

In this issue: introducing the Interdisciplinary Self-Designed Program (ISD)

Director's Letter:
"A Culmination and
a New Beginning"
Page 2

Program News:
ISD and Returning
Adult Students
Page 3

**Returning
Student
Profiles**
Page 4-5

**First-person
Discoveries:**
Shelby Lasaine
Page 6

Student Resources
New Library
Technology
Page 7

Convergence

A publication for students and alumni of DePaul University's Interdisciplinary Self-Designed Program
Spring 2018

New beginnings: MALS/IDS Programs becomes Interdisciplinary Self-Designed Program (ISD)

Interdisciplinary Self-Designed Program (ISD)

Master of Arts in
Liberal Studies

Master of Arts in
Interdisciplinary
Studies

Master of Science
in Interdisciplinary
Studies

Susan Jacobs, Associate Director

We are pleased to announce an important change to MALS/IDS. Our new program name, **Interdisciplinary Self-Designed Program (ISD)**, finally brings our MALS and IDS students under one academic umbrella. All the great program flexibility will remain the same for all MALS and IDS students; the new name solidifies our identity and will help us streamline many administrative processes.

Our students make **ISD** unique; our programs are distinct in and of them-

selves, especially in the Chicago academic community. DePaul's MALS program is the only graduate liberal studies program in the Chicago market that gives students access to most of its masters-level offerings in the humanities and social sciences, notwithstanding prerequisites in some cases. DePaul's IDS program is the only multi-disciplinary "design-your-own" masters-level program in the Chicago region that allows students to draw from graduate level course offerings from most areas in the university.

Each of the three degree programs (MALS, MA-IDS, MS-IDS) will remain

unchanged, so the degrees held by our alums will continue for our current and future students. The structure and requirements of each of the component programs will remain unchanged for the present, with only minor changes contemplated in the near future.

Our new name will help potential students looking for flexible, interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary graduate programs find us more easily. Come visit us at our new website: <https://las.depaul.edu/academics/interdisciplinary-studies/Pages/default.aspx> and our blog <https://densejoyousmodern.com/>.

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<https://las.depaul.edu/academics/interdisciplinary-studies/Pages/default.aspx>

Blog:

densejoyousmodern.com

Facebook:

[facebook.com/1160893980633827](https://www.facebook.com/1160893980633827)

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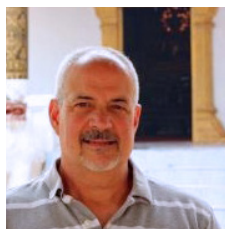
*A publication for students and
alumni of DePaul University's
ISD Program*

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Director's Letter



This issue marks a culmination and a new beginning. It's the culmination of a long process that began five years ago with our Academic Program Review of 2013-14.

Our external reviewers noted the academic excellence of our programs, the extraordinary level of satisfaction among current students and alums, and the great pleasure our faculty took in guiding our self-motivated and highly creative students. At the same time, they pointed out that our potential student audiences might not recognize that "Master of Arts in Liberal Studies & MA/MS in Interdisciplinary Studies" could be the exact program they were looking for. In the university setting, "liberal studies" and "interdisciplinary" are terms with established meanings. "Liberal Studies" refers to a broad-based program in the humanities, social sciences and physical sciences, whereas "Interdisciplinary signifies bringing those fields together to create new and multi-faceted knowledge. Uniquely in DePaul's interdisciplinary programs, we also welcome professionally-oriented courses in business, education, computer science, digital media, and communication. Our reviewers pointed out that not only is "MALS & IDS" difficult to understand, but the chief feature of our program—the ability to design one's own course of graduate study—wasn't conveyed in our name.

This observation began a multi-year process of proposing a single new name to embrace both of our mysteriously acronymed programs. In the end, we decided on Interdisciplinary Self-Designed Program, which we hope will become known as ISD. We received wonderful support for our proposal from our home College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences via former Associate Dean Shailja Sharma, former interim Dean Lucy Reinhart, current Associate Dean Jacqueline Lazú and Dean Guillermo Vásquez de Velasco, and from the university's Faculty Council through the LAS representative to the Committee on Curriculum and Programs, Miles Harvey. We are also grateful to the School for New Learning, which also has a self-designed graduate program, the MA in Applied Professional Studies, for graciously allowing us to incorporate the

term in our name. We know that potential students will investigate both programs to find the one that fits their needs.

