talented and dedicated staff — those who support our faculty and research enterprise. Staff members note that they are often attracted to join the Heller School because of our commitment to social justice that permeates all we do. This is a powerful lure for many who want to work in a place that stands for something.

I want to acknowledge the many ways our loyal and talented staff keeps Heller humming along every day, every week and every year. In this issue, we pay tribute to Doris Breay, senior assistant dean for student services, on the eve of her retirement after nearly 20 years of dedicated and compassionate work. I also urge you to read the Perspectives column by Tam Emerson, director of the Eli J. Segal Citizen Leadership Program, about what drives her in her life and her work. Tam and Doris exemplify the types of people who thrive here — creative, dedicated, collaborative problem-solvers and doers. All of our staff members have some of these wonderful qualities.

So, while we bring you more stories about our research, the faculty and the students who distinguish this venerable school, we also salute the scores of staff who provide the environment and context in which the Heller School breathes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Marty Wyngaarden Krauss". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Marty Wyngaarden Krauss, PhD'81

DORIS BREAY, LONGTIME ACADEMIC AND STUDENT SERVICES ASSISTANT DEAN, ANNOUNCES RETIREMENT

BY MAX PEARLSTEIN '01

She answered an ad looking for an individual “to help organize new graduate degree program in Sustainable International Development.” That was 1995, before the SID program was affiliated with the Heller School. Doris Breay, a former elementary-school teacher, got the job, and when SID moved to Heller two years later, she came too.



“Doris has been my most trusted colleague, adviser and friend in all my career,” says Laurence Simon, the SID director who hired her. “It is utterly fair to say that the SID program would not have thrived without her partnership in its creation and growth. She knew that programs with large diversities of students from developing nations had to build a welcoming and supportive environment.”

Breay eventually transitioned from SID to become the assistant dean for academic and student services, a position that allowed her to assist students from across Heller’s degree programs.

“I like getting to know people on a very human level,” Breay says. “Sharing that experience of school with them is special. It has taught me how alike we all are. We really want the same things out of life, personally and on a larger scale. A good life for the people we love, and care for others out there, which is kind of how I live my life. It matches what the people who come here feel.”

Over her nearly 20 years at Heller, Breay has connected with many students — some of them closely.

“I recall so many students she cared for during their hospitalizations or during family tragedies unfolding thousands of miles away,” Simon says. “One alumna from Mauritius, even while a member of Parliament, would refer to her as Mother.”

After two decades of building such relationships, Breay has decided that her work at Heller is coming to a close. She will retire as senior assistant dean at the end of December 2016.

“My job here has included just about anything from helping students who are having a problem with their health insurance card to missing bank information,” Breay says. “A lot of things I can’t solve — I can just listen. But I hope that what I do is give them a little bit of support and comfort so they can focus on their studies and not worry so much about the other stuff.”

Now that her life will be less full of that other stuff, Breay is still trying to figure out what comes next, in retirement. “I have no plans other than to keep doing all the things I do except work, and when I get bored, probably some advocacy work,” she says. “I think I always need to have something outside myself to care about.”

Spoken like a true mother.

FOLLOWING THE WAKE-UP CALL

BY MAX PEARLSTEIN '01

As the presidential primary season rolled on and Donald Trump unexpectedly collected enough support to ultimately win the Republican nomination, Professor Mari Fitzduff of the Conflict Resolution and Coexistence program wanted to understand why. What was it about a candidate who speaks off the cuff, often voicing feelings over facts, that appeals to so many Americans?

“This is such a challenging question for democracy,” says Fitzduff, who is originally from Northern Ireland. “In Europe, we faced Brexit, in which people voted to maintain the past while not recognizing that it’s important to consider the future.”



“Most of our children in Europe and the United States are committed to globalizing our world, but we’re forgetting that there are also people who are committed to the local and the national. They’re worried about change. They’ve lost jobs because of this change and they don’t see their children getting jobs because of the change. It’s a similar situation for many of Trump’s followers, who are feeling disregarded.”

To better understand the roots of those feelings, Fitzduff asked a group of social scientists, evolutionary biologists, psychologists, anthropologists and neuroscientists for their analysis of why Trump’s brand of politics is so attractive. They each contributed a chapter to Fitzduff’s forthcoming book, “Why Irrational Politics Appeals: Understanding the Allure of Trump.”

“One of the things we wanted to bring home was that our existing framework, in which we see ourselves as rational choosers, is actually very thin,” Fitzduff says. “Most of us are what I call ‘amygdala-heavy and cortex-light,’ and this is very true in terms of our decisions about our leaders. The whole idea of us as thinking creatures is actually very frail, and the book helps explain that. Rational thought doesn’t hold up when there is fear around. When there is fear involved, we often go back to something that will bring us more certainty.”

Fitzduff says one of the most fascinating things discussed in the book is that even if voters disagree with a candidate, they prefer someone who is certain. In fact, they would

rather have a leader who is strong, even if he or she is wrong, over someone who is weak and right. That explains some of the ambivalence over President Obama, who consults and thinks deeply.

Fitzduff says that Trump forced some Republicans to do deep thinking of their own. “It was a realization for those who envision themselves as true conservatives that you can’t let the capitalist system take over completely without also considering people who are being left behind. That’s the lesson for both the U.S. and Europe. And it’s not just the Republicans. Bernie Sanders pushed the Democrats to do some of their own socially inclusive thinking.”

“Why Irrational Politics Appeals: Understanding the Allure of Trump” will be published in February 2017.

MBA PROGRAM UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT

BY MAX PEARLSTEIN '01

This academic year marks a change in the directorship of Heller’s MBA program. Carole Carlson succeeds Brenda Anderson, who served as director of the program for the past seven years. With a heavy heart, Anderson decided that it was time to recalibrate her portfolio of professional activities.



CAROLE CARLSON

During Anderson’s tenure as director, the MBA program established a solid and growing admissions trajectory; launched the EMBA for Physicians Program, along with four new dual-degree programs that integrate the study of management with the areas of biomedical science, global health, biotechnology and coexistence; and instituted innovative programs such as the Heller Board Fellows Program and the Heller Startup Challenge.

“I am most fortunate to have worked in a leadership role with students and graduates who continue to inspire and

humble me on a daily basis,” Anderson says. “This journey has been extraordinary, and I will passionately support the MBA program going forward.”

In announcing the transition, Interim Dean Marty Krauss said, “We are all indebted to Brenda for her work ethic, her warmth, support and good humor for the program’s students, faculty and staff, and her insistence on rigorous academic standards and excellence in all programmatic activities.”

Anderson remains a core faculty member within the MBA program and continues her role on the faculty at the Brandeis International Business School.

Carlson, who serves as chair of the Social Entrepreneurship and Impact Management concentration in the program and co-chair of both Net Impact and the Heller School’s Committee on Teaching Excellence, became director on Sept. 1.

“I am thrilled to have the chance to extend my role here at Heller to include overseeing the MBA program,” Carlson says. “It has been a real pleasure to teach our students for over a decade, and the opportunity to work with the program team to continue to increase our scale and impact is really exciting.”

