

summer 2009

# commons



Haas Center for Public Service at Stanford University



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Haas Center  
for Public Service  
<http://haas.stanford.edu>

Choosing action over apathy since 1985.

## commons Summer 2009

*The Haas Center connects academic study with community and public service to strengthen communities and develop effective public leaders. The Center aspires to develop aware, engaged, and thoughtful citizens who contribute to the realization of a more just and humane world.*

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## Commons has changed!

In addition to a new look for 2009, we're changing our publication schedule in an effort to save money and paper! **commons** will now be printed once per year in time for Commencement. But fear not. You can still hear from us on a regular basis. e-Commons, our electronic newsletter, will be sent out quarterly, and our alumni emails will continue on the fourth Tuesday of each month. Learn about what we're doing, and how you can get involved—we love to hear from you and see you!

To subscribe to e-Commons or the monthly alumni email, please contact Damali Robertson at [damali@stanford.edu](mailto:damali@stanford.edu).

We're in the process of compiling our Triennial Report for 2006 through 2009. We are printing a limited number, so if you're interested in receiving a paper copy, please email Damali. The pdf will be available this fall on our website, <http://haas.stanford.edu>.

## Support Our Work

Can you help us ensure a solid future for public service at Stanford? Not since our founding nearly 25 years ago has so much been at stake. Your gift to the Haas Center can fund student leadership programs, international public service fellowships, our core partnerships with local communities, interdisciplinary approaches to the study of philanthropy and civil society, and essential assessment and innovation in public service education.

Please visit us online at <http://haas.stanford.edu> or contact Suzanne Abel, [sabel@stanford.edu](mailto:sabel@stanford.edu) or (650) 723-4719.

THE  
STANFORD  
CHALLENGE



## From the Executive Director

As I drove across the high plains of Wyoming, I couldn't help but notice the enormous wind farms that had been developed there. Turbines as far as the eye could see, harnessing the wind and converting it to electricity. It had been about 15



years since I had last driven I-80, and while little else had looked different, the presence of those turbines stood as a symbol that much had changed during that time.

Perhaps it was the fact that I had been driving alone for two days, pulling a small U-haul trailer toward the new adventure that awaited, but that wind farm got me thinking about all the changes that had occurred, for me personally, but also for our nation and the world, over the past 20 years.

The Haas Center has experienced change and continues to do so. As we grapple with how best to respond to the current economic crisis from an educational perspective, we are also faced with difficult decisions caused by the downturn. Like the rest of Stanford and higher education across the country, the nation's economic volatility has translated to budget cuts. We have reduced staffing in administration, fellowships programs, and the Stanford College Prep program, and we have trimmed operational costs across all program areas. Amid all of this, two of our most seasoned staff, Jackie Schmidt-Posner and Olivia Torbett, retired this spring.

The loss of talented staff and the contraction of our resources provide a powerful impetus for us to examine the scope and focus of our work, improve efficiency, and become more collaborative. They do not, however, lessen the importance of our mission or weaken our resolve to *develop aware, engaged and thoughtful citizens who contribute to the realization of a more just and humane world*. On the contrary, the extraordinary economic and social challenges facing our nation and the world increase both the urgency and importance of public service education.

Change is constant, yes. At the Haas Center, we will be embarking on a strategic planning process as part of the celebration of our 25th anniversary. In this way, we hope not to simply respond to change, but also to shape that change. Being proactive and intentional is precisely how, in the words of John Gardner, we convert "insoluble problems," into "breathtaking opportunities."

Thomas Schnaubelt

# All We Want Is To Be Able to Learn More

Vanisha Gandhi '10 (Human Biology),  
Teaching in Kadod, India



**Vanisha Gandhi '10** (Human Biology) was a Haas Summer Fellow in 2008 with the Nanubhai Education Foundation in Kadod, India, teaching spoken English to children. Since 2004, the Nanubhai Education Foundation has helped vulnerable students in rural India attain skills so that they can participate in India's economic opportunities. Her fellowship was so successful that, with the support of the Foundation, she returned to Kadod this May to continue implementing her English and technology curriculum. This fall, Vanisha will join the Public Service Scholars Program to write her honors thesis on the effects of the summer program on the academic and psychosocial development of adolescent students in Kadod. To learn more about her experiences, please visit <http://vanisha-adventuresinindiapart2.blogspot.com>.

**June 25, 2008:** I have finally captured a glimpse of the monsoon rain a week after my arrival in Kadod. I'm interning with the Nanubhai Education Foundation in Kadod, a rural town in Gujarat, India. My ultimate goal for this fellowship is to implement an integrated English and technology summer enrichment program, which has never been done before in this region. Over the next ten weeks, students will develop creativity and critical thinking skills that academics in the Gujarat education system often deemphasize.

