

Read by current students, faculty, administrators, alumni and friends of the Bridging Disciplines Programs, **The Bridge** is a platform for program successes, changes, and events. **The Bridge** also serves to share news among the BDP concentrations.

## The Start of a New Academic Year...

The 2011-12 academic year brings new energy to the Bridging Disciplines Programs. With a highly successful student recruitment season in the spring, we welcomed a record number of new applicants to the programs. You can learn more about our incoming BDP students on page 6. Additionally, the BDPs have a new Academic Advising Coordinator. With experience in marketing, recruitment, assessment, and academic advising, Lauren Campbell will provide strong leadership as we continue to grow our programs. Read more about Lauren, her background, and what she's looking forward to in the upcoming year on page 2. Also in this issue, you will read accounts of summer Connecting Experiences, find out why Dr. Sean Theriault remains a committed partner to the Bridging Disciplines Programs, and learn about the accomplishments of our May 2011 graduates.

## News & Updates

- Conflict Resolution & Peace Studies is the newest BDP! This **new certificate program** offers students the opportunity to study and practice conflict resolution in a variety of different contexts. Students will explore the causes and consequences of various forms of violence, as well as the conditions of peace.
- After much discussion, the faculty panel for the International Studies program **voted to change the name** to "Global Studies." The panel believes that the new name better reflects what the program and curriculum offer students.
- Children & Society has a **new strand**: Intervention and Vulnerable Children. This strand is inspired by interests expressed in applicant essays during the Spring 2011 semester, and it gives students the opportunity to explore issues related to disabilities, abuse, and socioeconomic disadvantages.
- BDP alumni and current students are encouraged to **get connected on LinkedIn**. Search for "UT Bridging Disciplines Alumni Network." The group will serve as a forum for graduate/professional contacts, networking opportunities, and career advice.
- **Like Us on Facebook**. Search for "Bridging Disciplines Programs - UT Austin."

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## An Interview with Lauren Campbell

*Lauren Campbell joined the Bridging Disciplines Programs in June 2011 as the Academic Advising Coordinator. In her position, Lauren oversees advising services, events, and outreach activities for current and prospective students.*

### **Q: What are you looking forward to in your work with the BDPs?**

A: I love that the value and experience of the BDPs draw such a range of students from across campus. I am looking forward to hearing about all the wonderful research and internships students are doing and how it impacts their future goals and worldviews.

### **Q: If you could choose a BDP, what topic would you choose?**

A: This is tough because there are so many good ones. If I could redo the academic aspect of my undergrad years, I would probably major in Sociology and the Human Rights & Social Justice BDP (Social Groups and Social Justice and Theory, Policy, and Institutions) would make a great addition to that major. In my doctoral coursework I have taken several social justice-oriented courses in Education, Social Work and Public Affairs, and I have found it fascinating to research the views of such a broad topic through so many disciplines. Studying social justice and education go hand-in-hand, so that BDP is the most interesting ... although I could go on about all of them.

### **Q: Looking back at your college years, what advice would you have given to yourself?**

A: Try to do it all (within reason)! I feel like I really took advantage of a lot of opportunities as an undergraduate but maybe I could have done more. I spent a fall semester studying in Madrid, Spain, and I was anxious to come back to Boston University for the spring semester, but I now wish I would have taken that whole year abroad to have two varied experiences, as it would have been great to live in a South American country as well. Believe me, you will never be at your retirement party saying, “Gee, I regret going on that study abroad program,” or “I wish I would have graduated early.” College is a fantastic time, so make the most of it.

### **Q: What is one thing that BDP students should do to enhance their BDP experience?**

A: Try to start the program early so you don’t put off courses and overlook opportunities. I know that’s easier said than done, but I read the graduating student survey and so many have responded that they wish they had found their BDP sooner or at least gotten involved earlier in their curriculum. The more faculty you interact with and the more opportunities you take to meet with your BDP advisor, the more research and internship options you’ll have—and that all takes time.

### **Q: What do you enjoy doing outside of work?**

A: In addition to working on campus, I am also a Ph.D. student at UT studying higher education administration, so I don’t have much time outside of being a mommy, work, and school. But when I can, I like to cook by experimenting with new vegetables, and I try to exercise when I can because it gives me so much energy. Before my son was born, my husband and I were huge film and theatre buffs, but now my screen and stage viewing has dropped off tremendously, and that’s okay with me because we have new adventures. I love to travel so any chance I get to go explore some place new, I will take it.



