Spring 2009

CIIS Today, Spring 2009 Issue

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Opening Up Arts Education

CIIS launches two interdisciplinary MFA programs this fall.
By Cindy Shearer

In a February New York Times article, art critic Holland Cotter laments, “The present goal of studio programs . . . seems to be to narrow talent to a sharp point that can push its way aggressively into the competitive arena.” Then he asks: “But with markets uncertain, possibly nonexistent, why not relax this mode, open up education? Why not make studio training an interdisciplinary experience . . .?” Not long thereafter, a prospective student tells me: “I enjoy the deeper inquiry at CIIS. That’s what art schools need.”

As the director of CIIS’s two new MFA programs, to be launched fall 2009—the MFA in Creative Inquiry, Interdisciplinary Arts and the MFA in Writing and Consciousness—I can happily respond to both Mr. Cotter and the prospective student: “We are and we agree.”

“OPENING UP” THE MFA

CIIS’s MFA programs have similar requirements to many other MFA programs in the United States. We offer intensive, two-year professional degrees in which artists must demonstrate a strong artistic competence and develop a substantial arts project. But Creative Inquiry, Interdisciplinary Arts and Writing and Consciousness “open up” the MFA by asking artists to do more than focus on technical mastery of artistic forms or prepare art for specific markets. We ask artists to understand themselves as responsible world citizens. We make them aware of the times in which they live—of the profound issues that affect the world now—and invite them to use that awareness in their artmaking. The result: our artists not only become more accomplished, but they also participate in an ongoing interdisciplinary dialogue with each other that shapes their lives as well as their art. “We consciously step away from the artist as isolated genius and into the artist as community member and map maker to the world(s) that could be,” says faculty member Kris Brandenburger, who is a writer and sound-text artist.
Warm greetings from the CIIS community. I hope that you and your families and friends are faring well during these difficult times for our global economy. Because many CIIS programs prepare students for service in healing and wholeness—areas that are certainly needed during these trying days—your CIIS education is especially relevant.

Over the recent years, we have prudently managed our finances and strategically adapted to economic changes. Consequently, we find ourselves doing as well as one could expect in 2009. To date, we are on a course to exceed our projections in tuition and non-tuition revenue for the present year. In addition, we are planning to renovate the library space once we have completed our fundraising campaign for the library.

You will see in this newsletter that we continue to offer programs that attract and retain students as well as address emerging social and professional needs. Our new MFA programs serve as excellent examples of how CIIS effectively blends academic excellence, artistic creativity, and career preparation into degree programs that advance our educational mission.

Fortunately, our student applications for next year are surpassing our goals for 2009–10. However, the downturn in the economy makes it harder for some very promising students to meet tuition costs, even though we have kept them to a minimum. I hope that you will consider investing in our students by contributing to our Alumni and Friends Scholarship—a contribution that you can make on our Web site at www.ciis.edu. Also when you go to our Web site, I encourage you to check out our current Public Programs offerings. We have an array of workshops, lectures, concerts, and certificate programs to help you keep strong connections to CIIS.

Wishing you all blessings and success in the coming year.

Joseph L. Subbiondo
President
Mindfulness Pioneer

Jon Kabat-Zinn

Receives CIIS Honorary Doctorate

For his lifelong commitment to bringing mindfulness into the mainstream of medicine and society, Jon Kabat-Zinn, PhD, received an honorary doctorate in Mindfulness Practice in Promoting Health and Wellness from CIIS at its 41st commencement ceremony on May 17 at San Francisco’s Palace of Fine Arts.

Kabat-Zinn is the founder and former executive director of the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society, and professor of medicine emeritus at the University of Massachusetts Medical School. He is also the founder and former director of the Stress Reduction Clinic, where mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) originated. He received his doctorate in molecular biology from MIT in 1971.

Since 1979 his research has focused on mind/body interactions for healing and on the clinical applications and cost-effectiveness of mindfulness meditation training for people with chronic pain and stress-related disorders, including a work-site study of the effects of MBSR on the brain and how it processes emotions. Kabat-Zinn also conducts annual mindfulness retreats for business leaders and, with his colleagues at the Center for Mindfulness, runs training retreats for health professionals in MBSR.

A founding fellow of the Fetzer Institute and a fellow of the Society of Behavioral Medicine, Kabat-Zinn has received many awards for his work, including the Art, Science, and Soul of Healing Award from the Institute for Health and Healing at the California Pacific Medical Center; the second annual Trailblazer Award from Scripps Center for Integrative Medicine; and an Inaugural Pioneer in Integrative Medicine Award from the Bravewell Philanthropic Collaborative for Integrative Medicine.