This is not only a culmination, but a beginning. For the ISD Director, Associate Director and Policy Committee, the name change also signals new opportunities to communicate our availability to people looking to pursue a masters degree, but not finding one that exactly meets their needs. Some of our students combine courses in various liberal arts programs, say sociology and women's and gender studies, while others seek to develop professional expertise in fields such as public service and journalism. We've had quite a few students who do graduate work in education and other fields, or combine business areas such as marketing and finance with psychology or writing. How about combining work in digital cinema with studies in English, writing, or modern languages? We've had students who have done all these, and more.

We pride ourselves on the individualized guidance we provide to each student. It can be challenging to create a program tailored to your needs from hundreds of university offerings in six different colleges. We've had many years of experience helping students do exactly that, and we work closely with DePaul's many student-focused support centers, such as the Career Center and Writing Center. Whether you're looking to broaden your academic and professional skills for a career move, to gain additional expertise in an area in which you're already established, to gain the knowledge base in public affairs to make a difference in your community, or to boldly explore the new frontiers of research in gender, race and ethnicity, the Interdisciplinary Self-Designed Program can help you create the master's program you've been searching for.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "David Gitomer".

David Gitomer, Ph.D.
DIRECTOR, ISD

Program News

Returning students: You can go home again, even if the route has changed considerably ...

Susan Jacobs, Associate Director

DePaul's Interdisciplinary Self-Designed (ISD) Program, formerly called the MALS/IDS Programs, occupies an academic niche that's home to a unique group of students. Our self-constructed, highly individualized graduate programs often appeal to returning adult students who may have been out of the workforce for a while, adults who have been in the workforce and away from academia, and those who have identified specific academic/professional goals that span multiple disciplines.

The ISD Program requires, to a certain extent, a different mindset than that required by traditional cohort programs. Marriage, child-rearing, elder care, military service, professional involvement, and health issues all challenge the returning adult learner's availability and sense of mission. One particular characteristic of our adult learners is that because their lives are complicated, their studies might be more likely interrupted or extended than traditional students.

Some of our students have to interrupt their studies for very long stretches, sometimes for months, and in some cases, years.

Where traditional grad students might finish their studies and complete their capstone project in 2-3 years, our students might leave their studies for anywhere from a couple of years to a decade. And yet another group of students tackle their courses one per quarter, and in some cases, one per year.



In our 2008 annual assessment, we analyzed the issue of having far too many students complete their coursework, and then for various reasons, stop just before launching into their dissertation or practicum. We wanted our students to succeed, so we worked on ways to bring them back, keeping in mind that each student's time demands differed greatly.

We addressed this problem by creating more flexible

completion options. These options appealed to many of our students whose studies had been interrupted, and over the past 10 years, the MALS/IDS completion rate strengthened considerably. Students who had been away from the program for years returned to complete their degrees; new students who might not have been drawn to a traditional program found MALS/IDS flexibility attractive and manageable.

This background leads to the stories we love to tell. I am always in awe of what our students achieve academically; I am equally in awe of what they accomplish in their personal lives. Some students take time off to contribute to political movements; some deal with serious, life-changing health issues. Many have families, career shifts, they move across or out of the country, or their interests and areas of expertise take dramatic turns.

The returning adult who has experienced more of life's complexities is that much more likely to find deeper focus, more targeted goals, and heightened awareness of the value of the endeavor.

To learn more about our program, visit <https://las.depaul.edu/academics/interdisciplinary-studies/pages/default.aspx>.

Student Achievements

Congratulations to Rachel Conrad!

Rachel is graduating at the end of the year and will be completing her degree with distinction.

Congratulations to Jennifer Rhee!

In 2017, Jennifer graduated and completed her degree with distinction.

Congratulations to Sana Bell and Estella Achinko!

Sana and Estella presented the following papers at Crossing Boundaries, the LAS Graduate Student Conference:

Sana Bell

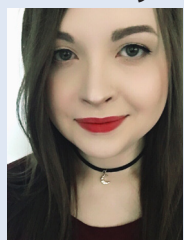
"Understanding the Role of Curriculum as Preparation: K-12 Curriculum & Social Emotional Development"

Estella Achinko

"Women's Slave Labor in The Middle East: An African Centered Perspective"

Have you recently received an academic award or another form of recognition? We want to hear about it! Send us an email and we will share your achievement with the program.