THE UNHOLY CONVERGENCE THAT MAKES FOR “TOXIC INEQUALITY”

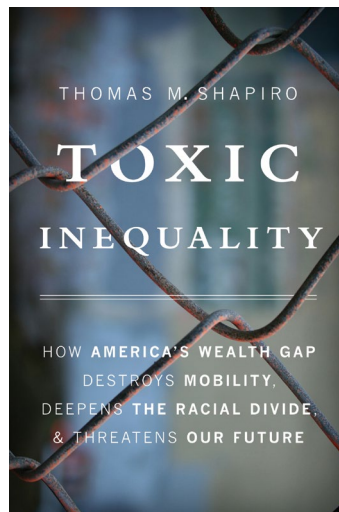
BY MAX PEARLSTEIN '01

Back in 1998, Tom Shapiro interviewed families about their socioeconomic status. The interviewees were divided evenly between black and white, urban and suburban, and middle class or working class and poor. Shapiro and his colleagues found that black families, despite an increase in both employment and income over the previous several decades, still lagged well behind their white counterparts when it came to assets accumulation, like home equity. The interviews formed the foundation of Shapiro’s book “The Hidden Cost of Being African American.”

More than 10 years later, between 2010 and 2012, Shapiro, the director of the Institute on Assets and Social Policy, decided to reconnect with those families and enlisted the help of fellow IASP researchers, Heller PhD candidates and

Master of Public Policy students in re-interviewing them for a new book. What they found is that the times have changed — but the economic situation for many of the families has not.

“What’s very special about the present moment is that we’re seeing an unholy convergence of historic highs in wealth and income inequality with a widening racial wealth gap,” Shapiro says. “I wanted to define a concept



that distinguishes where we are right now in the United States, and it’s the title of the book: “Toxic Inequality.” Shapiro says the phrase brings together two different conversations about inequality in the U.S. “With the Occupy movement of several years ago, a lot of space opened up around inequality and it was

largely focused on income equality and wealth, but race and ethnicity didn’t enter that conversation,” he explains. “More recent movements, like Black Lives Matter, created a different set of conversations about what inequality looks like in the United States, centered on race.

“I make the case in the book that understanding inequality means understanding both of these in tandem. The policies that created the historic highs in income inequality are the same sets of policies and structures that gave us a distribution of awards, if you will, divided along income and class, yes, but also along racial and ethnic lines.”

In order to bring these policies to life, “Toxic Inequality” shows the reader how they affected some of the people Shapiro’s team interviewed. “That’s what I hope is one of the great values of the book: being able to make those macro forces very concrete and show how they play out in the lives of families and communities,” Shapiro says.



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BY BETHANY ROMANO

FREADA KAPOR KLEIN, PHD'84, CO-FOUNDER OF PROJECT INCLUDE, BRINGS RESEARCH TO BEAR ON DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION EFFORTS IN SILICON VALLEY

THE PREVAILING MYTHOLOGY

The U.S. tech industry thrives on a mantra of competitive innovation, and for many decades has been on a trajectory to disrupt every field and every sector. The tech innovations born in Silicon Valley have lengthened our life spans and changed the ways we conduct transactions, listen to music, talk to our loved ones, buy our groceries and do our jobs. Tech employers are often lauded for adopting nontraditional work styles and embracing drastic changes to the workplace in an effort to enhance employee engagement and performance.

And yet in one aspect, the tech industry remains stubbornly archaic: The composition of the sector itself is overwhelmingly white or Asian and male. And the numbers aren't moving.

In 2014, a number of large tech companies released their diversity numbers to the general public for the first time. Scanning the list, it wasn't uncommon to see companies with an African-American or Latino workforce of just 2 percent, or a female workforce of less than a quarter of the total employed. Attrition rates were alarmingly high. In an industry where new hires come largely through referrals, the numbers bore out that tech employees are a largely homogeneous group.

"Diversity efforts in corporate America have failed miserably, despite billions of dollars and countless hours spent on diversity initiatives," says Freada Kapor Klein, PhD'84. "I found it particularly interesting, having been in the business world, that nobody got fired because their diversity efforts had failed. I didn't know of any other serious business initiative where, year in and year out, they'd miss their targets and nothing would happen."

Why, in an industry built on innovation and progressive ideals, do diversity and inclusion efforts fail? "There's a prevailing mythology in the tech industry that tech, more than any other sector, is a meritocracy," says Kapor Klein, who is based in Oakland, Calif. "So the concept of hidden bias flies in the face of people who regard themselves as smart and innovative. If you believe you're a meritocracy, then you don't have to pay any attention to diversity and inclusion efforts."

ROOTS IN ACTIVISM

Kapor Klein co-founded the first group focused on sexual harassment in the United States, the Alliance Against Sexual Coercion, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1976. As a leading figure in the U.S. women's rights movement, she was featured in *The New York Times* and *Ms. Magazine* in 1977 for her work alongside that of Gloria Steinem. In addition to organizing speak-outs and trainings and publishing information booklets, she contributed to several chapters of the pioneering book "Our Bodies, Ourselves."

Kapor Klein enrolled in the Heller School's PhD program in 1981 with her dissertation topic already in mind: As an adviser on a research study, she had acquired data for over 20,000 federal government employees, and she used that data set to conduct the first methodologically rigorous study of sexual harassment in the workplace.

After receiving her PhD in social policy and research, Kapor Klein joined the Lotus Development Corporation, where her job was "to make Lotus the most progressive employer in the U.S., which is the coolest job description ever," she says. "The world would be a better place if more companies had that mandate."

“There’s a prevailing mythology in the tech industry that tech, more than any other sector, is a meritocracy.”

After Lotus, she founded Klein Associates, a consulting firm specializing in reducing bias, harassment and discrimination in work environments. Her clients included McKinsey, Goldman Sachs, the United Nations, the World Bank and Harvard Business School. She then became a partner at Kapor Capital, a venture-capital firm that invests in startups that generate positive social impact. She also founded the Level Playing Field Institute (LPFI) in Oakland, a nonprofit organization focused on closing the gap of access and opportunity for people of color in STEM. LPFI’s flagship program is SMASH (Summer Math and Science Honors Academy), a free, fully residential, STEM-acceleration college-preparatory program for underrepresented high school youth of color now based at five universities in the U.S.

BRINGING RESEARCH TO THE TABLE

Along the way, Kapor Klein contributed a sorely needed resource to workplace diversity and inclusion efforts everywhere: sound academic research. In 1988, she conducted a study of sexual harassment in Fortune 500 companies that received extensive press coverage. As a result, she was on standby for NBC with news anchor Tom Brokaw throughout Clarence Thomas’ Supreme Court confirmation hearing. Kapor Klein had agreed to be an expert witness for Anita Hill’s side, though like many of Hill’s witnesses, she was not called to testify.