He is the author and coauthor of many books about mindful living, including Wherever You Go, There You Are: Mindfulness Meditation in Everyday Life; Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mindfulness; and most recently, Arriving At Your Own Door: 108 Lessons in Mindfulness.

“Dr. Kabat-Zinn, as a pioneer in mindfulness meditation to promote health and wellness, exemplifies the core values and founding spirit of CIIS,” said President Joseph Subbiondo. “We have been inspired for many years by his scholarship, and we are delighted to recognize his distinguished service to our community and the world.”

CIIS Welcomes

New Board Members

CIIS has appointed three new members to its board of trustees: Daphne White, Helen Desai, and Savita Bhan Wakhlu. These three new trustees bring many years of experience and community service to our board,” said President Joseph L. Subbiondo. “Their leadership will help us to keep providing the cutting-edge education that CIIS is renowned for.”

Daphne White holds a PhD in Psychology, as well as three master’s degrees: in Psychology, Marriage and Family Counseling, and Education. Her community involvement includes serving as chair of the board of the Institute of Noetic Sciences and of the Sonoma Ashram. She also coproduced the PBS documentary Rumi: Poet of the Heart.

Helen Desai holds a master’s degree from UC Berkeley and was a founder of the Society for the Art and Cultural Heritage of India (SACHI). In 2006 she and her husband Rajnikant Desai received CIIS’s Bina and Haridas Chaudhuri Award for Distinguished Service for their work in celebrating and preserving Indian culture in the United States. She has also served as a board member of the Cultural Integration Fellowship.

Savita Wakhlu is the managing director and founder of Jagriti Communications, a training and development firm specializing in individual and organizational learning. She relocated her firm to the U.S. in 2003. A mechanical engineer, Ms. Wakhlu graduated from the National Institute of Technology in Srinigar, India with honors and distinction. She has served as a Rotary Club president both in India and in the United States.
CIIS has allocated a total of $1.1 million in scholarships for the upcoming 2009–10 academic year, a 22 percent increase in scholarship spending from last year. This increase, and the introduction of new scholarships such as the Alumni Scholarship, signal the Institute’s commitment to expanding scholarship offerings to meet increased student need, especially during these tough economic times.

CIIS offers 14 types of scholarships from gifts, endowments, and institutional funds. According to Financial Aid Director Marisol Nealon, award amounts range from $500 to $10,000 a year, with the average award at around $2,000. In response to the overall need for more scholarship money, President Joseph Subbiondo has made a commitment to significantly boost the Institute’s general scholarship budget.

Last year CIIS also introduced the Alumni Scholarship, an annual scholarship funded by contributions from the Institute’s alumni. In its first year offering this scholarship, the Financial Aid office awarded $500 scholarships to three students. For the upcoming academic year, the Financial Aid office has selected three incoming students to receive the Alumni Scholarship and increased the annual award amount to between $1,000 and $2,500 per recipient. The scholarship is for two years or four semesters.

Although the pool of money set aside for the Alumni Scholarship has grown in size over the past year, the success of this scholarship—as well as the other scholarship funds—rests on continuing alumni contributions. “Because of the economic downturn, students need help more than ever,” says Director of Development Dorotea Reyna. “Without support in the form of scholarships, some students can’t afford to attend CIIS.”

Kendra Harris, a first-year doctoral student in the Transformative Studies program, received one of the Alumni Scholarships. She’s a New Orleans native who holds a master’s degree from Tulane University. “Being awarded the Alumni Scholarship suggests that the philosophy I’ve always believed is true: People who are ahead on any given success path tend to turn around and extend a helping hand to those currently trudging,” Harris says. “For that, I am grateful.”

Kim Cuddy, also an Alumni Scholarship recipient, is a first-year doctoral student in the Clinical Psychology program. She spent years counseling and case managing homeless, at-risk, and LGBTQ street youth in the Bay Area, New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania. She has also worked as a vegetarian chef and activist, promoting organic farming, sustainable food systems, and food justice. Cuddy thinks the scholarship affirms CIIS’s values of generosity and support for successive generations.

“Being awarded the CIIS Alumni Scholarship means that there is an interest in my presence at and contributions to CIIS,” she says. “I appreciate the values of ‘giving back’ and supporting future generations, and am very honored to be invited into that tradition at CIIS.”