Brittany Schmitt: Student Assistant



In April 2018, Brittany Schmitt re-joined the ISD family as the returning Student Assistant. Brittany is a second year masters student in the Writing and Publishing Program.

Brittany writes and reads across a variety of genres and forms. She hopes to write young adult literature that provides young women with positive role models.

You can reach her via email at bschmitt@depaul.edu or by phone at 773-325-7840.

Returning Student



Valerie Coleman MALS, 2015

“During the course of multiple health complications, I decided to finish my thesis. I beat cancer and survived a stroke, so I could move ahead and finish the thesis. With the help of five university professors and our MALS director, I received my master’s degree in 2015. I began in 2003, and achieved a beginning, middle and an end that reflects my life, my work, and my academic journey.”

Valerie began her MALS program in 2003; she had earned her BA in Entertainment Management/Music Marketing from Columbia College in 1992. Her professional credits include writing and editing freelance articles published in Exhale Magazine, The Post Tribune (IND), Correspondent, Chicago PM Magazine and others.

As a MALS student, Valerie’s studies focused on Women’s and Gender Studies, with an emphasis on the roles available to African American actresses in film and on stage.

Her studies were interrupted by serious illness. She returned to complete her dissertation and earn her degree in 2014.

Her thesis that she produced for her capstone was entitled “Black Actress in American Films—a History & Critical Analysis of the Mammy/Maid Character as Nurturer and/or Buffoon and the Actresses Who’ve Portrayed Them.” Enabled by the crucial support of her thesis director, Ann Russo, and her thesis committee, Valerie’s capstone demonstrates true interdisciplinary research in popular culture.



Anna Bahow MALS, 2018

“It is vital that all people have their stories told and that everyone has a chance to listen, to learn, and to be challenged to think in new ways.”

After completing a double major in Communications and Theatre at Miami University in Ohio and then gaining experience in the larger world as a theatre director, I chose DePaul’s MALS Program to become more knowledgeable and articulate about the systems that shape our world—and to become more effective in changing them.

I finished all but my thesis when work, a death in the family and my own protracted illness pulled me away. Coming back to school after a long gap has been challenging but necessary to further my professional growth. I wanted not just the tools to tell stories but a language to challenge prejudice and create new communities.

I took a class to enable me to think like a graduate

student again and connected to other students who were also working on their theses. The Writing Center, an important resource, helped me clarify my ideas, set goals and meet deadlines. With the guidance of Dr. Royster, my thesis advisor and committee, I am busy writing and look forward to finishing my thesis and graduating in spring 2018.

I plan to seek greater professional opportunities at universities and cultural institutions and to continue to invest in breaking down barriers. I am committed to creating a space and a voice for diversity. It is vital that all people have their stories told and that everyone has a chance to listen, to learn, and to be challenged to think in new ways. There are many stories to tell.



Jennifer Rhee MALS, 2017

“*My undergraduate journey was a straight path leading to a career in teaching, whereas my graduate journey was a country mile with curves, pauses, and new paths each leading back to where I started. I am an educator, a teacher ... and I am moved by my education and am ready to empower others to be and do the same.*”

Jennifer began her MALS studies in 1999. She had taught English at Wilmette Junior High and decided to explore the MALS program. Unlike her teaching colleagues, she did not want to pursue a master's in education; instead she wanted to garner more knowledge in her content area.

Taking a break between 2001-2013 to raise her family, she resumed her studies and discovered a new academic and professional direction. She had always been solid writer, but did not view writing as her strength. She took a language and style class with a linguistics focus, found the WRD (Writing,

Rhetoric, and Discourse) department, and became hooked, finishing her MALS program with four WRD courses.

Her capstone project was based on the concept that understanding language and being able to communicate effectively was a necessary skill for students to enter into academic discourse with confidence. Her interrupted/resumed studies culminated in “Graduation with Distinction” in 2017, an excellent model for her three children and her future students to emulate in her next professional endeavor.



Erika Coble MALS, Degree Expected 2018

“*Ultimately, my time at the university helped me to understand my place in the world.*”

I started as a student at DePaul in the mid-90s. I loved that the university was in a city of neighborhoods with good public transportation and access to the lake that I could walk to. I was drawn to Liberal Studies because the course work was exactly what I wanted to learn about. Ultimately, my time at the university helped me to understand my place in the world.

It was the second trimester of my first year at DePaul that my husband came into the office where I was working to pick up his bound M.A. thesis. After I finished my course work, our life included living abroad for seven years in three countries, set-

ting in Cleveland, and having two children. More recently, I finished a second bachelor's degree in Sustainability.