Brandeis professor Hill and Kapor Klein have since crossed paths many times. Of Kapor Klein, Hill says, “She is a perfect living example of passion, practice and a lifelong commitment to equality aligning. From her path-breaking work validating women’s experience with sexual harassment and assault in her early writings and advocacy, to making STEM careers possible for students of color with the SMASH Academy, to putting diversity and inclusion in the tech industry on the fast track with Project Include, Freada continually reminds us how to be the change we want to see in the world.”

Kapor Klein has used her Heller education to systematically explore hidden bias and to measure the interventions

and bias-mitigation strategies that actually work. “My research training has been invaluable,” she says. “Developing an interdisciplinary approach to thinking about these issues has also been critical.”

At the Level Playing Field Institute, Kapor Klein and her team conduct critical research into hidden bias, discrimination and the root causes of the tech industry’s diversity problem. For decades, the lack of diversity in tech has been blamed on an inadequate pipeline of talented young people moving into STEM fields. Kapor Klein says, “Despite all the excuses that persist today that it’s a pipeline problem, it really isn’t. We’ve found that if one designs careful programs that are research-based, one can very quickly, and at scale, solve the pipeline problem.”

A big part of solving it has to do with confronting the hidden biases that influence who enters the tech world — and who stays. “Like so many other things, having an accurate analysis of the problem and its contours is a prerequisite to fixing it,” says Kapor Klein. “Since the conversation has focused in a simplistic way on whether it’s a pipeline problem or not, there hasn’t been enough time or effort spent on doing rigorous research to understand all of the nuance.

“There’s a lot that we presume to be objective that turns out to be highly biased. Everything from the structure of a job interview to how somebody’s performance is evaluated to the criteria for promotion — each and every step of the employee life cycle is riddled with bias, and we pretend that if we somehow construct a point system and give a number to a bunch of subjective criteria, that we’ll magically have transformed it into being objective. That’s nonsense.”

PROJECT INCLUDE

Armed with her decades of research and experience, in May 2016 she entered into a new endeavor. Convened by Ellen Pao, Kapor Klein and six other prominent women in the tech industry founded Project Include, a nonprofit organization whose tag line is “to give everyone a fair chance to succeed in tech.”



THE FOUNDERS OF PROJECT INCLUDE (TOP, LEFT TO RIGHT): Y-VONNE HUTCHINSON, ELLEN PAO, ERICA JOY BAKER, LAURA GÓMEZ, BETHANYE MCKINNEY BLOUNT AND TRACY CHOU, AND (FRONT) FREADA KAPOR KLEIN WITH HER DOG, DUDLEY. SUSAN WU, THE GROUP'S EIGHTH MEMBER, IS NOT PICTURED.

Project Include works with tech companies to help them improve diversity and inclusion throughout the employee life cycle. Together, they've created an extensive handbook of recommendations that provides companies with the tools to create an overall inclusion strategy and to support employees not just in the recruitment process but throughout their entire time in the company. Of Project Include's co-founders, Kapor Klein says, "The majority of them are engineers and have worked at major tech companies, including Google, Facebook, Twitter, Slack, Pinterest, Quora — a large roster of important companies. It is our lived experience in tech, which totals 150 years, that informs the 87 recommendations we put together."

Project Include's recommendations are heavily grounded in the many years of research that Kapor Klein has contributed to this field. Y-Vonne Hutchinson, a Project Include co-founder and executive director of ReadySet, says, "One of the biggest challenges in this work is that there's no such thing as a PhD in diversity and inclusion, really. You can get graduate education on labor relations, you can study workplace issues generally, but people aren't necessarily trained to look at these issues in a scientific way. Freada is one of the unique souls who has gotten a PhD and applied it to tech, and in that sense she's quite rare. I think she's one of the most knowledgeable people working on this issue."

Project Include also runs Startup Include, a small cohort of tech startups from which Project Include is culling

diversity and inclusion data over time. "We're working in a data-driven industry, and it's really important to use the tools at our disposal to tackle the diversity and inclusion challenges that we see," says Hutchinson. "Six months from now we'll survey them a second time. We hope we'll be able to show that we have had a targeted, measurable impact over a relatively short period of time." The Project Include team also has plans underway to launch a similar cohort program for venture-capital firms.

BUILDING SOLUTIONS



Although workplace diversity and inclusion efforts are, of course, not restricted to tech, Kapor Klein feels that the tech industry is where innovation happens. "I believe that all companies are becoming tech companies. It is impossible in 2016 to be in any sector and not look at ways in which technology will disrupt your business or enhance your business. Technology has for many decades been on a march to transform every industry. A lot of the success of mitigating bias is going to rely on actually using tech tools to fix tech bias — tools that can review and flag job descriptions for biased language, tools that can provide anonymity in the interview processes," she says.

"I wouldn't be doing this work for this many decades if I weren't fundamentally an optimist. I have been and remain an advocate for social and racial justice, and therefore I am an optimist."

A photograph of a red brick building with a tall brick chimney and a green door, partially obscured by trees. The building has a grey shingled roof and a green door with ornate black ironwork. A large tree with green and yellowing leaves is in the foreground on the left. The sky is a clear, pale blue.

RIGHT IN THEIR BACKYARD

BY LAUREN GIBBONS PAUL
PHOTOS BY MIKE LOVETT



One evening in September 2013, the Eliot Church in Newton, Massachusetts, held a community forum on homelessness. Last to testify was a large man, who spoke haltingly about the despair of life on the streets. He described how much his life had improved after the Pine Street Inn of Boston found him a place in a safe home. “I’m the luckiest former homeless person in the world,” he said.



That night's presentation was organized to support a proposal to house nine homeless people in Engine 6, an old firehouse in the tony enclave of Waban, one of Newton's 13 villages. Soon after the plan surfaced the previous June, the community erupted in discord, with neighbors pitted against each other.

Many said Waban was no place for the chronically homeless, expressing fears that they would prey on children walking to school. Others felt Waban should welcome such an underserved group, especially given the city's poor track record of creating affordable housing for those of low and middle incomes.

Tatjana Meschede, a Newton resident, decided to attend the presentation at the church after hearing about the controversy. "It was so well done," she says. "I didn't see how anyone could object to the Engine 6 plan." Unlike most of the attendees, though, Meschede was hardly a layperson.

A senior scientist and research director for the Institute on Assets and Social Policy at the Heller School, Meschede has studied homelessness since 1990 and is an expert on servicing and housing chronically homeless individuals. She has repeatedly witnessed the transformation of people who move from the streets to housing with little if any impact on their new neighbors.

"At Heller, we are very involved with what's happening on the ground. We provide research to support action," says Meschede. "As a policy researcher, I want to impact policy discussions and policy creation." Engine 6 presented a perfect opening for action, right in her hometown.

The hue and cry over Engine 6 upset Meschede. "I just couldn't believe that we could not do better in Newton," she says. Due to community protest, Newton's mayor refused to allocate federal funds to the Engine 6 proposal. In response, fair housing supporters filed a complaint with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), eventually resulting in a conciliation agreement with the City of Newton. The demise of the Engine 6 proposal galvanized citizens on both sides of the issue and became a watershed moment for Newton's nascent pro-affordable housing movement.