I've only been teaching for a week and I've already fallen in love with all of my students! Kalpesh, a small boy who pronounces all his f's as p's, is my favorite. The students in his morning class are motivated and extremely eager, but many are also shy and have limited knowledge of English. Not Yashpal, who walks into class with his Barbie backpack every morning singing Hindu prayers. He is the first to raise his hand to respond to every question in class, yelling "Teacher! Teacher!" to get my attention. We recently started an autobiography assignment on the computer and Yashpal wrote the most heartfelt sentences in the past, present, and future tenses. This class has mostly phenomenal writers; however, there are a few difficult ones that I hope will start feeling more comfortable with class material. I have most difficulty with innocent-looking Hitesh—he won't speak a word of English and wants me to translate everything in Gujarati for him. But I won't give in.

The days go by so fast. For the past week, I and the three other American teachers in Kadod have been caught up in a media frenzy—journalists have been interviewing and filming us for stories for the local newspapers and news stations. It's quite a foreign concept to have Americans teaching at a school in rural India. Ironically, because I look Indian and speak Gujarati, the reporters often do not realize that I am American!

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**May 16, 2009 :** I'm back teaching at Kadod High School after almost a year. My efforts last summer created the impetus for the development of an intensive integrated English and technology curriculum, which was also piloted by the Nanubhai Education Foundation at Kadod High School. I started the summer program last Monday and classes are off to a great start!

I commute by bus from Bardoli, a town about 18 kilometers away, and the journey every morning has been so rewarding. I've gotten a feel for what life is like for the locals, and it's fascinating as a researcher to fit into my surroundings without seeming like an outsider. As I walk to school, the townspeople greet me with "Good morning, Teacher," "Hello, Ma'am," and "Madam, how are you?," which is a favorite among the little kids around town, who shout it out and then scurry off without waiting for the answer.

In my classes, I integrate English and technology through storybook projects, in which we code our written and illustrated stories into HTML to create a finished product. All of my students are so eager to learn; some have even started saying "yeah" and "ummmm," and although a lot of the time it's to make fun of me, I can tell that they really want to learn to speak English.

As we head into our second week of the program, I leave you with something that one of my students told me as he and his fellow classmates engaged in their daily ritual of escorting me to the Kadod bus stop: "All we want is to be able to learn more. And learn to speak English and use computers so we can do something good for our family...and for our country!"

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David L. Jaffe, MS, teaches ENGR110/210: Perspectives in Assistive Technology, a winter quarter course that explores the broad spectrum of issues surrounding the design, development, and use of technology that benefits people with disabilities. This three-unit course consists of twice-weekly one-hour lectures by notable professionals, clinicians, and individuals with disabilities, as well as student participation in a team-based project that addresses a need of an individual with a disability. Students brainstorm the problem, submit a design proposal, fabricate and test a prototype, and present their team's functional solution at the end of the course. Lectures are open to all students and community members.

**1 Assistive Technology (AT) sounds very broad. How do you define it?**  
I would define assistive technology to include not only the devices that allow people to overcome their limitations, but also the broader issues of providing these devices, namely research, design/development, policy concerns, education, outcomes measurement, etc.

**2 The course consists of lectures by medical professionals, scientists, lawyers, engineers, product designers, individuals with disabilities, and others. What led you to structure the class in this format?**

When I worked as a research engineer for the Palo Alto VA for many years, I was exposed to a diverse team of people including engineers, therapists, and physicians who all worked to improve the health and independence of people with disabilities. I wanted students to be exposed to this broader realm of disability, rehabilitation, and assistive technology. While I didn't have the expertise across all areas, I knew people who did, so it was natural to invite them to be a part of the course. I present the initial lecture, an introduction to AT, and let my colleagues take it from there.

This format does not have the same kind of flow that comes from teaching sequentially from a textbook; rather, it is a series of diverse topics. In one class, I might have a researcher talk about her work, and then invite a person with a disability to speak about his life experiences in the next class. I find this interesting, and so do the students. This year, the class was given a tour of the VA's spinal cord injury unit, which took students out of the classroom and into a clinic where the rehabilitation work actually happens. They were able to interact with professionals as well as veterans with disabilities.

**3 What is your favorite lecture?**

I often ask the students, "Who is disabled?" For example, what about a wheelchair user who is only able to use his thumb? He can only use his thumb, but he is able to get around independently in his powered wheelchair. And he can use a device to choose words that will be spoken by a speech output system. This happens to be Stephen Hawking, who many consider to be the world's smartest person. Is he disabled? What about superman? Or superman sitting next to kryptonite? Or an amputee with carbon-fiber artificial legs who can run faster than an able-bodied athlete? I sometimes mention an episode of "Outer Limits" in which a person's head is completely covered in surgical bandages. When they are removed, we see a beautiful woman. But she lives in a closed society of disfigured people. Is she disabled?