Like Liberal Studies, Sustainability lends itself to learning why it matters to work to create a network of support that includes the greater community. The focus of my current project argues for the importance of including member species of the natural world in the landscapes cultivated for agriculture to further that network of cooperation. I am grateful for the support of the university these years later to complete the final project for the degree.

First-Person Discoveries

Shelby Lasaine: Conceptualizing the environment through study

Shelby Lasaine, IDS Student



I've enjoyed my time so far in the IDS program, and am looking to graduate in the summer of 2018, when I'll work on my thesis as the capstone project. My focus in IDS is in Environmental Governance and Stewardship.

My background is in International Studies, and I originally came to DePaul for my BA. My concentration was in the theory of the modern nation-state. I'm continuing my study of this by applying and further exploring systems and culture theories, specifically looking at how networks have set a new paradigm for how we in the Western world interact with, manage and govern social and natural environments. A main aspect of this is the availability of information technology, and how the large amounts of data today are understood, used and applied (or not), and how this all can be used to better inform ecological and other managerial practices.

My first conscious encounter with the concept of 'environment' as including both social and natural conditions was as an interpreter working with French speaking African refugees, which I did for several years after finishing undergraduate study. Working with individuals and hearing their lived experiences of social and economic mismanagement made what I learned in undergrad—a philosophy of social and environmental interactions as culture and economy—very real.

This experience made me recognize the role of personal narrative, and more broadly experiential knowledge, in finding solutions to environmental problems. I believe that the theoretic framework that I had from undergrad studies offered me a solid contextual reference as an interpreter, and this has made me aware and interested in how data and knowledge of situational context inform and enhance decision making. An interesting piece of the puzzle has come from nursing theory: it has solidified a concept for my thesis on the more general act of resource stewardship as a question of integral health, and how important it is to have multifaceted data and framework to deal with complex ecosystems, whether they are an individual human, a forest ecosystem, a national economy or a global common like the ocean or atmosphere.

Networks, as flows of information and resources, offer many opportunities for more attentive and informed decision making. My goal with this track of study is to conceptualize the complex structure of our Western networked society (including our legal, knowledge, and financial structures) to contribute to the causes of informed decision making, research, and innovation in the 21st century, and more specifically, how this can support good environmental and natural resource management.

To learn more about our students and their self-designed, interdisciplinary graduate programs, visit the [About Students section](#) on our blog.

From My Educated Female Self

I cannot chronicle all of my journey in this little note but I am glad to say that reaching this milestone has entailed hard work and determination. I think of my baby steps as a little girl, in the pleasant morning sun of my homeland. The parched soil and the dry Harmattan winds that coated my skin and the house and the trees with dust as I left for school every morning. All I did was cry as my mother walked me to school because I had not grasped the essence of education. I am glad my parents didn't give up on me with their help and encouraging words. I pen this note with deep appreciation for education as it has morphed me into who I am today. I have known unearthing opportunity. I have known the audacity of hope as I see no limitation for women attaining their full potential. I pen this note to the woman and girl child: do not dwell on the statistics that say 'there are close to a billion illiterate people, and most of them are women.' My educated self and millions of other women seek to make that difference through consciousness that we are the ones we've been waiting for. And still, we can rise in the earth's largess to achieve what we set out to do.

Estella Achinko, a community activist from Cameroon, is a Fulbright scholar in the ISD Program.

Student Resources

Inside look at the re-designed Richardson Library

Agustina Manrique, Contributor

DePaul's John T. Richardson Library is an important resource for ISD students and their various interdisciplinary studies and projects. Over the fall, the Richardson Library entered Phase Three of a four-part renovation designed to offer more resources and technological tools for student and faculty, according to the library website.

Previous phases of the rebuild featured the complete renovation of the first floor and the addition of the The Information Commons, which is made up of The Learning Commons, The Scholarship Lab, and Genius



Squad. The latest additions to the second floor introduces The Forum, Collaborative Research Environment (CoRE), Maker Hub, and 1581 Studios.

Megan Bernal, the Associate Librarian for Information Technology and Discovery Services, offered a first hand look at the newly redesigned library and all its new features.

Bernal explained that the first floor is a mixture of computers, soft seating, and collaborative tables. There are different types of computers upstairs, such as high powered Mac Pros, double screens, and iPad-like tablets with stylus pens that are available for check out at the circulation desk.