Newton residents formed a group called Supporters of Engine 6 (often simply called Engine 6) to promote the creation of affordable housing in Newton. Meschede got involved, attending meetings and writing a letter to the local newspaper urging an increase in the number of permanent supportive units for the formerly homeless. But she was aware not all of her neighbors agreed with her stance. "I began to realize that some of my friends were on the other side of the argument," she says.

The median single-family home price in Newton now exceeds \$1 million, putting the city's housing stock beyond the reach of most. In a place where land itself is so dear, it's virtually impossible to create affordable housing options, even with federal and state subsidies and the incentives contained in Massachusetts General Law Chapter 40B. Many residents worry more about their own ability to pay increasingly high taxes — a particular burden for the elderly — than Newton's continuing failure to meet state affordable housing mandates.

"A lot of people are afraid of being priced out, losing a sense of control as to what is happening with this city,"

The median single-family home price in Newton now exceeds \$1 million, putting the city's housing stock beyond the reach of most.

“They’ll throw old mattresses out the window,” said one attendee at a public meeting to discuss a potential development at the St. Philip Neri Church in Waban.

says Meschede. There were knee-jerk reactions. One of the loudest choruses was from people who felt Newton should stay as it is forever. “We bought in Newton because we loved Newton — why should anything change?’ It all takes on a life of its own.”

With its elite location and starkly underprivileged target population, Engine 6 was bound to be controversial, but it wasn’t alone. By spring 2014, Newton had already been working for years to redevelop an underused municipal parking lot on Austin Street in Newtonville into a mixed-use property that would contain 17 affordable-housing units along with commercial space, a public plaza and 51 market-rate units. With the end in sight, a group of residents strongly opposed to the project began exploring ways to block it, and nearly succeeded. It was finally permitted in late 2015 but is still the subject of a lawsuit. The Newton Villages Alliance, an anti-development group, was born in the Austin Street fight.

Waban has seen other proposals for mixed-income multifamily housing development in the past two years. Progress has been slow at best, in part due to the city invoking a procedural challenge to Chapter 40B. Neighborhood protest has flared up again, stoking the same irrational fears of living near lower-income residents. (“They’ll throw old mattresses out the window,” said one attendee at a public meeting to discuss a potential development at the St. Philip Neri Church in Waban.)

In 2014, as the noise level surrounding affordable housing in Newton grew louder, progress seemed slower than ever. Newton’s newly released housing strategy calls for the creation of 800 affordable units by 2021. But since 2010, only 18 have been created, with another 33 on the way. As it turned out, Meschede was not the only Heller researcher

(and Newton resident) whose research and personal passion has been instrumental in helping pro-affordable housing efforts on the ground.

HELLER FAIR HOUSING EXPERT GETS INVOLVED

Dolores Acevedo-Garcia, director of the Institute for Child, Youth and Family Policy at Heller, is a nationally recognized researcher on racial/ethnic inequity and the key role that residential segregation plays in reinforcing it. She became involved with Engine 6 after witnessing residents’ strong resistance to a proposal for a group home in Newton Centre for young people with intellectual disabilities. As a long-term fair housing advocate, she was struck by the vicious opposition to these proposals as well as Newton residents’ ignorance about the city’s obligations under fair housing law.

Acevedo-Garcia, a Waban resident, was particularly alarmed to see the themes of exclusion and unfairness from her research happening literally in her own backyard. “My work has been at the metropolitan and national levels. It was horrible to see how the things I have studied were playing out right where I live. I decided to start working here in Newton,” she says.

“I have done a lot of work on the negative effects of housing segregation and the lack of affordable housing, especially in communities with high opportunity levels,” says Acevedo-Garcia. In September 2016, her research team collaborated with The Boston Globe on a front-page article titled, “Boundaries to hope: In Greater Boston, a lopsided geography of affordable housing.”

Acevedo-Garcia’s role in working with Engine 6 is to share key research highlights with the group and to attend the



DETAIL, ST. PHILIP NERI CHURCH, WABAN, MASSACHUSETTS

at-times explosive public meetings to speak in favor of specific affordable housing projects in Newton. She writes letters to the editor, pens blog posts and editorials, and starts conversations with her neighbors.

From the beginning, the group voraciously consumed Acevedo-Garcia's knowledge and perspective, welcoming her onto its steering committee. According to Engine 6 leader and employment attorney Lynn Weissberg '69, "[Acevedo-Garcia] brings an academic perspective to the work we are doing. That is very important because she understands how these issues have been fought in other communities. She is good at reminding us there is another world out there. We're not the first to be fighting these fights."

Engine 6 co-founder Kathleen Hobson goes further. "[Acevedo-Garcia] has raised our sights and changed the conversation. Engine 6 began as a group of self-interested Newton neighbors talking amongst ourselves, posing as experts but mostly reacting emotionally to negative stereotypes about homeless people," says Hobson. Acevedo-Garcia's work gives the group courage and lends its advocacy credibility and authority, she adds.

Acevedo-Garcia has sharpened her focus thanks to her work with Engine 6. While as an academic she understood the strong correlation between fragmented municipal

governance and segregation, her work on the ground with Engine 6 has given her a better understanding of how this plays out.

Says Acevedo-Garcia, "I have become much more aware of the role of governance in perpetuating exclusionary regulations and allowing anti-affordable housing groups to influence housing decisions. The fact that it is easy for neighborhood groups to band together to lobby their ward representatives — which happened in opposition to the Engine 6 proposal — makes the situation difficult."

In the aftermath of the Engine 6 proposal, some residents commented on the online forum Village 14 that the city was right to give in to neighborhood animus against the incursion of the chronically homeless. This makes Acevedo-Garcia shake her head.

"Recent court decisions in New York and Arizona made it clear this may constitute a violation of federal fair housing law. The market rules a lot of things, but thankfully there are limits that have been set to remedy historical and current discrimination in housing," she says. Bowing to neighborhood pressure to kill a proposal is impermissible for cities like Newton that receive federal funds to help create fair and affordable housing.

FUNDING THE CREATION OF MORE EQUITABLE COMMUNITIES

Newton resident Susan Eaton, director of the Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy at the Heller School, has also been involved in fair and affordable housing efforts since Engine 6. Eaton studies responses to demographic change in a variety of communities across the country.

"It's hard to go up against the old way of thinking," says Eaton. "There is a tremendous resistance to change, especially in exclusive, upper-middle-class communities like Newton." Without support for agents of change, there is a danger that residents will assume no one cares about affordable housing.



AUSTIN STREET PARKING LOT, NEWTONVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

“I saw the pushback against the Engine 6 housing [proposal] as pushback against diversity, affordable housing and the needs of vulnerable individuals and groups in our society.”

Eaton applauds organizations like Engine 6 that are trying to create more equitable communities. “There is actually a really large number of people in Newton who think like that. But they have to be organized. These groups need resources to thrive and grow.”