Photo courtesy of David Fisher

## Connecting Experience Spotlight: A Case Study of Río Plátano, Honduras

by David Fisher, Environment BDP

When planning my Connecting Experience, I already knew that I was interested in tourism and how it can be developed responsibly as a tool for conservation. This basic idea led me to Honduras and the Río Plátano Biosphere Preserve. The Preserve is an internationally protected body of land housing the largest intact rainforest outside of the Amazon. There, indigenous groups have developed rustic adventure tourism destinations in hopes of creating jobs, incentivizing conservation, and improving economic opportunity. After choosing the location I wanted to go to and the research questions I wanted answered, I was lucky enough to receive generous scholarships from the BDPs and the College of Liberal Arts. I bought my plane ticket, and with admittedly little preparation, I started the trip.

Before coming to Honduras I had never been to a place quite so different from my day-to-day experiences. I was unprepared for the amount of poverty and the lack of law and order I would encounter there. The life I led for a short time, without running water or electricity, in grass huts in the jungle or in disorderly cities taught me that I really could thrive in such conditions, away from any support system in a place that was completely foreign to me.

I collected and analyzed data on three remote communities and their tourism development programs for six weeks. The case study included a field journal, document collection, and a casebook including more than forty recorded interviews with key informants. Through this Connecting Experience, I got first-hand knowledge of field techniques used in the social sciences, applied concepts that I had learned about in college courses, and came to realize that environmental and conservation issues are inseparable from social, economic, and political ones. But more than anything, I learned my own potential as a social scientist and my limits as a traveler in extreme locations.

This Connecting Experience was incredibly valuable for me; it showed me that I can use my skills and what I've learned in my undergraduate experience to create tangible change in the world. I feel lucky to have been given the opportunity to work in a place I'd always dreamt of, towards the cause of conservation, and to apply research techniques I'd only read about in the classroom. I can honestly say that I have done nothing more exciting or interesting in my life.



Photo courtesy of David Fisher

# Connecting Experience Spotlight: Habitat for Humanity in Austin, TX

by Stephanie Shih, Social Entrepreneurship & Non-profits BDP

Habitat for Humanity was one of those organizations I've known about and volunteered with since middle school. So when Michael Willard, the Executive Director of Austin Habitat for Humanity, came to speak at my BDP 101: Intro to Non-Profits class, I didn't hesitate to go up to him after class and ask if they had any internship opportunities available for the summer. As a matter of fact they did, he told me, and they were looking for a Finance/Accounting intern. Luckily for me, that was right up my alley. As a Business Honors and Plan II major, I came into BDP hoping to find a way to use my Business degree towards something meaningful, and this seemed like the perfect fit. He put me into contact with Mat King, the CFO of Habitat, and from there I was on my way to becoming the affiliate's first Accounting intern.

I spent most of my days in the office working with Excel and Great Plains (the accounting software Habitat uses), but I also got the chance to attend board meetings, work with other departments, and volunteer at a construction site to witness how all the different parts work together. After being exposed to the different sides of the organization, from the on-the-ground work to the behind-the-scenes work, I learned a lot about Habitat as a whole. I realized that what makes Habitat such a successful non-profit are its connections, its diverse revenue streams, and most importantly, its role in the community. Habitat uses hundreds of thousands of volunteers every year to work on sites, and the work of the organization lends itself to playing a big role in the community by not only transforming the lives of families, but also in turn transforming different areas of the city.

Beyond learning more about the organization and honing the accounting skills I picked up in class, the most valuable part of the internship was how much I learned about myself in the process. I realized, after the cycle of cash flow statements, month-end entries, and various other financial statements and spreadsheets, that I'm not meant for the average 9-5 desk job. There is something more that my heart yearns for than the structure and stability that a corporate accounting job offers. But when the work failed to excite me each day, I found that it was the subtle reminders of Habitat's mission to provide safe and affordable housing to low-income families that fueled me through the mundane tasks. It is through those moments that I better understood my desire to work for non-profits and came to realize that it is as much the passion for the cause as it is the passion for the work itself that motivates me. So while my career path may not be crystal clear at this point, I at least know what I want in my future job; that is, a cause that I'm passionate about and a mission that I believe in.

Tell Us Your BDP Story  
Email us at [bdp@austin.utexas.edu](mailto:bdp@austin.utexas.edu)

If you are a current student and wish to share your Connecting Experience journey with us, we are always seeking stories to publish online or in *The Bridge*. If you are an alum, we would love to hear what you're doing and share your news with other alumni and current students.