To support the campaign for the Alumni Scholarship, please e-mail Director of Development Dorotea Reyna at dreyna@ciis.edu, or call her at 415.575.6135, to learn how to contribute. Your contribution is tax deductible.
of this work.” At CIIS we teach artists that awareness of values provides them with a way to “map” their creative choices so they can make authentic decisions about their art forms, audiences, and artistic purposes. Learning where their art originates or about the traditions and cultures they can draw from deepens their self-knowledge, which can lead to new artistic options and often to additional professional opportunities.

Dancer, choreographer, and faculty member Anne Bluthenthal tells students that art “reflects the truth of our moment and acts as our greatest teacher.” But as the founder and principal of her own dance company for 25 years, she is very aware that carving out time to create, looking for venues to support work, teaching, and juggling family or financial responsibilities often fully occupy artists—and that many artists rarely, if ever, have a place where they can reflect on their own work, talk deeply with other artists, or find new mentors or ways of engaging their art. CIIS’s program in Creative Inquiry, Interdisciplinary Arts provides that place.

**WRITING AND CONSCIOUSNESS**

In the MFA program in Writing and Consciousness, writers present and respond to work in more than one genre (creative nonfiction, fiction, text/image, and poetry), so they can see how multiple perspectives on writing enhance and enliven their work. They learn how one writing genre can inform and aid another.

Central to the curriculum is the idea that writers can consciously choose their writing projects and their purposes for them. In a challenging but supportive environment, they focus on their writing, while learning from the work of peers and published writers. The program invites them to bring the greater world to their writing by asking them to investigate literary canons, claim a literary lineage, and reflect on global, historical, and political contexts that influence them as artists.

“Students transcend the sometimes limiting factors of identity politics and begin to forge complex, layered identities as writers/artists,” says fiction writer and faculty member Carolyn Cooke.

Exposing writers to multiple perspectives throughout the curriculum allows them to become more aware of human conditions and diversities of all kinds, including the intellectual, cultural, ethnic, religious, and physical. “Part of what we do is to expand the range of possibilities available to students, from subject matter to artistic skills to ways of working,” says novelist and faculty member Sarah Stone.

“We emphasize learning to appreciate each other’s choices too, developing the ability to celebrate, and to intelligently critique, a wide variety of work.”

**ART IS A MEANING-MAKING PROCESS**

Our MFA programs show students that art practice is a way to engage meaning, and artmaking that is meaningful can help sustain their lives. Poet, social theorist, and faculty member Judy Grahn, who first envisioned the MFA in Creative Inquiry, Interdisciplinary Arts, tells artists if they are going to translate their deeply felt knowledge into art, they must keep their minds “alive” and continually expand their capacities. A willingness to keep learning—cognitively and artistically—is key.

**SUSTAINABLE ARTS PRACTICE**

Markets are uncertain and volatile, particularly in this economy, so we help artists to understand marketplace realities, while, at the same time, aiding them in developing new creative venues for bringing art to the world. We offer an arts laboratory for innovative, collaborative, and multigenre work. Students also prepare an artist’s portfolio and acquire skills in editing and publishing, the business of art, community arts, or teaching.

“Students can use the ideas, knowledge, and skills gained in the programs to identify possible careers that best support their lives as artists, thinkers, and/or activists,” Sarah Stone says. In Creative Inquiry, Interdisciplinary Arts, artists focus their arts practice throughout the degree in the working world of the arts. Graduates become part of a network of vital working artists.

*New York Times* art critic Holland Carter tells us that art might look very different if art schools were to change. I can assure him, at CIIS art already does. To all prospective students, I’m glad to say, “We’ve got just the place for you. Welcome.”

“Students transcend the sometimes limiting factors of identity politics and begin to forge complex, layered identities as writers/artists.”

Carolyn Cooke, fiction writer and CIIS faculty member

Professor Cindy Shearer chairs the department of Writing, Consciousness, and Creative Inquiry at CIIS. She directs the MFA in Creative Inquiry, Interdisciplinary Arts and the MFA in Writing and Consciousness. You can reach her at cshearer@ciis.edu or 415.575.6285. For more information, visit www.ciis.edu.
In Kandahar, on International Women’s Day, women clad in light blue scarves gathered publicly to pray for peace. In India, the Consortium of Pub-Going, Loose and Forward Women organized a pink underwear campaign. Medea Benjamin and Alice Walker, aided by Egyptian First Lady Suzanne Mubarak, crossed into Gaza; Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf cohosted a women’s conference with Finland’s President Tarja Halonen.

