Putting theory into practice

From creative approaches in music education to graduate seminars that join social work and law students, graduate programs at MSU are inviting students to branch out from traditional pedagogical and theoretical practices. This issue of The Graduate Post highlights the diverse ways in which graduate students are applying their knowledge in settings on campus and beyond -- putting theory into practice.

During a rehearsal for “The Marriage of Figaro,” Raphael Jimenez, doctoral student in Music Conducting, leads the MSU Chamber Orchestra from Fairchild Theater’s orchestra pit. Story on page 12.
Welcome to the Spring 2001 edition of The Graduate Post!

As in all of our issues, we highlight the achievements of graduate students who, along with the faculty, share the rigors and rewards of the graduate education process. In this issue we honor Jan Bulman, a doctoral student in the Department of History, and recipient of the prestigious Newberry Fellowship, as well as 71 graduate students who interacted with disciplinary colleagues by presenting their research at professional meetings across the United States and around the world. In addition, we summarize two summer research programs that provide an opportunity for potential or newly-admitted ALANA* graduate students to gain experience in conducting research.

We also highlight creative approaches to graduate education that diverge from the more traditional pedagogical and theoretical practices of many disciplines. This issue’s theme, “putting theory into practice,” focuses on just a few of the innovative ways that graduate education at Michigan State is changing and improving.

We specifically note three graduate programs that emphasize the application of knowledge beyond the disciplines. The first is the Multidisciplinary Graduate Training Program on Technologies for a Biobased Economy. This program, led by Dr. Mark Worden from the Department of Chemical Engineering, crosses collegial boundaries by including faculty from both the College of Engineering and the College of Natural Science. This program incorporates an Industrial Advisory Committee, an industrial internship, participation in the Certification in College Teaching program, and a Multidisciplinary Bioprocessing Laboratory (MBL) course, into its requirements.

I find the MBL course to be a particularly noteworthy and worthwhile addition to this graduate curriculum. Similar to the advice given by industrial boards of advisors to the professionally-based master’s degree programs in the College of Natural Science (http://www.ns.msu.edu/prospective/grad/profmasters.htm), the ability to conduct research effectively in multidisciplinary teams is highly valued by the private sector. This course requires intensive work with a faculty mentor on a “real-world” problem. We applaud the faculty and graduate students who participate in this program and look forward to a report in the future on their accomplishments.

A second program of note is a set of exciting graduate programs that engage the faculty and graduate students in the School of Music. These programs include several master’s degree programs, Ph.D. degree and Doctor of Musical Arts (D.M.A.) degree programs. If you are not familiar with the D.M.A. degree, I encourage you to turn to page 12 and “meet” several current students who are pursuing this degree programs. There are also a number of examples of putting theory into practice, including the performance programs. You can learn more about these talented students and faculty by attending concerts and events hosted by the School of Music (www.music.msu.edu/events.html).

Our final feature on “putting theory into practice” introduces the graduate programs in the School of Social Work. These programs are inextricably connected to the community and to the School’s outreach programs as they prepare future clinicians and policy leaders for the challenges of the future. The School offers both a master’s and a doctoral degree and is engaged in distance education formats to meet the needs of students in Michigan and beyond. We are pleased to recognize these faculty and graduate students for effectively and coherently integrating research, teaching and outreach.

Finally, we provide an overview of the Graduate School’s role in the review of graduate programs. We are supporting the process of graduate program review in a number of departments and colleges across the campus. As faculty consider their graduate curricula, the opinions of their colleagues on the future of their disciplines, the needs and desires of the various employment sectors and of their own graduate students, and the unique ways that their graduate programs fit Michigan State University, graduate program review can provide an opportunity to study and reflect on these issues in a systematic way, to invite colleagues to provide advice and to think and plan for the future. We encourage faculty to fully participate in this process of review and renewal. Please contact my office for more information on how the Graduate School can assist you in graduate program review.

This is the last issue for our Editor-in-chief, Patty Payette, a doctoral student in the Department of English. Patty has been our editor for these past 2 issues and plans to defend her dissertation later this spring. She has accepted as position as a Program Associate at the University of Michigan’s Center for Research on Teaching and Learning. Congratulations, Patty! I thank you for your commitment and enthusiasm, as well as for the high quality of your work.

I wish everyone a safe and happy summer.

Karen L. Klomparens
Dean of the Graduate School

*ALANA stands for African American, Latino(a)/Chicano(a), Asian/Pacific American and Native American
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