What I try to do here is to put a human frame around disability. It is all too easy to talk about body parts and function—arms, legs, walking, etc.—but you lose the concept of the person. I have a photograph of a colleague who is of short stature and I ask the class how they should refer to him. As a midget? A dwarf? A scooter guy, since he rides one? When I click to the next slide, it says "Bob"—we call him Bob, because that's his name. You want to refer to the person, rather than use labels.

## 4 Students are tasked with the design of a product to address the needs of individuals with disabilities. What is the process?

The main requirements are that the students address a real need and involve a person with a disability or a health care professional who works with individuals with disabilities. Students work with these individuals as equal members of a team during the definition, design, fabrication, and product-testing phases.

This is where the service-learning component comes into play: a connection is made between students and an individual with a disability or health care professional. I often come up with project ideas for students after asking people in the community for suggestions. There is a group of wheelchair users at the VA who are working with students to develop a device to help them open doors, for example.

## 5 How do you see this class fitting into the concept of public service?

I think that ENGR110/210 is an ideal public service/service-learning course. It exposes students to the concept of assistive technology as they work to solve problems faced by individuals with disabilities in the community. The course lectures are open to the community, so students are able to interact with non-students, including those with disabilities. Community members, in turn, are able to take advantage of the local expertise of the presenters and become involved in projects with the students. Everybody benefits. I believe that all students have a desire to do something socially responsible and that this course provides them with an opportunity to do that.

To listen to lectures, learn about projects developed in the class, or contact David Jaffe, please visit: [www.stanford.edu/class/engr110](http://www.stanford.edu/class/engr110).

## Projects from ENGR 110/210

### 2009

- iPhone Dialer for Users with Visual Impairments
- Handi-Cart
- Sonification of Movement
- Opening Doors

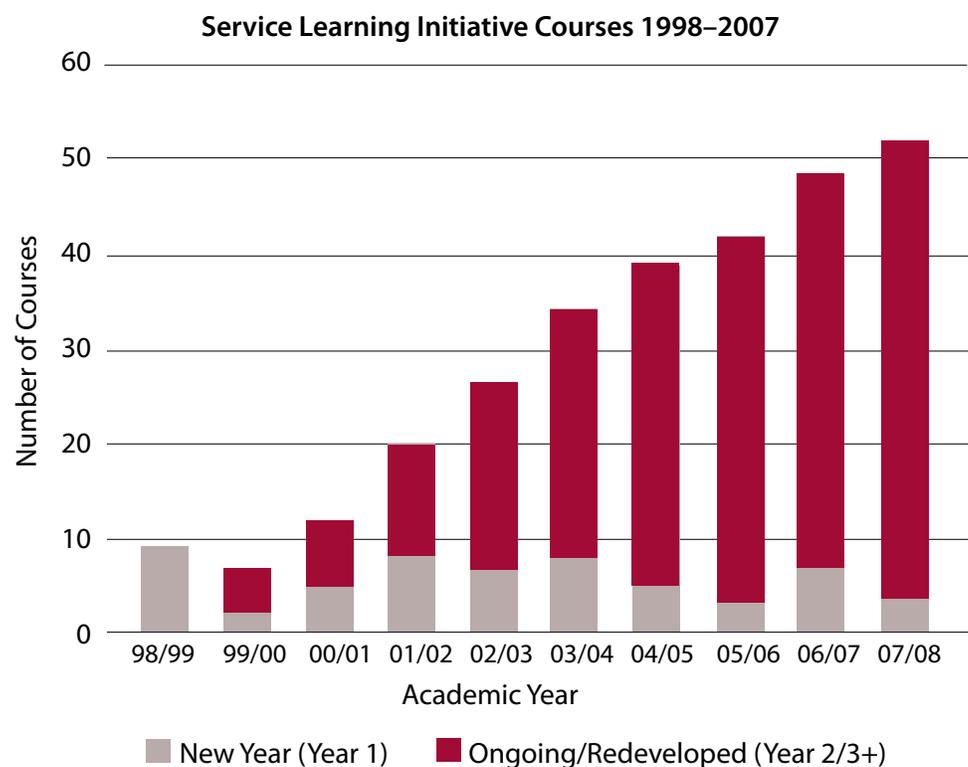
### 2008

- LiquidMetal: Redesign of the White Cane
- Let's Get Physical: Pediatric Gait Project
- ElevAid

### 2007

- Aid for Donning an Artificial Leg
- Accessible Fishing Rod
- Aid for Improving Mobility around the Home for the Elderly
- Rain Protection Device for Wheel Chair Users

Since 1984, the development of service-learning courses has been part of the Haas Center's strategy for institutionalizing service and connecting to Stanford's academic mission. In 2008, we began compiling quantitative and qualitative data on the history of service-learning at Stanford. Stay tuned for more information. We will present an in-depth analysis for our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2010.