According to Bernal, this kind of technology wasn't widely available outside of CDM labs, so providing screens and devices to students at the library is an innovative experience.

The Forum and CoRE

The Forum and CoRE are meeting spaces which allow students to collaborate using higher powered computers than the ones on the first floor. On the second floor, there are small meeting rooms and larger training spaces designed for events, meetings, and student collaboration. These spaces are open to both students and faculty.

Maker Hub

In addition to the meeting spaces, the Maker Hub houses new technology for the DePaul library. Similar to a fab lab, a small-scale workshop offering digital fabrication, the Maker Hub is home to several types of 3D printers, laser and vinyl cutters, a computerized sewing machine and more.

"For some people, this is a radical concept in libraries, but this is something that has been going on

for more than ten years," Bernal said of the technological advancements. "Libraries are transforming into these types of spaces. The maker movement is not just in higher education and professional lives, but also in K12, so for 18-year-old students coming in, this is very familiar to them."

“People have always come to libraries to learn how to do things: whether it’s to build job skills, use a computer, or get a book that teaches them how to do something, especially in cities. We provide the space.”

1581 Studios

Lastly, the 1581 Studios are designed for the creation of media using digital audio, video composition, green screens, and more. The variety of different-sized rooms affords opportunities students in multiple endeavors. The studios offer sound-proof spaces equipped with the technology for recording, podcasting, mixing, synthesizing, and other kinds of media-based projects.

For information on the renovation of the John T. Richardson library and its resources, visit its website at library.depaul.edu.

Additional Library Resources

- **Via Sapientiae:** DePaul's Institutional Repository Service that stores and hosts locally generated scholarship from various DePaul communities. Visit via.library.depaul.edu to browse the repository.
- **Online Databases:** As a DePaul student, you have access to a plethora of online databases spanning multiple topics. You can search through these databases at library.depaul.edu.
- **Special Collections:** DePaul's Special Collections hosts materials pertaining to topics such as Chicago history, social justice, Vincentian history. Visit <https://library.depaul.edu/special-collections/Pages/default.aspx> to schedule a visit.

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 **Convergence**

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<http://densejoyousmodern.com>

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Online Resources: Meant to be used

Adult Student Affairs

[studentaffairs.depaul.edu/
adultstudentservices](http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/adultstudentservices)

Alumni Association

alumni.depaul.edu

Alumni Sharing Knowledge (ASK)

ask.depaul.edu

Campus Events

events.depaul.edu

The Career Center

careercenter.depaul.edu

Center for Students With Disabilities

[offices.depaul.edu/student-affairs/about/
departments/Pages/csd.aspx](http://offices.depaul.edu/student-affairs/about/departments/Pages/csd.aspx)

Course Catalog

sr.depaul.edu/coursecatalog

Digication

depaul.digication.com/

Financial Aid

depaul.edu/admission-and-aid/financial-aid

Financial Fitness

financialfitness.depaul.edu

Genius Squad

[offices.depaul.edu/information-services/
support/Pages/genius-squad.aspx](http://offices.depaul.edu/information-services/support/Pages/genius-squad.aspx)

LAS Grad Student Services

[las.depaul.edu/student-resources/graduate-
student-support/Pages/default.aspx](http://las.depaul.edu/student-resources/graduate-student-support/Pages/default.aspx)

Learning Commons

[library.depaul.edu/get-help/Pages/learning-
commons.aspx](http://library.depaul.edu/get-help/Pages/learning-commons.aspx)

Library

library.depaul.edu

ISD Blog

www.densejoyousmodern.com

Office for Academic Advising Support

oaas.depaul.edu

Steans Center

steans.depaul.edu

Student Involvement

studentaffairs.depaul.edu/involvement

Student Legal Services

sls.depaul.edu

Student Life

[depaul.edu/student-life/Pages/student-
organizations.aspx](http://depaul.edu/student-life/Pages/student-organizations.aspx)

Study Abroad

studyabroad.depaul.edu

Technology Training

[offices.depaul.edu/information-services/
services/technology-training/Pages/default.
aspx](http://offices.depaul.edu/information-services/services/technology-training/Pages/default.aspx)

University Counseling Services

studentaffairs.depaul.edu/ucs

**Via Sapientiae: The Institutional
Repository at DePaul University**

via.library.depaul.edu

Writing Center

condor.depaul.edu/writing/