How to reconcile these acts of solidarity with suffering and isolation in places such as Sri Lanka, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan, and Iraq? Darfur and Eastern Congo?

“I derive a great deal of hope from the fact that the reason we commemorate International Women’s Day is because women have continued to breathe and continued to resist,” says Kavita Ramdas, president and CEO of the Global Fund for Women.

“Yes, the horrors of what is happening to women in so many parts of the world are real and haven’t gone away,” she says. “But the reason to take the time and celebrate the accomplishments of women is not to say that our work is done, but to acknowledge what we have achieved, what we share together, and the sense of being connected to one another.”

The Global Fund for Women, over the past 20 years, has awarded more than $71 million to roughly 3,800 women’s organizations in 167 countries. In a world where women make up 51% of the population, constitute 70% of people living in poverty, and hold 1% of the world’s assets, less than 6% of total philanthropic resources go to women and girls, according to the Foundation Center.

As a scholar and longtime activist from a prominent Indian family of intellectuals and peace activists, Ramdas is a woman who has navigated the morass of global power and politics, militarization, and human rights. She has an optimism of the will and the vision to disaggregate and contest discourses of tyranny. She has the compassion to understand the despair and pain of others, the injustices of the disenfranchised.

When lecturing, she might sing a joyful song or be soberly analytical. She has received many awards for her human rights work, and she sits on several international boards and councils, including the Global Development Program Advisory Panel of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the African Women’s Millennium Initiatives on Poverty and Human Rights. She joined the Global Fund for Women in 1996, after working in the Community Initiatives Program at the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

“Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.”

Arundhati Roy

Kavita Ramdas

Photo: Courtesy of Global Fund for Women
WAYS OF SEEING  
With the U.S. economy fallen off a cliff, according to financier Warren Buffett; and some people looking askance at Milton Friedman and titling toward Marx, perhaps an answer to what ails economies isn’t a bailout of the status quo, but what the Global Fund for Women has been saying for years: invest in women—their health, education, empowerment, and economic security; ensure their full equality and participation in society.

“Women have to ask themselves: ‘What is it we are struggling to be equal to? Opportunistic killers? Torturers in the military?’” says Ramdas. “We want the equal right to question the status quo. To ask ourselves different questions: ‘What is this game where half the world is living on less than $2 a day? What is this game where women are not allowed to have a voice, where the GDP doesn’t include women’s labor? And what is this game where men and women have to be organized in such a way into a productive work force that neither have time to spend raising children?’"

 According to Ramdas, philanthropy as the redistribution of privately gained wealth toward public good can’t legitimize or make up for the huge gaps between the haves and have-nots. Despite philanthropy’s inherent contradictions, Ramdas won’t dismiss it as just “how the wealthy perpetuating capital enterprise.”

THINGS FALL APART  
In the recent past, Ramdas says, there’s been a feeling in the U.S. of being under constant siege from Bush and “the bad guys out there who hate our way of life and who any minute could be coming to bomb us.” Now the insecurity is more economic; the fear is loss of jobs.

“That is a perfect environment in which you see anti-immigration sentiment rising, in which you see notions of Otherness being defined. We know this from every experience of economic crisis where violence against women gets exacerbated, where notions of masculinity become hypermasculinized.”

What then might an academic institute be teaching, and what kind of questions should students be asking?

“I am sort of old-fashioned in that I still believe that old maxim of ‘question authority’ is the best thing you can teach your students. I think again how education plays out at a given moment in time,” she says.

“We’re not in a very pretty place right now to say, ‘We elected Obama, so now it’s gonna be great.’ Even those of us who are the most likely to see ourselves as global citizens, in times of crisis like this, tend to go back to our tribes, to our people, to our knowns. The implications for education are profound.”

HOLD EVERYTHING DEAR  
Ramdas calls for a mindfulness, for a reaching out, for a building of alliances across social movements and differences, for collective and personal responsibility. She has evidenced a kind of participatory philanthropy in a year that has seen a big drop in foundation grants, but an increase in individual donations. “People wrote and said they were giving because they thought women would need more support now. “It’s interesting,” she says, “that in these difficult times, when we are coming from a place of scarcity, it’s important to remember that this world really has more than enough of everything we need.”

Still, Ramdas is anxious about raising money.

“I have this mantra, which Gandhi used to always say, that if the cause is right, the means will come. So in my bleakest moments I just say that again and again,” she says, smiling.

“The notion of resistance, in and of itself, is that you keep breathing.”