# Mauritanian Timeline

Reflection from Noel Foster '08  
(Political Science; MA '08 Sociology),  
International Postgraduate Fellow



## July 2008

I arrive in Mauritania's capital, Nouakchott. I learn that a piece of butter is referred to as a "Kennedy," after Washington sent food aid to newly-independent Mauritania in the early 1960s. Until then, Maure nomads' sole knowledge of America came from shipwrecked sailors and other curiosities that washed up on their shores.

## August 6

I realize something is amiss when I hear that the generals have been sacked, then hear complete silence on the radio. In the wake of a bloodless palace coup, President Abdallahi, the first democratically-elected president, is overthrown.

## Late August

The ICC conducts a poll of the 100 most influential Mauritians. We find a surprising level of agreement between members of opposite ends of the political spectrum, who agree to the need for new elections and constitutional reform.

## September 15

I have broken the fast every Ramadan evening with my adoptive Maure family. Going all day without water in the late summer heat defeated me. If Mauritians fast throughout the day, they compensate throughout the night with feasts and revelry.

## October 7

At the request of ICC, I have contacted dozens of foundations for support, with little success. Almost daily electricity outages hinder office work. A surprise birthday party lightens the mood. In the meantime, grilled daily over the latest developments stateside, I am stunned by how many locals I meet are following the U.S. elections more attentively than I.

## November 28

Within my adoptive family, Mauritania's independence day passes quietly, a rather somber occasion given how much of the country is now divided into three camps: those supporting the junta, those opposed to the junta on the side of the toppled president, and a third group opposed to both positions and both men, quickly dubbed the "neither, nor" faction.

## December 25

Just a year earlier, I had spent an atypical, tranquil Christmas in Mauritania while researching my thesis. Upon returning to America this year, the brutal shift from the picturesque landscape of undulating dunes in a never-ending summer to a Northeast blizzard jarred me. What I had grown accustomed to, such as the call to prayer by the muezzin, struck me by its absence.

Two-thirds desert, over twice the size of California, and peopled by only three million Muslims, Mauritania is unfamiliar to most Americans. Nonetheless, it constitutes the amalgamating frontier between the Arab world and sub-Saharan Africa. Mauritania gained independence from France in 1960, and since then has known war, ethnic strife, the vestiges of slavery, poverty, and dictatorship. But the country has also known the efforts of many of its leaders to build a prosperous nation-state amidst an unforgiving environment, and great potential in its many natural resources, from minerals to fisheries, and now oil.

With the support of a pilot Haas Center postgraduate fellowship supported by the Office of the President and Provost, I chose to work for the Initiative Citoyenne pour le Changement (ICC) or Citizen's Initiative for Change, a Mauritanian NGO founded in April 2006 at the height of the democratic transition period, and at a time of great hopes for the country. The ICC has tremendous potential, but funding is minimal and precarious, dependent entirely on the contributions of supporters and fixed contracts with such partners as the transitional government, the European Union, and the United Nations Development Program. My role was undefined, with no direct supervisor, and determined entirely by how I could best serve the ICC. This situation compelled me to get to know the ICC, identifying its challenges and opportunities, and suggesting how to act strategically and tactically in response. Unlike friends who went into consulting, however, I had no specialized training, mentoring, or similar support. Graduating from Stanford in June 2008, I had written my thesis on the country's transition from dictatorship to democracy from 2005 to 2007. Arriving just before the coup and working during a time of great upheaval, the fellowship gave me a chance to contribute and would teach me far more than I could ever have expected.

#### February 2009

Bringing together Mauritanian intellectuals and academics, the ICC pursues a series of colloquiums addressing the major issues facing the country. The collected papers are being edited and prepared for publication, the first of a series of works the ICC hopes to publish later in 2009 as it transitions to becoming the country's first think tank.

#### March

I vacation in the desert with my adoptive family in a windswept patch of dunes where fruit trees are beginning to grow. Upon my return, a schoolteacher from the hinterland visits the ICC offices and describes conditions there. With a third of the country's population settled in the capital, most in shantytowns, the rural poor are Mauritania's forgotten people.

#### April

On a brief trip home, I have the occasion to return to Stanford and sit on the Haas Center committee selecting the next fellowship recipient. Joining a panel of Stanford professors in its debate is intimidating enough, but what strike me most are the four finalists' incredible qualities. Fatima Hassan Ali '09 (Human Biology) is selected as the 2009–2010 International Fellow.

#### May 25

Campaign season leaves Mauritians uncertain whether elections will be postponed, impatiently awaiting news of a settlement or a final failure.

#### Early June

The ICC's role during the elections is a challenging balancing act, one crucial to the organization's future and its mission of consolidating democracy here. Maintaining our credibility as a strictly non-partisan organization paramount in an environment where partisanship is severe and loyalties assumed. Tracking the byzantine, unending negotiations and campaigning across the country is at once grueling, yet riveting.