PREPARING THE NEXT GENERATION OF HOUSING ADVOCATES

Soo Laski was a Heller student and Waban resident when the flap over Engine 6 erupted. Laski went to several public meetings but stopped short of joining the Engine 6 group when her father, Frank Laski, became its attorney. Then she received an assignment to get involved with a community advocacy group for her Policy Advocacy and Community Organizing class at Heller. Naturally, her thoughts turned to Engine 6.

“I saw the pushback against the Engine 6 housing [proposal] as pushback against diversity, affordable housing and the needs of vulnerable individuals and groups in our society,” says Laski, who earned an MS in global health policy and management and an MA in sustainable international development from Heller last May.

In September 2015, Laski testified at Newton City Hall in favor of diverse and affordable housing during the Austin Street special permit hearings. “I testified as a millennial living in Newton for many years. I was in that spot where I was thinking about where I am going to live and how I am going to move on from graduation,” she says.

Having grown up in Waban watching house prices climb ever higher, she wondered where she could afford to live after graduation. With no available rental units and

housing prices in the millions, her hometown was not a viable option.

“I’d love to live and work in the Boston area, but how am I going to do that?” says Laski. She credits her education at Heller with feeding her passion for working on social justice issues. “Heller gave me the tools, skills and knowledge to actually work on affordable housing,” she says.

The Austin Street project was approved in December 2015, a decisive win for affordable housing advocates in Newton. Since then, wins have been few. Newton remains divided on the issue. Many believe that housing should be restricted to those who can afford it.

Obstacles are generally fewer in less-pricey communities, says Meschede. She recalls a project she worked on years ago in Quincy, Massachusetts, that reminds her of Engine 6. They were able to house 10 formerly homeless people in a similar property. There was just one catch: It was a crack house before it was developed as housing for the homeless.

Lesson learned? “Tear down a crack house, and use that as homeless housing, and the neighbors will be very happy,” she says ruefully. Time and time again, Meschede has encountered communities with vocal opposition when disadvantaged people move in. Then weeks go by, and everything normalizes. After a while, no one remembers there was ever an issue.

Asked if it gets discouraging when progress is so slow, Meschede shrugs. “I continue to try,” she says.



INSIDE
MAN

EDWIN POOL, MA SID'17, WANTS TO BE AN AGENT OF CHANGE FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

BY TONY MOORE

Let's say you want to find out about the indigenous communities of Mexico, and you've narrowed your focus to those of Quintana Roo, a Mexican state located in what's known as the Mayan zone. Quintana Roo, like the entire Mayan zone surrounding it, is known for its long and rich cultural history and its indigenous communities, people who have inhabited the region in small enclaves since the 10th century.

With this in mind, you might be surprised to see what your first Google search turns up: photos of beaches lined with hotels and resorts, a landscape jammed with tourists sipping cocktails under beach umbrellas stuck in the sand like flags on the surface of the moon, establishing ownership. And then, as you lean in a little and take a good look at one of those photos, you catch a glimpse of someone from one of the indigenous communities you're hoping to learn more about. Somewhere between the hotel and the pool, he's frozen in time, delivering drinks to cabana 12.

Like many communities in the Mayan zone, Quintana Roo has become a tourist destination, a place where those headed to Cancún or Cozumel only see indigenous people who have relocated to these resort towns for jobs. Briefly, right after graduating from high school, Edwin Pool, MA SID'17, was one of those people, working as a chef's assistant on the Mayan Riviera. It was a life-changing experience, one he felt taking hold right away.

"I didn't want to spend all my life working in a place where I felt like cheap labor," says Pool, who grew up in a small community near Cancún. "I wasn't a human but an object." In response, Pool decided to go to college and explore his own language and culture, which he saw becoming overshadowed by tourism and the commercialization of the land he called home.

CHANGE AGENT

Indigenous peoples around the world — and there are more than 350 million of them in nearly 100 countries — face ongoing threats from a variety of outside forces: mining exploration, deforestation and the general expansion of other cultures at large, to name a few. In many areas of Mexico, the threat comes in the form of the ever-expanding world of tourism. And as Pool found out soon in his higher-education program, the situation was worse than he imagined: The language and culture he hoped to connect with were not just obscured, but slipping away, lost in an economic cascade that begins with a substandard educational system and ends at resort jobs that come and go, leading nowhere.

"And then I knew what I wanted to do with my life," he says. "Stop re-creating the same social pattern and be something else: a social and cultural change agent."

Pool attended the Intercultural University Maya of Quintana Roo, where he worked with local people creating and implementing community development projects based on Mayan culture and language. Projects such as holding linguistic revitalization workshops and working toward the recovery and strengthening of a Maya ceremony called Ch'a'acháak (a rain petition ritual devoted to the Maya god Cháak) were driven by both Pool's own need to connect with his heritage and the needs he saw in those communities.

"When I was a child I witnessed many Mayan rituals, and I loved them," he says. "There was a full respect behind these rituals, a harmonic respect between humans and nature. But I did not want to create and implement a project by force. I saw how many governmental projects had failed by not taking into consideration the people's necessities."



THE SACRED CENOTE, OR WELL, IN THE RUINED MAYA CITY OF CHICHÉN ITZÁ PHOTO BY EDWIN POOL



“I used to think that ‘sustainable’ was only about the environment and global warming.”

COMPLEX ELEMENTS, INTERTWINED

After graduating with a degree in language and culture, Pool worked for more than two years with Quintana Roo’s Department of Culture, where he designed cultural and artistic projects, implemented monitoring and evaluation tools, and served as a liaison to the department’s federal government donors. And then he was off to graduate school, enrolling in Heller’s Sustainable International Development (SID) program, where he says he found what “sustainable development” was really all about — and crystallizing it for the uninitiated.

“I used to think that ‘sustainable’ was only about the environment and global warming,” Pool explains. “However, this term is very broad and complex, encompassing many other elements — such as inequality, gender, education, management, policies and rights — and these embrace other elements, making them even more complex.”

Pool — or more precisely, Edwin Ivan Pool Moo, with both surnames deriving from Mayan words — says he fell in love with the SID program immediately and through it has been studying indigenous rights, Latin American regional development and technological innovations that can be deployed for development. With a concentration in environmental conservation, a field that can be applied to every corner of the world, Pool has immersed himself in the SID program’s rich global scope.

“The SID program is very holistic and approaches problems from different directions, integrating the newest policies, laws and management plans, and constantly developing a curriculum that copes with these problems,” says Pool, now in his second year. “And this program is very international, with many students from Africa, Asia and America, including Latin America. Since I like to learn about other cultures and share my culture, this was an important fact that drew me as well.”

Pool’s love of SID is an extension of both his passion for and experience with the issues at the heart of sustainable development. He’s currently addressing those issues while working with two organizations, Cultural Survival in

Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Yaax Chaak (Green Rain) in Quintana Roo, both dedicated to fighting for the rights of indigenous peoples in the face of development efforts that are often anything but sustainable.

