Finding Peace in a Troubled World

Terrorism in Paris. Shootings in schools and movie theaters. For children, these events can be especially frightening, and UMass Lowell graphic design Asst. Prof. Ingrid Hess is using art to help young people cope with and understand these dangerous days.

“It’s easy to feel powerless when confronted by news of terror and war. Rather than telling myself there is nothing I can do to make a positive change in the world, I focus on art,” Hess says.

“Art is a particularly effective tool when educating young children about peace. Even when children can’t read, they are able to understand visual images and create their own. Exposing children to images and teachings about peace helps them become peacemakers themselves,” she says.

Hess’ solo exhibit “Why Peace?” is showing in Dayton, Ohio, at the Dayton International Peace Museum, a non-profit institution with a focus on inspiring peace. Founded in 2004, the museum honors the 1995 Dayton Peace Accords that ended the war in Bosnia.

The Dayton exhibit presents 22 cut-paper prints, each of which focuses the viewer’s attention on a subject—flowers, for example—that is accompanied by a verbal description of how a child might use the subject in peacemaking, like giving a flower to a friend. The show also includes a large panel depicting people of all races interacting peacefully with each other.

Hess’ exhibit is accompanied by a workshop in which children and adults are asked to come up with additional subjects for peace, create images of their own and think about how they can be peacemakers.

“Why Peace?” will be at the Dayton International Peace Museum through January 2016.
Diagnosing TB? There’s an App for That

Researchers Use Smartphones to Improve TB Diagnosis in Peru

A team of researchers led by UMass Lowell faculty is using smartphone technology to help improve the diagnosis of people afflicted with tuberculosis, a chronic and infectious disease that disproportionately affects poor and marginalized communities. Last year, 9.6 million people around the world became sick with TB, and 1.5 million died of TB-related complications, according to the World Health Organization.

“This is unacceptable, considering TB is curable and preventable,” says Assoc. Prof. Maria Julia Brunette of Work Environment and Computer Science Assoc. Prof. Benyuan Liu and Asst. Prof. Yu Cao to develop a mobile device-based, computer-aided system for TB screening that would reduce wait times for patients by speeding up the diagnosis so they can start the treatment right away. Brunette, Liu and Cao are the principal investigators for the project, which is being funded by a four-year, $1.3 million grant from the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation through the interagency program Smart and Connected Health. A group of Peruvian physicians from Partners in Health Peru are also direct collaborators.

The goal of the project is to provide a cloud-based tool for nurses and health-care workers at remote TB clinics to capture, process and analyze images of film chest X-rays brought by the patients. The images are transmitted to a server in the cloud, where doctors in the city can access the images, confirm the diagnosis and send results back to the mobile-device user. This process can potentially reduce wait times from weeks to days.

If successful, the project will eventually be applied in low- and middle-income communities in the United States and elsewhere.

Student Vet Fights Battle for Benefits

New App Would Cut through Red Tape

David Tetreault, a senior in the Manning School of Business, spent a harrowing year in Afghanistan as a Massachusetts National Guardsman assigned to provide security for those working to restore infrastructure.

And now he’s using the university’s Difference-Maker program to help the flood of other returning veterans cut through red tape and confusion. Tetreault and his team are designing a web platform to help veterans get the benefits they need from the Veterans Administration.

His teammates include another active National Guard and criminal justice major Brian Holt, plastics engineering major Terry Fox-Koor, business major Maria Gottshall and Ann McGill, a professor of English as a second language.

Their final product will guide veterans through the application for disability benefits by asking a few clear, concise questions.

“It’s awful,” says Tetreault, scrolling through the current online application. “I don’t even know the acronyms. This is what needs fixing.”

“I went through three years of school, always thinking, what am I going to do with my life? And then I heard Ralph Jordan (the Manning School of Business lecturer) say, during a DifferenceMaker event, ‘If you know of a problem, bring it forward.’”

Two Heads Are Better than One

Health Students Collaborate to Improve Care

Sophomore nursing student Brandon Moore listened carefully as a seven-month pregnant patient described numbness and pain in her arm. Working side-by-side with physical therapy students, Moore realized the power of collaboration in health care.