#### Late June

In my last month here, I come to grips with what I haven't done and evaluate what I have, detailing both in my final report. Leaving an organization I have become attached to and whose mission I believe in, right at the cusp of change, is more wrenching than I would have thought, and I hope I have the chance to continue contributing in the future. More difficult still is leaving behind friends I've grown close to. Next year I will be a world away, studying for a master's in International Relations at the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium.

# Service through Singing

Zack Wettstein '11 (undeclared) describes  
a cappella in New Orleans

This past spring break, Mixed Company, Stanford's oldest coed a cappella group, traveled to New Orleans for a "service through singing" spring tour.

As tour manager, I set out to plan an experience for the 19 members of our group that would be unique and rewarding. Our past tours include visits to colleges in the Northeast or beach vacations to Southern California and Hawai'i. I'm not suggesting those tours weren't rewarding, but I thought that as a talented group of singers, students, and human beings, we had the potential to do much more than sing and vacation.

After spending much of my summer in Nicaragua participating in healthcare service projects through the Haas Center's Impact Abroad Program, I wanted to add a service component to our tour. Furthermore, as someone who had never been to New Orleans, yet had heard about the troubles the city faced in recovering from Katrina, I reasoned that a tour to the Gulf Coast could combine our love for music (in one of the most musically diverse cities in our nation) and our desire to serve.

During the week, we sang at a number of venues, including the 36-hour Bach Around the Clock music festival at Trinity New Orleans Church; held a series of a cappella workshops with the kids at the Westbank Boys & Girls Club; and helped clean and rebuild the Bayou St. John Wetlands with AmeriCorps and the Haas Center's Alternative Spring Break trip, "Rising from the Rubble: Moving Forward in Post-Katrina New Orleans." We took time to get to know some of the culture and history behind the city by visiting historic

jazz venues throughout the city, including Preservation Hall; exploring the recent tragedies the city has faced through a levee tour with Tulane Professor Steven A.

Nelson; and experiencing the French Quarter through a nighttime haunted tour. We were fortunate enough to have the Alternative Spring Break volunteers as well as Talisman, another a cappella group from Stanford, there in New Orleans with us so that we could combine forces and work together on service projects, including the wetlands rebuild at Bayou St John.



Our spring tour was a great success. I especially enjoyed watching my friends experience service for the first time as I did last summer, and fall in love with the community. We gave as much as we could in only a short amount of time, and the community also gave back what they could to us—it was much

more of a cultural exchange than a one-sided service project, which was the beauty of the trip. Although we were only there for a week, I know that our tour to New Orleans had a significant impact on the Mixed Company family. In our 25 years of existence, our group has never been closely associated with service, but I hope that this experience will inspire the future leadership of the group to combine singing and service and to use our talent to make an impact in other communities around the world.

*Service through music has a long history at Stanford, with groups like Talisman traveling to South Africa and others like Side By Side singing in local hospitals and nursing homes. The Haas Center has worked with several of these groups, and hopes to continue to inspire the call to serve through the arts for years to come.*

# Science in Service Grows

## SiS Director Kelly Beck presents the Teen Program

For the past six years, the Science in Service (SiS) program has prepared Stanford students to be science mentors to second through sixth graders. This spring, SiS launched a science mentoring program for teens, matching Stanford students with youth at the Boys & Girls Club of the Peninsula.

The SiS student leaders and I have long wanted to develop a teen science program to complement the existing youth science program. The goal became reality with the support of Dr. Matthew Evans, a plant biologist and geneticist at the Carnegie Institution Department of Plant Biology, which is housed at Stanford. With support from the National Science Foundation, Dr. Evans is partnering with SiS to reach out to teens in the community. His support and vision help us to train Stanford science and engineering students for the challenges and rewards of mentoring teens, and provides the rich content of plant biology and cutting edge research in maize genetics.

The SiS mentors and teens are fully engaging in science learning as a means of positive youth development as well as an opportunity to open doors for future careers and aspirations.

In this first quarter, we've had our share of rough spots, as is the case in any pilot, but the big success is the mentoring relationship that the participating Stanford undergraduates—the SiS teen mentors—have developed with the teens. Mentors have reflected on their teen partners' experiences in school and with their peer group, as well as their overall potential. The SiS mentors and teens are fully engaging in science learning as a means of positive youth development and an opportunity to open doors for future careers and aspirations. The Science in Service teen program is yet another opportunity for Stanford science students and young people in East Palo Alto and Redwood City to bridge opportunity gaps and build community engagement.

For information about direct service programs at the Haas Center, please visit us online: <http://haas.stanford.edu>.



# Public Service Scholars Reflect on Research as Service

**Meredith Bell** '09 (Peace and Conflict Studies)

*"De Lawd" and the Locals: Structure, Leadership and Two Organizations' Efforts to Develop a Grassroots Movement for Civil Rights and Equality in the Jim Crow South*

Research as service is a way of improving human and environmental situations through investigation, analysis, and thoughtful presentation of the study's insight and potential application.