“I’ve witnessed an interesting transition in Edwin’s identity through my Indigenous Peoples and Development class, when he reflected and then proudly accepted that he was not only Mayan but part of the indigenous peoples,” says Associate Professor Cristina Espinosa, Pool’s thesis adviser. “He is honest to the extreme and has a great sense of irony, which I see as one way he copes with the pain of injustice.”

LIVING, FEELING, SEEING

Pool says the one-two punch of his first and second semesters at Heller gave him the tools to tackle that injustice, while opening his mind to an international perspective he needed to absorb. After graduation, he’ll focus his efforts on working with international organizations, an approach that will allow him to see how global nonprofits operate and then appropriate their methods to transform local organizations from the inside.

“Edwin is deeply committed to defending indigenous culture while creating opportunities for economic growth and social advancement in his home state of Quintana Roo,” says SID program director Joan Dassin ’69. “Based on this combination of passion for social change and Edwin’s newly acquired knowledge and skills, I’m confident he’ll play an important role in bringing social justice and economic opportunity to Mexico’s indigenous communities.”

And those communities have always been where Pool’s head and heart are, where he came from, and where he’s always set out to return.

“My next step will be to go back home and start doing projects and partner with local NGOs,” Pool says. “I live, feel, see and suffer problems that many of my people do. So I really want to make a positive change in my community. The SID program was created to change people’s lives for the better.”



A HERCULEAN TRADITION

THE TEAM CONSULTING
PROJECT COMES FULL CIRCLE
FOR ONE HELLER MBA ALUMNA

BY BETHANY ROMANO

Every August, Heller MBA students fill the tiered seating in the Altman Amphitheater to present the final results of their Team Consulting Projects (TCP), in which they consult for mission-driven organizations to tackle an ongoing management challenge. Of the nine TCP groups in the 2016 cohort, three worked with clients who are Heller MBA alumni. One of them is Samantha Eisenstein Watson '01, MBA'06, founder of The Samfund, an organization that provides financial assistance and support to young-adult cancer survivors.

IN THE SAME BOAT, FACING THE WRONG DIRECTION

Back in 1999, Watson had just finished the first semester of her senior year at Brandeis when she was diagnosed with bone cancer. She took time off from college to receive eight months of treatment at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York, eventually returning to Brandeis the following year. Then, with just a month left before graduation, she was diagnosed again — this time with early-stage leukemia.

Watson received a bone marrow transplant and recovered, graduating in 2001. Her three-year bout with cancer treatment behind her, the next hurdle she faced was finding an apartment and a job to start her professional adult life. “I had graduated from school, but I hadn’t started working yet and I had no real job experience,” she says. Watson realized that what made her experience at that time so difficult wasn’t her diagnosis or treatment, but her age. “Friends of mine, even those who graduated with student loans, still had forward momentum. Young-adult cancer survivors’ momentum has been totally cut off, and many are facing huge medical bills. You’re in the same boat as your peers, but facing the wrong direction.”

Watson knew her experience was not unique. More than 70,000 young adults are diagnosed with cancer every year in the U.S., and 60 percent incur medical debt. “After I finished treatment, I decided to put together a fundraiser

with some friends and donate the proceeds to a group that was helping young adults after cancer treatment, but we didn’t find any organizations that did that.” Watson decided to start a nonprofit designed to raise money and then distribute it. “I was 25 at the time, and I was professionally equipped to do nothing. That’s when I decided to apply to Heller.”

TURNING THE BOAT AROUND

Watson enrolled in the Heller School MBA in Nonprofit Management program in 2004. “That program was very real for me,” she says. “I would take a fundraising class and then go home and write a fundraising appeal. I would take a human resources class and then go back and work on an employee handbook.” Nurtured by Watson’s real-time acquisition of MBA skills, her nonprofit slowly grew and took on structure.

Like all MBA students, Watson also completed a Team Consulting Project (TCP) in the summer prior to her graduation. Her team consulted for a large government agency, produced a 90-page report and gave a formal presentation of their findings. With the support of a faculty adviser and workshop series, TCP teams come to emulate a small consulting firm: owning and executing the practical, academic work as well as managing both the client relationship and timeline, and delegating roles and responsibilities within the team.

In 2006, Watson graduated from Heller, and her tiny nonprofit had grown large enough to become her full-time job. The Samfund, whose tag line is “Cancer isn’t free,” is now 13 years old and has granted over \$1.6 million to young-adult cancer survivors facing financial hardship. In addition to monetary assistance, The Samfund provides free online support and financial education to help young people recover from the financial impact of cancer treatment. Many grantees later go on to volunteer for The Samfund or give back as “Sambassadors,” a close-knit group of volunteers The Samfund relies on to raise funds.

The team of Sambassadors, like The Samfund, is growing rapidly — more rapidly than the organization can handle. “We’ve done things ad hoc for a while now and we were starting to unravel a little bit,” says Watson, “but we didn’t have the bandwidth or the expertise to step back and



THE SAMFUND TCP TEAM (LEFT TO RIGHT): CAITLYN BURKE, MBA'16; EMILY BLECKER, MBA'16; CHRISTIAN CHAMARS, MS/MBA'16; MARIAM HASSAN, MBA'16; AND ANDY SMITH, MBA'16

“Our operations and strategic management classes were particularly helpful for our project. We pulled in a lot of different frameworks from those classes,” says Emily Blecker, MBA'16. In several instances the team received advice and suggestions from other classmates in the MBA cohort — calling on the Heller “hive mind” for ideas and opinions.

For many, working on their TCP also evokes personal reflection. “TCP is a long process, and it’s bigger than any class project we’ve had. So for me, it was a personal test that helped me see if my own view of myself as a manager is true or not,” says Mariam Hassan, MBA'16. “At this point I think I know what my strengths and weaknesses are when it comes to teamwork, but TCP tested my assumptions. It helped me discover myself a bit more.”

THE HELLER TRADITION OF TCP

As a faculty member and professional consultant, The Samfund team’s adviser, Melissa Nemon, considers TCP invaluable. “I would have rushed at an opportunity like TCP when I was a student. I don’t know of many other schools that do an experience like this, that literally say, ‘You’re going to take an entire summer and act as a consulting firm, you’re going to set deliverables, work on those deliverables, work on client relationships and communication, et cetera.’ A lot of people who go into consulting have to just learn that on the fly.”

Prior to joining Heller more than 10 years ago, MBA program director Carole Carlson worked at a major strategic consulting firm where her responsibilities included training the company’s new consultants. As co-facilitator of the TCP program and workshop series, Carlson says, “TCP is about problem-solving and actually doing something

practical and implementable for an organization. And we have amazing problem-solvers. Our students are really, really good at going into a situation, understanding it in a sensitive way, using data-driven analysis to develop objective solutions and figuring out how an organization can implement it. That is a suite of very valuable skills.”