Kavita Ramdas  
Honored at Gala Dinner

CIIS presented its Haridas and Bina Chaudhuri Award for Distinguished Service to human rights activist Kavita Ramdas at a gala dinner on April 25, 2009, at the Crowne Plaza Cabana Hotel in Palo Alto, California. Ms. Ramdas, the president and CEO of the Global Fund for Women, was honored for her “dynamic leadership in promoting women’s empowerment and health worldwide,” said President Joseph Subbiondo. The Global Fund for Women is the largest grant-making organization in the world that focuses on women’s rights internationally. During her tenure, the Fund has tripled both the total amount of its grants and the number of countries that it serves.

Ms. Ramdas received the award at CIIS’s seventh annual dinner celebrating the school’s Haridas and Bina Chaudhuri Endowment for South Asian Philosophy and Culture, which supports courses and public programs on Indian philosophy, culture, and history. Indian scholar Haridas Chaudhuri and his wife, Bina, founded the Institute in 1968.

President Joseph L. Subbiondo with Kavita Ramdas
And Now for Something Completely Different

CIIS provided the setting for an unusual meeting of minds this semester as the celebrated comic actor and writer John Cleese joined Richard Tarnas, cofounder of the Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness program, for a seminar entitled “The Comic Genius: A Multidisciplinary Approach.” More than 80 students, alums, and staff packed into Namaste Hall for two intensive weekends dominated equally by laughter and serious note taking. The two lecturers explored the history of comedic creativity from Charlie Chaplin and the Marx Brothers all the way to Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, and Tina Fey, alternating between analysis, stories, and film and video illustrations as they examined the role of comedy in the human psyche and in cultural history.

“CIIS has done a lot of integrating over the years,” said Robert McDermott, CIIS’s president emeritus and a professor in the Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness program, “but I can think of none more delicious than bringing together an archetypal philosopher and a world-famous comedian. In addition to enjoying the comedy classics, Rick Tarnas’s analyses, and John Cleese’s sage humor, surely everyone in the room was delighting in their special friendship.”

John Cleese is best known as an actor and writer, as a member of the legendary comedy group Monty Python, and for his award-winning television series *Fawlty Towers* (described by *Entertainment Weekly* as “the Sistine Chapel of sitcoms”) and the critically acclaimed film *A Fish Called Wanda*. But Cleese is no stranger to the academic world. A graduate of Cambridge University, where he read Law and was a member of the famous Cambridge Footlights Revue, he later served as the rector of the University of St. Andrews and as visiting professor at Cornell University. He is also the coauthor with Robin Skynner of two books on relationships: *Families and How to Survive Them* and *Life and How to Survive It*.

Cleese had first become acquainted with Tarnas’s work when he read *The Passion of the Western Mind* in England in the 1990s and signed a contract with the BBC to host a documentary series based on that book. In the summer of 2003, Cleese became friends with Tarnas after attending a “Psyche and Cosmos” workshop that Tarnas and Stanislav Grof, a founder of transpersonal psychology, were offering at Esalen Institute. “To my surprise, John was always one of the first to arrive at each session, sitting there with his notebook ready, sharply attentive to the lectures,” Tarnas said. A warm friendship ensued, and since then the two have taken part in many events together, such as at the Mind and Supermind Lecture Series in Santa Barbara, where Cleese interviewed Tarnas on the stage of the Lobero Theatre after the publication of his book *Cosmos and Psyche*.

Last summer while at the Eranos conference in Ascona, Switzerland, the two friends discussed the possibility of co-teaching a course that would examine the complex role that comedy plays in cultural life, from broad popular entertainment to subversive social critique. They also wanted to explore comedy’s unusual capacity to express powerful archetypal impulses, both individual and collective, in ways that articulate otherwise suppressed energies and tensions. Starting with Chaplin’s emergence as the Tramp in 1914, moving on to the brilliant social comedy of Mike Nichols and Elaine May around 1960, and then the surreal hilarity of Monty Python, Tarnas and Cleese sketched out a course that would approach comedic creativity from several overlapping perspectives: cultural history, biography, depth psychology, archetypal astrology, performance, and writing. Films would be assigned in advance—*Duck Soup*, *The Great Dictator*, *The Life of Brian*, *Annie Hall*, *Roxanne*, *Groundhog Day*—while film clips of various individual performances would be viewed in class.

The Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness (PCC) program, which Tarnas cofounded 15 years ago with Robert McDermott, Brian Swimme, and others, has always been committed to multidisciplinarity, and this topic seemed especially suited for such an approach. One person attending the seminar was Board of Trustees member Lynne Kaufman, who afterwards said, “This was a rare opportunity to learn through laughter. One of the great pleasures of this unique class was the uniting of the power of archetypes with an insider’s view of comedy to reveal new insights on both.”
Comic actor and writer John Cleese teamed up with Professor Richard Tarnas this spring to teach a groundbreaking—and often humorous—course on comedy’s capacity to express powerful archetypal impulses.

The stars seemed particularly well aligned for just such a course, as comedy has recently been center stage in the nation’s cultural life. “During the past year especially,” Tarnas said, “comedy has come to play a crucial role in confronting the major political and economic realities of our time. Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert more or less carried the moral center of gravity within the mainstream media for the past eight years, speaking truth to power through their skillful satire and acute alertness to spin, propaganda, and deception. A cultural milestone was Colbert’s sensational performance at the White House Correspondents’ Dinner in 2006, with President Bush only a few feet away, hundreds of powerful Washington politicians and journalists in the audience, and thousands of overjoyed Internet viewers in the days immediately afterwards. Since then we had Tina Fey as Sarah Palin and Will Ferrell as George W. Bush watched by many millions on Saturday Night Live week after week during the election campaign, and with Ferrell afterwards on Broadway. In England in November, Robin Williams did a masterly performance welcoming the shift from the Bush era to Obama (‘America is officially out of rehab!’) at Prince Charles’s 60th birthday celebration, which John Cleese hosted. In March, Jon Stewart performed a weeklong devastating critique of the CNBC network’s irresponsible journalism during the financial crisis. Even President Obama appeared with the stand-up comic Jay Leno on The Tonight Show. There are deep underlying reasons for why comedy is playing such a critical role in our time.”

President Joseph Subbiondo expressed his appreciation for the gift of John Cleese’s presence at the school this term. “I am most grateful to Rick Tarnas for introducing John Cleese to the CIIS community. Mr. Cleese lives and supports our mission and core values. He is remarkably intellectual, articulate, and self-reflective—a rare comic genius.”

Tarnas and Cleese have discussed the possibility of doing future courses together, and many in attendance were putting in their vote. “I hope John and Rick do this again and somehow also bring it out into the world to reach many more people,” said Grof, a distinguished adjunct professor in PCC, after the final day of the course. “They’re bringing a particular depth of analysis to the subject that you can’t find anywhere else.”

“Like so many people, I grew up deeply affected by Monty Python’s comedy,” said PCC doctoral student Matthew Stelzner. “So it was totally surreal, and very special, that I would grow up to take a class where I would learn about the origins of those precious sketches direct from Cleese himself.”

“CIIS has done a lot of integrating over the years, but I can think of none more delicious than bringing together an archetypal philosopher and a world-famous comedian.”

Robert McDermott, faculty member and president emeritus

“Rick and John Cleese chose the most interesting aspects of a large topic and facilitated a very interactive experience for everyone,” said Clinical Psychology student Adriana Albano. “I learned so much more from the class than I ever could have anticipated.”

Cleese himself sees CIIS as holding a unique place in an academic world that has become, in his opinion, constrained and devitalized by its limited vision and hyperspecialization. During his opening remarks on the last morning, he cited the opinion of his friend the philosopher Stephen Erickson, who said that what is going on in the mainstream academy today “is the same as what was going on in the later Scholastics in the fourteenth century—I think it is dead. There is nothing of importance that is going to come out of it.” And, Cleese added: “This is just why CIIS is so important. There is something going on here that I think is more important than at any other university I’ve ever been at.”
About ten years ago, Gloria Simoneaux, an Integral Counseling Psychology alum, received a letter from a man who was working with orphans in Ghana and desperately needed her help. She didn’t think twice about going. “I don’t hesitate, I just jump through,” says Simoneaux, a veteran expressive arts therapist. After three weeks in East Ghana she asked the man, “Why did you pick me?” to which he replied, “I wrote a hundred letters, but you were the only one who answered.”

This serendipitous visit would result in several more trips to sub-Saharan Africa over the ensuing years. In Eritrea, Simoneaux set up an arts program for children affected by HIV/AIDS. In Tanzania, she trained HIV-positive community health workers; and in Zimbabwe and Ethiopia she offered art therapy to sexually abused orphans.