**Anjali Dixit** '09 (Biological Sciences)

*Living a Contradiction: Power Inequities and Health Attitude-Behavior Discrepancies in the Bay Area Indian Immigrant Women's Community*

Turning research into service can be done in multiple ways—through a tangible service project, or by spreading information gathered to change the way people think about a certain social issue, or even by informing the researcher herself to change the way that she thinks about and interacts with the world.



**Kelley Fong** '09 (American Studies/History)

*"I Do What I Can": How Homeless Parents Interpret and Support Their Children's Education*

Research as service is more of a mindset than an objective. Pursuing research as service necessitates looking beyond the laboratory, beyond the archives, beyond the statistical software. It is purposeful; it goes beyond research for the sake of learning and discovery to explore a topic within a broader societal context.



**Scott Keyes** '09 (Political Science)

*Why Do States Adopt Election Day Voter Registration?*

Honestly, I'm hesitant to disqualify any type of research from being research as service. The purpose of research is to better understand our society and our world. I can think of few discoveries that have been made where the public interest is not being furthered by that discovery; that is, there is almost nothing we wish we could "undiscover."



**Stany Leblanc** '09 (Urban Studies)

*Partnership for Success: The Effects of Parents and Parental Initiative Programs on Student Educational Aspirations and Achievement*

I believe that research is the necessary foundation for service to be useful. I think it has the power to increase efficiency and enhance meaning. Research provides the theoretical and practical background that is integral to the development of sustainable and effective service.



**Jessie Liu** '09 (Human Biology)

*Maternal Beliefs and Behaviors in the Prevention of Childhood Diarrhea in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania*

Research as service combines academia's rigorous inquiry with service's compassion and desire for tangible improvements. Projects should be based on tried-and-true methods and evaluated for effectiveness, and most research offers real-world applications if investigators are motivated to pursue them.



**Andrea Romero** '09 (Political Science)

*Cultivating Success Through Community-Based Health Initiatives in Developing Countries: A Lesson from Mozambique*

Research as service connects students with the "real world." Students learn what it is like collaborating with organizations and watch their research provide something for a cause bigger than themselves. It not only provides them a means of gaining experience, but also of discovering something they can imagine themselves doing after school and beyond.



**Theresa Zhen** '09 (Economics/Sociology)

*Language, Social Capital and Information Channels for Chinese Immigrant Families in Chinatown, San Francisco*

Research as service is an academic endeavor, but with social impact and social value added to a community as measures of success. Ideally, it is initiated at the community's discretion, but other forms of research as service could be implemented with a public service goal in mind.



**T**wenty-seven years ago this June, I graduated from Stanford. I still remember our commencement speech by newly-appointed Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, urging us on to careers of public service. I took her seriously: four days after that speech, I was in Morocco training to be a Peace Corps Volunteer. I taught for two years in a high school, became fluent in Arabic, and made lifelong friendships with Moroccans and fellow volunteers alike.