Over the last decade the word has spread about what Heller TCP groups can do, and the demand for TCP teams has increased. This year, over 20 organizations pitched project proposals to the MBA cohort, and only nine were chosen. Roughly half of the clients in any given year come back, hoping for another team next year. “They want us to solve bigger problems, and have more inherent trust in our teams,” says Carlson.

“I think TCP is one of the best things about Heller,” says Lawrence Bailis, associate professor and co-facilitator of the TCP course. “We often talk about the community service role of universities, and I can’t think of a better example than TCP.” Watson agrees with him, telling her TCP team at their final presentation, “Because of your work, so many more people will be positively impacted by The Samfund. The end result is that young adults who need us, who are going bankrupt, who can’t feed their kids, will be positively impacted by this.”

Ten years after her own TCP presentation, Watson is thrilled to be on the client and mentor side of the TCP equation — and not just because of the workload. She says, “Being back at Heller in a professional capacity is so meaningful. Having the opportunity to be a mentor and to offer some perspective is just a great feeling. It feels like things have come full circle.”



MY JOURNEY TO BELONG AND EMPOWER OTHERS TO FIND THEIR SPACE IN THE WORLD

BY TAM EMERSON, DIRECTOR,
ELI J. SEGAL CITIZEN LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

I stood in the immigration and customs line watching nervously as I approached the window. I repeated an address in Spanish to myself close to 100 times, having been told that was the primary question I would need to answer. It was my first time back in Bogotá, Colombia, nearly 30 years after being adopted at the age of 6 months.

I honestly hadn't thought I would ever go back — not because it wasn't compelling but because I was scared. Growing up in the United States, I never found a comfortable way to engage in the culture that reflected my true heritage; it always felt shameful or inferior. Imposter syndrome, something many people (especially women and people of color) feel in spaces that they aren't traditionally expected to inhabit or excel, was something that resonated with me whenever I explored what it means to be Latina or Colombian. When I did try, I was hypercritical of my inability to command the Spanish language and my lack of cultural competency. I mumbled the address over and over again, feeling as if I was about to be caught for being less than fully Colombian as I tried to enter the country.

Over the years, I sought out other adoptees. I was eager to understand their experiences but often felt discouraged because I haven't felt the same sense of belonging to my Bostonian roots and family as they had in their lives. I kept this to myself most of the time, as I think it's magnificent how many people have had positive experiences with adoption.

What I've learned is that there isn't a cookie-cutter example of what it means to be who I am — Colombian,

first generation, American, woman, adoptee and activist. However, sometimes this positive grasp on life feels overshadowed by the many ways my American family tried to change me, including my name, birth date and connection to my culture. I wondered if I was enough, or if these changes made me more acceptable in America.

What I believe we miss fairly often, though, is how to allow each person's individual light to shine — one that they dictate and one that makes them feel empowered. Rather than ask people to fit a mold — whether it is body type, gender assignment, race or ethnicity, method of learning, sexual orientation, religion, language, family structure, culture or so many other facets of current society — why can't we foster the ways we each provide necessary parts to a system of change? These questions have led me to become part of movements like Black Lives Matter and anti-racism work as well as commit to organizations where I work with children, youth and young adults trying to forge their own paths.

I was relieved when the customs agent didn't ask the address of where I was staying or why I couldn't answer his questions in Spanish, even though my passport states my nationality as Colombian. I thought it was luck, but once I arrived in Colombia, I fit. I can't fully describe what this means, but I had never felt it before. The first time I felt this sense of "fit" was as I forged a friendship with two other Latin American women adoptees whom I met in a Boston leadership development program. One of them was also adopted from Colombia, and she invited me to join her on her annual trip to visit her family. I knew that

I know the step I took by traveling back to where I came from was integral to my feeling grounded in who I am today.

this was my chance to go back to Colombia under all the right circumstances.

I fit, even though I didn't possess the conventional markers of belonging. Rather, I saw that my openness to acceptance of others and by others was all I needed. I'm so grateful to my friend, her family and the people in Colombia who welcomed me home as if I had never left. It was the proclivity toward generosity that struck me and was done in a form unique to Colombia. I was surrounded by a culture and people that didn't care if I had waited five years, three decades or my entire life to return and get to know them.

Since I couldn't speak the language, I had to sit quietly and observe often. For me, as those who know me can attest, not speaking is a rarity, but I do enjoy observing and reflecting. I filled some of this time by getting to know my friend's niece, an adorable 18-month-old girl who understood what it was like not to be able to speak with everyone. We spent many hours laughing and smiling over a sticker on my phone and a set of "beeps" and "boops" that made up our own form of language. It was only a week, but my friend's family never once treated me like I was less than Colombian.

I was only a year younger than this toddler when I left the country. Her sense of curiosity, self-reliance, independence and warmth reminded me of stories I've heard about myself when I was the same age. It mirrored an intellectual path I have traveled for years to better understand the nature-versus-nurture debate. What parts of me are due to the experiences and people who surrounded me for most of my life (predominantly upper middle class and white) and what parts of me are ingrained in my DNA from the ancestry of people I may never meet? The way my toddler friend interacted with the world felt akin — our desire to develop language, the need for few things to satiate our curiosity and a longing to be understood. I know I just described most toddlers,

but this felt different. I can't fully explain it, but I will continue to explore it.

What I appreciated most was that when I was in Colombia, I realized I'm not an imposter. I'm a Colombian American. I'm proud to be a woman of color, just as much as I feel fortunate to have grown up in a place like the United States. I want to make an impact on the world. Every person I interact with is dealing with a similar struggle for a sense of self. I want to be a force that reminds them they have genius and a purpose. My ability to connect with people, empathize, and be open with my journey will provide me with my own unique set of abilities to make this change.

I may have been destined to travel this path no matter where I was raised, but I'd like to think that it's happened this way because of my unique identity. I believe this is a lifelong journey for self-acceptance that changes due to the experiences we have and the people we meet. Some days it's empowering, other days demoralizing. Nevertheless, I know the step I took by traveling back to where I came from was integral to my feeling grounded in who I am today.

Some of my next steps include seeking dual citizenship and learning Spanish. Many people ask the intrusive question of whether I'll go find my family, but all I can respond is that I don't know. Family has been an interesting part of my life, and even if it weren't, it's a deeply personal decision. One thing I do know is that I thought I'd never go to Colombia. But I made a friend who brought me along on this journey, and now I can't imagine not having done it. I won't ever be able to fully answer who I am, but I now have more pieces of my larger picture. I have a renewed sense of my work and passion. And I believe in people who are told too often that they don't matter — those are the people who will make all the difference. I just hope to be part of the waves that make a change for the future.

ON THE FRONT LINES OF BOMB CLEARANCE EFFORTS IN LAOS

BY COURTNEY LOMBARDO

Arina Chithavong Lester, MA SID'15, Feldman Foundation Endowed Fellow, landed her dream job working as the director of development and operations at Legacies of War, a Washington, D.C.-based organization that advocates for the removal of unexploded bomb leftovers from the Vietnam War era in Laos. In this new role, Chithavong Lester, who is of Laotian heritage, conducts training, victim assistance, bomb clearance and advocacy for communities in Laos. Her new position coincides with an important time in the history of relations between the United States and the South Asian country.