Simoneaux moved to Nairobi in fall 2008, thanks to a Fulbright Scholar grant. Affiliated with the Kenya Association of Professional Counseling in Nairobi, she is currently teaching expressive arts and play therapies to counseling students enrolled in diploma and degree programs. She is also designing a 150-hour certificate program for therapists, who will then be able to train others, and helping to organize Kenya’s first association of expressive arts and play therapists.

Leaving the Bay Area last year wasn’t easy, but it proved to be essential for her own well-being. After 19 years as the founder and executive director of DrawBridge, a Marin-based organization that brings art therapy to homeless children in 30 sites in seven Bay Area counties, Simoneaux was burnt out on fundraising and running the day-to-day operations of a large nonprofit. “I never took a break,” she says.

In Africa, she can focus on doing what she loves the most: art therapies with at-risk children. “Africa is so far away that no one can bother me,” Simoneaux says with a chuckle. “In Nairobi, I have no voicemail. I take my time and I’m very present with the children. That’s very satisfying.”

Simoneaux has adapted her groundbreaking work with homeless children in California shelters to the needs of African communities. She has founded a new nonprofit called Harambee Arts: Let’s Pull Together, which partners with grassroots organizations to train local health providers and educators to provide arts programs for children.

A visit to the Harambee Arts Web site and blog (www.harambeearts.org) reveals her many, and varied, projects: from painting murals, salsa dancing, or meditating with children in Nairobi’s Kibera slum to running an art support group for HIV-positive women in Langata Prison. She also introduced painting to children with autism.

Simoneaux believes that expressive arts and play therapies can help heal children traumatized by AIDS, war, dislocation, and famine by giving them a nonthreatening means to express often inexpressible grief, loss, and anger. “Most traumatized children, both in the United States and Africa, don’t have a childhood,” Simoneaux says. “So I give them time to play, to escape their difficulties.”

Like the homeless children in California, Africa’s most vulnerable children “paint their stories. Their art is an expression of what they’re going through and what they’ve experienced,” she says.

In March, Simoneaux, who received the Jefferson Award for Public Service two years ago, was selected to be a 2009 Marin Women’s Hall of Fame honoree. In the Bay Area for the week to receive the award and see family, Simoneaux was already anxious to go back. “Africa is my soul, my heart,” she says. “I’m just so comfortable there and can’t wait to return.”
We see her. Or we think we do, but only through high-powered binoculars. There are 12 of us in the jeep and not enough binoculars. A football field away, she is a mirage, a one-inch horizontal gray shadow behind straw, behind green, behind blue. As the light changes, and the sky melts into earth, Joe says, “I see her.” Joe, whose passions up until now ran silent. So when Joe says, “I see her,” we all know she is really there.

It has been six days since 22 of us left the United States and traveled to India with CIIS, though it seems much longer. Especially now, huddled in an open-air jeep parked in front of a lake, in the high desert of eastern Rajasthan, gazing out at an impregnable landscape dotted with ancient ruins. As we stare through binoculars, I listen to us reveal pieces of ourselves. Shelly and Monique talk about who is watching their dog back home. Mary shares a photo of her dog on her digital camera. The binoculars are being passed around like a bottle of fine wine. “Were binoculars on the list?” I ask, amusing myself. I, who have enough antibacterial wipes for seven, not one, months in India. I choose my favorite binoculars—Ellen’s. Looking through them, I take a guess at what I see: “She’s looking at us.” I think I see her face—brown and orange and black, hiding in grass named in her honor.

We are trapped in this vehicle. We cannot even get out to pee. After 45 minutes, I notice a jeep beside us back up and leave. Satish, our park guide has decided to wait. “It’s like the Zen saying,” I tell him. “The novice hunter chases, but the experienced hunter waits.” Satish smiles. With his right index finger, he traces the path her mother walked a few months ago: down the hill in front of us, around the jeep, across the road, and into the bush. He says that our mirage is a three-year-old female, and about now she is waking from a day’s slumber.

“She is looking at us,” Joe says. My heart skips a beat. The one-inch grey shadow does have a face inside of it. I fumble for Ellen’s binoculars and refocus. Anticipation is mounting by the second. If the grass moves, is it her ear? If a hawk soars overhead, does it mean something? If a gazelle cries out, is she somewhere else? In this moment, we are former strangers, now a tribe, thousands of miles from home, stripped of all our comforts, in a new land, playing hide-and-seek with a tiger.

Ranthambore National Park is in the Sawai Madhopur District of Rajasthan state of India. Declared a wildlife sanctuary in 1957, it became a “Project Tiger“ reserve in 1974. Project Tiger is India’s most famous wildlife conservation project, launched in 1972 to protect the diminishing population of Indian tigers.