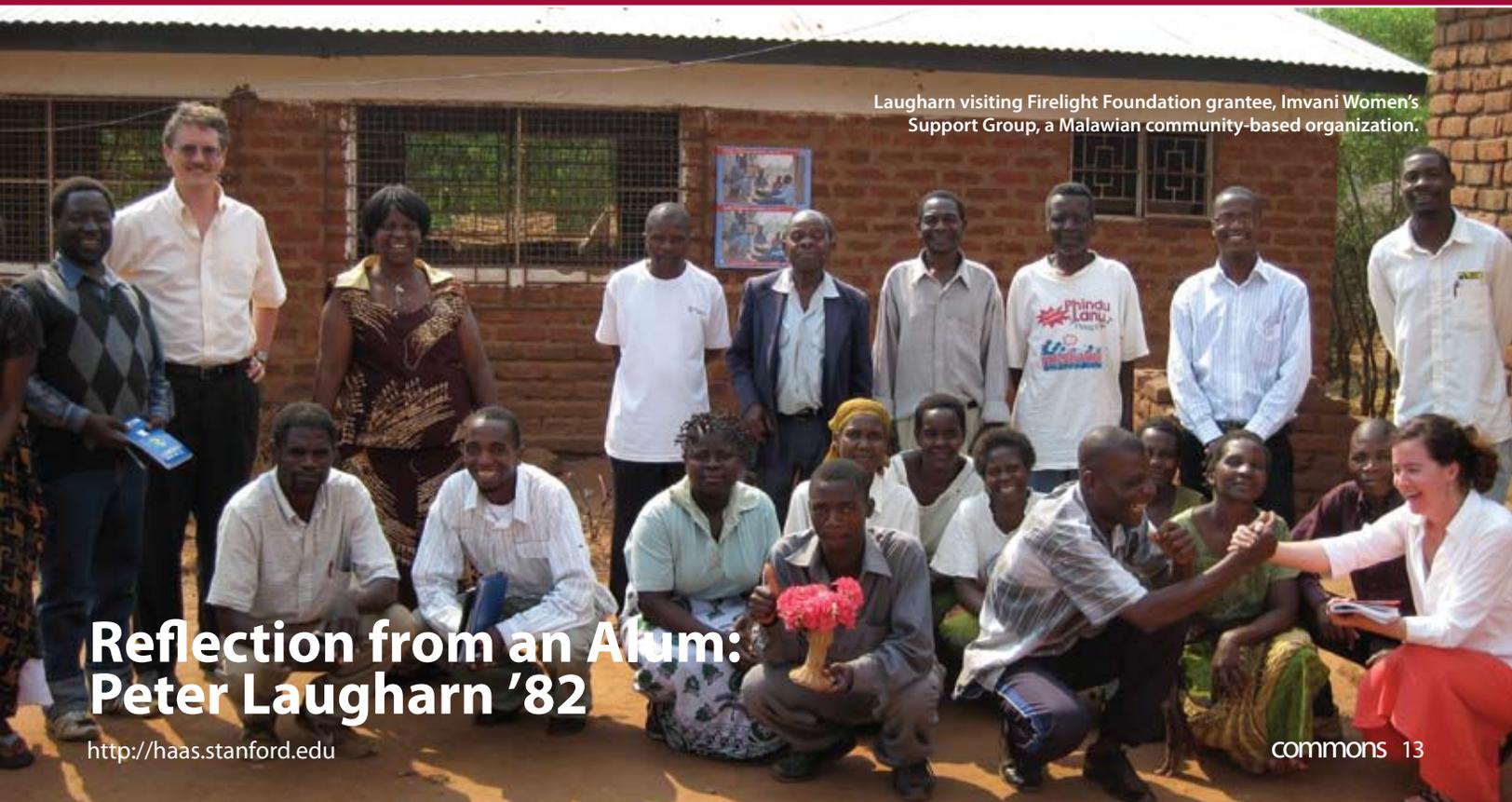
My experience in Morocco was also the start of a quarter-century of nonprofit work focused on children. I have spent that time in different parts of the world including eight years in Mali as a field office director and education advisor for Save the Children, and nine years in the Netherlands as executive director of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, which funds NGOs all over the world helping disadvantaged children. This year, I have come back home to California after 25 years away, to take up the position of executive director of the Firelight Foundation in Santa Cruz, which funds about 200 community-based organizations in Africa helping children made vulnerable by AIDS and poverty.

**A**wonderful part of this homecoming has been discovering the Haas Center and the admirable work it has been doing in promoting public service. I have been very impressed by the commitment, enthusiasm and pragmatism of Stanford students. Their awareness of global issues and desire to contribute strike me as much more vibrant than in my earlier time at Stanford.

If I have one thought to add to the rich discussion of public service that is currently going on at Stanford, it is to remember to think beyond the borders of the United States, both in considering the possibilities for serving globally and in celebrating the fact that public service goes on every day all over the world. We see it in the small Malian grassroots organization going house to house to see that all of a village's daughters are enrolled in school; in the under-resourced but determined efforts of a health minister to bring services to families; in centuries old traditions of solidarity, philanthropy, and charity in many cultures.

The world needs our compassion and we have many service paths to choose from. I look forward to learning more through the Haas Center of the paths that others have taken.

*When Peter Laugharn '82 (American Studies) returned to the US to take up the reins at the Firelight Foundation, he also reached out to staff and faculty at Stanford. On April 2 and 3 this year, the Haas Center, Firelight Foundation, Freeman Spogli Institute and the Center for African Studies together sponsored a symposium that focused on the complex set of issues related to vulnerable children in sub-Saharan Africa.*



Laugharn visiting Firelight Foundation grantee, Imvani Women's Support Group, a Malawian community-based organization.

## Reflection from an Alum: Peter Laugharn '82

# When Direct Service Isn't Enough

Robbie Torney '09 (Human Biology; MA '10 Education)  
reflects on his experiences at the Haas Center

**D**uring my freshman year, more or less by accident, I started doing Ravenswood Reads through the Haas Center. I didn't think much about my motives, and I didn't really know what to expect. Mostly, I thought volunteering would be a fun way to do a little good. It turned out to be really tough. Andy, my first tutee, was a handful. I didn't know how to motivate him to read; I didn't know how to build a relationship with him. In fact, most of my memories from that first quarter are of fetching a Tutor Coordinator to help me coax Andy out from under our table, the place he would inevitably hide during every tutoring session.