“Two heads are better than one—that was demonstrated during this activity,” he says. “I learned that if people from many health fields work together, we can come to a diagnosis faster, which is very helpful in patient care and recovery. I think the PT students held the missing puzzle pieces in my own diagnoses, and vice versa.”

The patients were actually community volunteers who simulated scenarios developed by faculty to train students on working together.

This is one example of Interprofessional Education (IPE) in action in the College of Health Sciences. Recommended by the Institute of Medicine and the World Health Organization, IPE teaches students how to work effectively in teams so that patients are more likely to receive safe, quality care. Dean Shortie McKinney recently awarded five grants to faculty to develop IPE teaching ideas.

“Our goal is to train students to work together with other health professionals so that when they enter the health care field, they hit the ground running for the benefit of their patients,” McKinney says.

Community volunteer RaeAnn Dopson, center, explains her symptoms to nursing student Nicole Kebler and physical therapy students Amy Aiello and Matt Mailhot.
Students Become Teachers for Lowell Kids

Literacy Improvement Collaboration Benefits City, Students

When Patrick, a third-grader from the Bartlett Community Partnership School, entered the buzzing classroom in O’Leary 478, he scoured the crowd for Shamus Ricardo, his literacy buddy from UMass Lowell. When he spied him, Patrick made a mad dash to Ricardo’s side, and the pair admired a near-life-sized version of Benjamin Franklin they’d created together over several weeks.

The celebration was the culmination of a service-learning outreach effort designed to improve literacy among elementary school students. Under the program, freshmen in English Department Lecturer Matthew Hurwitz’s College Writing class visited the Bartlett School in Lowell for several weeks, selecting and reading books with second- and third-grade student partners.

“Getting off campus and into elementary school classrooms is a powerful way for our students to transcend and expand their horizons,” Hurwitz says. “This work went beyond only asking them to write some prescribed number of pages on something they’ve read, and instead extended a wider focus on things that affect literacy, like class, race and identity.”

“I can’t overstate how powerful it is for these children to visit this university campus,” says Bartlett principal Peter Holtz. “I hope they’ll remember this day and know that they, too, can realize their college dreams.”

At the close of the celebration, UMass Lowell students gave their partners copies of the books they liked most in elementary school. The Bartlett students clutched their gifts and headed back to school.

Elementary school and university students celebrate the service-learning partnership designed to improve literacy for second and third graders while enriching the College Writing curriculum for university freshmen.

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Emeriti Chemistry Professors Pay it Forward

Blumsteins Endow New Scholarship

Education is not something that Alexandre and Rita Blumstein, both Holocaust survivors, ever took for granted. That’s why the emeriti chemistry professors decided to endow a new scholarship for chemistry students.

The Blumsteins were born in Poland in the years immediately before World War II, Alex in 1930, Rita in 1937. Unlike the vast majority of Polish Jews, their immediate families survived the war, but not without great hardship: Rita was sent with her family to a Soviet work camp, and Alex’s family spent 18 months in hiding in a cramped, earthen cellar in a rural village close to the front lines. For four years, the teenage Alex had no schooling.

Their circumstances didn’t entirely ease with the war’s end, given Poland’s lingering anti-Semitism, which, Rita says, “made us foreigners in our own country.” Both families eventually immigrated to France, and Alex and Rita found themselves scrambling to adjust to new languages and schools. Both went on to study at the Sorbonne, where they met.

“Chemistry became my lifeline,” says Alex. “I had my beloved chemistry, and I could pour all my energy into it and forget about everything else.”

Chemistry also became their passport to the United States, where they moved in 1960 when Alex took a job with a Pennsylvania engineering firm. In 1964, he joined the faculty at Lowell Technological Institute, where, as the first faculty member to receive a National Science Foundation grant, he became something of a founding father of the department’s research efforts. Rita joined the department in 1974, and worked to bring more young women into the sciences. While they formally retired in the 1990s, both remained active at the university for many years.