## Faculty Highlight: Dr. Sean Theriault

*Dr. Sean Theriault is an Associate Professor in the Department of Government. He is the recipient of several teaching awards, including the Friar Centennial Teaching Fellowship (2009), the Texas Exes Teaching Excellence Award (2007), and the President's Associates Teaching Excellence Award (2006). His primary research interest is the United States Congress, and his latest work focuses on the Gingrich Senators and the polarization within the U.S. Congress. Dr. Theriault serves on the faculty panel for the Ethics & Leadership BDP.*



**Q: How did you get involved with the Bridging Disciplines Programs faculty panel?**

A: I got involved back when Lucia Gilbert was running the program. She had come to learn about my research program in the Government department and thought that it would provide the perfect experiences for BDP students. When she asked me to join, I was flattered and quickly agreed.

**Q: What do you enjoy the most about working with the Bridging Disciplines Programs?**

A: I like how there is both a research and work experience component. BDP students are encouraged to use their in-class resources to better understand research (what it is that professors do) and the real world (what it is that professionals do). Such a context can be invaluable as we seek to understand the society in which we live and seek solutions to public policy problems.

**Q: You have served as a faculty mentor for many of the Ethics & Leadership students. What projects stand out to you?**

A: It is not the projects that stand out as much as it is the students who stand out. The projects, for good and bad, are experiences in an education. The learning that goes into the projects, though, lasts a lifetime for the students. While it might be understanding the role of women in politics in a BDP project, it transforms into understanding how poor girls can succeed in an education system that too frequently leaves them behind. It is the transferring of how to study something that really matters, not really the topic of the project.

**Q: What do you study and why do you think it is important?**

A: I study the Congress. Congress is the linchpin for American democracy. It is most citizens' first entry point to the system of government.

**Q: In your studies of American political institutions, what surprises you?**

A: I'm always amazed at the genius of the founders in setting up the system. What started as an experiment has grown, developed, and prospered for more than 200 years. It hasn't always been easy, but we—as a country—seem to lose our footing when we take our eyes off the system that framers developed in the eighteenth century.

**Q: Looking back at your college years, what advice would you have given to yourself?**

A: This will sound strange coming from a person who studies the Congress, but I wish that I had studied abroad. I really missed out on what could have been an awesome experience.

**Q: If you could choose another career, what would it be?**

A: Yikes. Any alternative I can think of has its roots in politics. But, um, no thanks. I would rather study it than be in it.

**Q: What do you enjoy doing outside of teaching and research?**

A: Playing tennis, running, and traveling.

**Q: What do you spend your time reading—for scholarship and for fun?**

A: I'm embarrassed to say, but for scholarship, I read books about Congress written by other political scientists, for fun I read books about Congress written by members of Congress or journalists. How boring is that?

## Spring 2011 Admit Profile

In May 2011, we welcomed 121 new students to the Bridging Disciplines Programs. Representing over 50 academic majors—with significant representation from Biology, Government, and the College of Communication—these students are motivated and passionate about complimenting their fields of study with an interdisciplinary education. Take a look at the representation across BDPs:

<b>Bridging Disciplines Program</b>	<b>Number of Admits</b>
Children & Society	13
Cultural Studies	5
Digital Arts & Media	17
Environment	9
Ethics & Leadership	13
Film Studies	1
Global Studies (formerly International Studies)	12
Human Rights & Social Justice	12
Innovation, Creativity & Entrepreneurship	11
Social Entrepreneurship & Non-profits	15
Social Inequality, Health & Policy	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>121</b>

During the application process, these students expressed ambitions to intern with the United Nations, Project Vote Smart, TOMS Shoes, the Texas Tribune, the Center for Disease Control, Austin Green Art, and TIME magazine. Furthermore, their research interests include human impact on ecosystems, global markets, multimedia interactive websites, urban design, and Japanese folklore. The Bridging Disciplines Programs website will be updated frequently with Connecting Experience profiles as the students embark on these exciting opportunities.

## Spring 2011 Graduate Profile

At the close of the Spring semester, 60 students across the BDPs graduated with certificates. Almost one-third of the graduating class were Ethics & Leadership students. Representing nearly 50 areas of study, this outstanding group of students completed 59 research projects and 53 internships. These Connecting Experiences spanned the country and covered the globe! From Alaska to Washington, D.C., students also traveled to Mexico, Peru, Argentina, Brazil, India, Ghana, Switzerland, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

The graduates wrote integration essays prior to graduation, offering thoughtful reflections on their experiences and confirming the value their interdisciplinary coursework brought to their studies. To all May graduates, we bid you farewell and best wishes in your future endeavors.

To see what our alumni have been up to since graduation, visit the BDP website. To stay connected, BDP alumni are encouraged to join the UT Bridging Disciplines Alumni Network on LinkedIn.

*Visit us online at [www.utexas.edu/ugs/bdp](http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/bdp)*