I blamed myself for being a bad tutor; I felt like the program wouldn't miss me and, in fact, would be better off without me. Having convinced myself that someone else would do a better job with Andy, I chose, with an easy conscience, not to sign up for winter quarter tutoring. About a week later, I got an email from my Tutor Coordinator, **Robert Trevino '06** (Human Biology) urging me to sign up to tutor Andy again: "You've built up a relationship with him and that's one of the most important parts of one-on-one tutoring."

I worked with Andy for the rest of the year. Things got easier, and while Andy and I were never best friends, we parted on better terms. More importantly, I felt like Andy had moved forward. I saw his academic progress; I saw him grow older (and taller); I saw him make friends; and, sometimes, when he was giving me a hard time, I saw a little kid with a great sense of humor. Of course, Andy didn't make progress because

a Stanford student worked with him for 35 minutes twice a week. He progressed because of his teacher, his family, his community, and because all children grow up. Yes, I had worked with him and learned from him, but was I making a real difference?

**The single reason I am now doing STEP Elementary, rather than pursuing a more lucrative professional career, is that I did Ravenswood Reads.**

**I**n my sophomore year, I took on a more demanding tutoring schedule and was at Costaño Elementary as much as possible. More invested in tutoring and my students, I became a better tutor. Slowly, I realized the grave injustice

that these students—by accidents of geography, race, and class—are systematically denied the means and opportunities to exercise agency in their lives. And slowly, I started to feel called to teach.

**A**fter two years, I wanted to do more to affect the outcome of these amazing children's lives and the lives of those who would follow them. I left Ravenswood Reads to work with my friend and mentor **Jenna Wachtel '06** (English; MA '06 Education), a kindergarden and first-grade teacher at Willow Oaks Elementary School in Menlo Park. I learned humility from being in the classroom. Even though I've observed some best practices and have gained some confidence and competence, I cannot teach without formally learning the skills. This was a major reason I applied to STEP.

I also resolved to devote my studies to the theory of justice. I needed to clearly understand the reasons to





practice education. I reflected on my early service and the demands of social justice through the lens of moral and political philosophy. For me, theory is more than a way to understand the intersection of morality and policy; it is at the core of understanding what action we must take and why we must take it. As bell hooks writes in *Teaching to Transgress*, "Theory is not inherently healing, liberatory, or revolutionary. It fulfills this function only when we ask that it do so and direct our theorizing toward an end."

## Direct service at Haas is the beginning, not the end, of the difference you will make in the world.

The single reason I am now doing STEP Elementary, rather than pursuing a more lucrative career, is that I did Ravenswood Reads. Tutoring shocked me. Though I, too, had gone to public school, the students at Costaño Elementary were poorer and more powerless than anyone I knew growing up. I had never visited a community like East Palo Alto, and I failed to appreciate the systemic reasons that these first and second

graders read below grade level. At the beginning, I thought my biggest challenge was learning how to be a good literacy tutor. I came to realize that my biggest challenge was building the kind of relationship with my students that got me to admit that their disadvantaged circumstances were a tragic injustice rather than a misfortune.

I have benefited greatly from my service as an undergraduate. It has changed my life and set me on a path I never could have imagined. Starting with what I learned from the students at Costaño Elementary, I was compelled to expand my definition of service, to become involved in effecting systemic change for students just like them. Thus, as I graduate, I put a challenge before current Stanford students: Continue doing direct service, but when it no longer feels like enough for you, take the next step. Remember that direct service at the Haas Center is the beginning, not the end, of the difference you will make in the world.

*As part of Stanford's K-12 Initiative, Education Professors Connie Juel and Paula England were awarded a research grant to disseminate the materials necessary to administer a program like Ravenswood Reads. To access the manual and videos, please visit <http://haas.stanford.edu>.*

## Donor Perspective

Since leaving Stanford I've pursued a varied career in public service,



working in the nonprofit sector and in government. I had been actively searching for an avenue to give back to Stanford for the last few years, and found that the Haas Center provided students with exactly the kind of learning and service opportunities that I felt were crucial to providing graduates with a grounding in meaningful civic engagement and community building. The Haas Center was not established until the time I graduated, so I value it perhaps even more, since I knew what a struggle it had been in the past to seek out those opportunities without a place like the Center to assist me. That's why I'm delighted to support the Haas Center.

*Brian Cheu '85 (Psychology) is Deputy Director of the San Francisco Mayor's Office of Community Investment and a member of the Haas Center National Advisory Board. At Stanford, he participated in the Volunteers in Asia program and also worked in half-way houses with residents struggling with mental disabilities. For information about becoming a donor, please visit <http://haas.stanford.edu>.*



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**Save the Date! We'd love to see you!**  
Reunion Homecoming: October 22-25, 2009  
Activities for the weekend include a Classes Without Quizzes on mentoring, the Symposium of Undergraduate Research and Public Service (SURPS, pictured here), and community service projects. Please check the Haas Center website (<http://haas.stanford.edu>) for updates.