“When I look back on my life,” says Alex, “the university has done so much for me. It took a refugee and gave me an opportunity.” The scholarship the Blumsteins have created will provide that same opportunity—that lifeline—to a new generation of chemistry students.

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Sdoia Spreads Power of Positivity

Marathon Bombing Survivor Brings Inspiring Message to Her Alma Mater

She was there as featured guest of the Manning School of Business’ new Women in Business Speaker Series, but the message Boston Marathon bombing survivor Roseann Sdoia delivered to a packed Moloney Hall crowd applied to everyone, regardless of gender or career path.

Sdoia, a 1991 graduate of the business school, lost her right leg in the 2013 Boylston Street bombings that killed three and wounded more than 260. She shared the life lessons that are still helping her get through the ordeal—keep a positive attitude, rely on the support of others and always set new goals.

Sdoia, a Dracut native, talked about her love of attending the marathon and cheering on friends. She showed a photo of herself standing behind a barricade near the finish line—with convicted bomber Dzhokhar Tsarnaev standing in the background—moments before the blast.

“I saw two flashes of light at my feet and then everything went blank,” said Sdoia, who survived thanks to the aid of Northeastern University student Shores Salter, police officer Shana Cottone and firefighter Mike Materia, along with her own instinct to remain calm.

“I knew that taking on the feeling of the chaos that surrounded me would not do me any good.”

“Hatred takes so much more energy, so why waste that on them? I need that energy to keep moving forward,” said Sdoia, who did testify against Dzhokhar Tsarnaev during his federal trial last spring in Boston.

Returning to her alma mater and seeing the campus transformation “almost makes me want to go back to college—almost,” joked Sdoia.

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Writing curriculum for university freshmen.

third graders while enriching the College

designed to improve literacy for second and third-grade student partners.

Elementary school and university students celebrate the service-learning partnership designed to improve literacy for second and third graders while enriching the College Writing curriculum for university freshmen.

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Life on South Campus Will Never Be the Same

Dining, living and learning on South Campus is about to improve in a big way thanks to the $34 million renovation of the McGauvran Center.

After more than a year of construction, the completely reimagined McGauvran Center was unveiled for members of the UMass Lowell community at a ribbon cutting and reception on Dec. 8. Following a “soft opening” in mid-January, the center will officially open for business when spring classes start on Jan. 19.

The new McGauvran Center features 52,000 square feet of dining options, study spaces and lounging areas, making it the hub of student life on South Campus.

From the main ground-floor entrance opposite O’Leary Library, students will find the all-you-care-to-eat South Campus Dining facility featuring “home-cooked” entrees at Full Plate, pizza and pasta at Aroma, sandwiches from Broadway Deli, a salad bar at Wilder Farms, gluten-free options at Choices and late-night takeout from Grill Out. There is seating for 400 on the first floor, including a bright and open section with a two-story glass wall providing a view of the South Campus quad.

The aroma of fresh-baked bread and coffee greets guests on the second floor, which connects to O’Leary Library and has seating for another 400 students, including several tables and chairs on a new outdoor terrace. In addition to a bakery and café, the second level features retail food options at Subway and Freshii, a Canadian chain specializing in wraps, burritos, salads and smoothies. Grab-and-go options are also available at the Merrimack Market.

The second floor is haloed by the balcony of the third floor, which is accessible by a new central staircase and also connects to O’Leary. Students may study by the fireplace in the learning common while faculty may take advantage of a private lounge. The third floor also features seven new smart classrooms and seminar areas, including one for 35 students and another for 50.

Once McGauvran opens, demolition of the Mill City Restaurant will begin in February, clearing the way for green space that will extend from O’Leary Library all the way to Coburn Hall.

While most of the McGauvran Center’s original structural “bones” remain in place, it was re-designed with energy efficiency and conservation in mind, in keeping with the university’s sustainability goals. Lighting control systems with occupancy sensors will minimize energy use, while low-flow toilets and sinks with automated sensors will help conserve water. Food waste will be composted, while newly planted trees and landscaping will help absorb carbon dioxide.

McGauvran Center is named after Mary E. McGauvran, the university’s former vice president of student affairs who died in 2014 at age 96.