On Sept. 6, President Obama, the first sitting president in U.S. history to visit Laos, acknowledged the history of the “Secret War” in which the U.S. dropped more than 2 million tons of bombs in Laos from 1964 to 1973. Today, 80 million unexploded Vietnam-era bombs remain, a problem that has severely restricted agricultural development. During his visit, President Obama announced that the U.S. would increase aid to Laos by \$90 million over the next three years to find and remove the explosives. This increase in aid is nearly equivalent to the amount the U.S. has spent in Laos over the last 20 years. Chithavong Lester adds, “During the ‘Secret War,’ the U.S. spent more than \$14 million per day over a period of nine years to bomb this country.”

She continues, “My parents were refugees and prisoners of war. My father left his family and became a refugee at age 17 by paying a Thai fisherman to take him over the Mekong River. When I was a teenager, he spent three years in a concentration/re-education camp. My mother still remembers the feeling of small stones in her mouth from the poorly cleaned rations of rice provided at the United Nations refugee camp in Thailand where she lived for three years. This historic event is not just significant for the 7 million people still living in Laos, but also for us, the Lao diaspora community, as we share the same history.”



ARINA CHITHAVONG LESTER, MA SID'15



TRANSFORMING ENGAGEMENT INTO ACTION

BY MAX PEARLSTEIN '01

In her role with 100 Million Healthier Lives (100MHL), Marianne McPherson, PhD'09, is attempting to do the



MARIANNE MCPHERSON, PHD'09

unprecedented. 100MHL, which is convened by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is working toward an audacious goal: 100 million people living healthier lives by 2020. As director of implementation, McPherson is a key leader of a small team charged with keeping the massive movement on track. She does a bit of everything, from coordinating resources for members, to developing the website and a measurement platform, to providing leadership to the wide network of participants.

“I really enjoy helping to connect the dots across a variety of issues,” McPherson says. “We have a big-tent approach, with people working on many different topics, and it’s my job to make it easier for them to perform their piece of the puzzle. I love being able to support the diverse collection of members who together are transforming health and well-being with a core focus on equity.”

According to McPherson, 100MHL currently has more than 900 members in 20 countries — its potential reach is already more than 100 million people in the United

States alone. Together, they work to transform health and well-being through various projects, like a partnership with the Office of the Surgeon General to turn the tide on the opioid crisis in the U.S. or another to interrupt the school-to-prison pipeline.

McPherson believes the movement is now at an inflection point. “We’ve been welcoming new members, and I think this is the time for us to transition that momentum for engagement into momentum for action,” she says. “I think that between now and 2020, my days will be full of the incredible challenge and incredible privilege I have to provide the tools, support and facilitative leadership needed to make this movement that I really believe in fly.”

NEW LEADERSHIP ON HELLER ALUMNI ASSOCIATION BOARD

BY COURTNEY LOMBARDO

In September 2016, Sarah K. Emond, MPP'09, Stavis and Altman Fellow, was announced as the new president of the



SARAH K. EMOND, MPP'09

Heller Alumni Association Board. Emond is chief operating officer at the Institute for Clinical and Economic Review (ICER), a Boston-based independent nonprofit dedicated to conducting and implementing comparative effectiveness research in the health care system. As president of the Heller Alumni Association Board, she is honored to lead such a stellar group of alumni and will be focused on tapping the worldwide Heller network to foster connections among alumni and the school.

Reflecting on her new role, Emond says, “The Heller Alumni Association has members all over the world, working in every conceivable industry and field, yet we are connected by our shared commitment to social justice. I’m honored to be representing your varied and important perspectives on the Alumni Board, and hope that you will reach out to me with ideas, feedback and comments on how we can leverage this incredible resource to support each other and the Heller School.”

The board meets twice annually and provides assistance and advice to the Heller School administration through its committee structure regarding student recruitment, career networking, fundraising and alumni events. Alumni are welcome to share ideas on how the Heller Alumni Association Board can better serve the needs of the alumni community by emailing helleralumni@brandeis.edu.

IMPROVING HEALTH SYSTEMS IN NEW ZEALAND

BY BETHANY ROMANO

Sreeraj Sasi, MS’10, recently joined the Auckland, New Zealand-based organization Ko Awatea as an improvement adviser for its development and delivery team. Ko Awatea is the center for health system innovation and improvement of Auckland’s Counties Manukau District Health Board, and it works to deliver systemwide improvement and well-being of local and regional communities by adopting a holistic, evidence-based approach. It is also a center of excellence and education that is committed to transforming health systems in New Zealand and globally, with a special focus on the Asia-Pacific region. The organization intends to bring positive outcomes for patients and communities by developing leadership for improvement, implementing change programs through innovative thinking, and building will and capacity to improve systemwide processes.

Of his new position, Sasi, who is a trained improvement adviser, says, “I lead and support various projects and program teams in applying improvement tools and

approaches. Currently, I’m leading a health equity campaign and a diabetes collaborative within Counties Manukau-Auckland. I provide advice, practical help and coaching, and deliver teaching sessions in the application of quality-improvement tools for internal and external customers. I’m also part of the change management team, whose mission is to effect an organizational culture change that is committed to continuous, deliberate improvement of patient experience, organizational performance and culture.”

Working on quality and process improvement projects always inspires Sasi. He says, “It’s even more exciting and challenging when you are in a new country and working in a health system that is unknown to you. This job gives me an opportunity to explore new horizons and learn health systems issues from a global perspective.”



SREERAJ SASI, MS'10

Sasi’s role at Ko Awatea involves working with various marginalized and deprived ethnic populations in New Zealand. He adds, “This job gives me a great platform to use my knowledge and skills to address these issues and grow professionally through new tasks and challenges — ones I haven’t had the opportunity to tackle in previous roles.”



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BACK COVER(AGE)

Domestic
dislocation is
expensive for
the public;

it is not just a cost borne by
the displaced employees.

JANET BOGUSLAW AND MARGOT TROTTER DAVIS,
PHD'08, IN A BOSTON GLOBE OP-ED ON THE
AFTERMATH OF THE HYATT 100

We need a little
more focus on
trying to do good
experiments and
get good data
on how people from these
societies interpret sounds, before
they vanish forever.

RICARDO GODOY IN THE BOSTON GLOBE ON HOW
ISOLATED INDIGENOUS SOCIETIES IN THE AMAZON
INTERPRET WESTERN MUSIC

When I was
looking
at the data,
I was convinced
someone had put a
decimal point in the
wrong place.

ANDREW KOLODNY ON THE BRITISH BROADCAST-
ING CORPORATION ON THE CAUSES OF THE U.S.
OPIOID EPIDEMIC

People are
a little more
tired, a little
more irritable,
a little more likely to be
stressed, and that's also
consistent with our findings.

CLEMENS NOELKE IN THE TORONTO GLOBE AND
MAIL ON HAPPINESS AND GLOBAL WARMING