For more information on Connie Hills, PhD, a licensed psychologist with a private practice in San Francisco, visit www.conniehillsphd.com.
CIIS alum Meili received her doctorate in Transformative Learning and Change in 1998. In fall 2008, Meili and her sister Charlene generously established the Wang CA Endowment Fund, in honor of their youngest sister, Carol Ann Wang, who passed away last year. The scholarship will be awarded each year to a student studying in the fields of spirituality and expressive arts, areas especially meaningful to Carol Ann, a devout Buddhist who studied in the Sound, Voice, and Music Healing program with Silvia Nakkach. Meili spoke to CIIS Today about the Institute’s impact.

Why did you choose CIIS to pursue your doctorate?
On the one hand, CIIS chose me by offering a scholarship for multicultural students. On the other hand, my psyche had persistently directed me toward the type of venue CIIS offered so as to find coherence in myself. I was born in China, spent my childhood in India and Japan, and was educated in the Western Scholastic tradition. At CIIS I began to learn to configure the dynamic synergy of these diverse cultural elements. C.G. Jung would describe this exploration as my path of individuation.

How did your experience at the Institute affect your life?
Aside from greater clarity of self, CIIS also made clear my life’s mission. I discovered its essence in writing my dissertation, which explored the implicit psychology in Confucius’ teachings, as amplified through Jung and Sri Aurobindo.

What impact did your 2008 trip to India with CIIS have on you?
The trip was a homecoming to early memories and a spiritual font. We traveled from Delhi to Auroville. This broad trek through modern, Mogul, and sacred India to the potent hub at the Matrimandir spiraled from the worldly to my own spiritual core. In the starkness and luminosity inside the Matrimandir I sensed what Sri Aurobindo observed as the increasing manifestation of the divine in the course of human evolution.

Did your trip to India help you to cope with the death of your sister Carol Ann?
This journey of soul, touched by the ablutions and funeral pyres at the Ganges, helped to contextualize my sister’s death—and my own—in the enormous drama of human evolution. She met me at the airport upon my return. That would be the last time I saw her in action. She died four months later of undiagnosed and untreated breast cancer—not letting anyone know until she felt herself withdrawing from her limbs. I was at her bedside in her last month, admiring the courage, resolve, clarity, and peace with which she entered the bardo.

Why did you decide to donate money to CIIS and establish the scholarship fund in your sister’s name?
I knew Carol Ann best as family. At her death I realized that we were independent entities bonded, by happenchance, as siblings and fellow cosmopolitan brats. She, too, was driven by disparate elements in her psyche to find meaning and coherence. Along her journey, she found soul expression in singing and mentioned her exhilaration in chanting with Silvia Nakkach in the Sound, Voice, and Healing program. To enable others like her is to honor her quest for soul.

Why do you feel it is important to donate to the Institute?
CIIS’s vision is to take human evolution to a higher point, which is akin to that of our nation’s founders. Our Constitution, in articulating an ideal state of liberty and happiness for all, documents a milestone in enlightened human history. Who

In My Own Words

Meili in India

PHOTO BY RICHARD BUGGS (1C 96)
Two key grants from foundations have recently provided an important infusion of scholarship funds to support students in counseling programs at CIIS. The J. C. Kellogg Foundation has offered up to $60,000 per year over the next five years for students in the Integral Counseling Psychology (ICP) program. The John and Lisa Pritzker Family Fund is providing $100,000 in funding for members of the first cohorts of the new Community Mental Health program.

“These grants couldn’t come at a better time to help students,” said President Joseph L. Subbiondo, “when many are struggling in a difficult economy. We’re extremely grateful to the J. C. Kellogg Foundation and to the Pritzker Family Fund for stepping up to meet both the students’ needs and to support programs for professionals who will make an impact in communities.”

Director of Development Dorotea Reyna reaffirmed Subbiondo’s words: “The J.C. Kellogg Foundation is a long-standing and generous supporter of CIIS. Their new grant to provide scholarships for students in ICP will help us meet our commitment to a diverse student body. We’re also grateful for this significant first-time gift from the Pritzker Family Fund.”

The scholarship funds from the J. C. Kellogg Foundation will be allocated in annual blocks of up to $60,000 for a total of five years. Philip Brooks, a core faculty member in ICP, explained the purpose of these Leadership in Diversity Scholarships: “We hope the students who receive these will become leaders in their communities, and that they will bring the openness, spirit of transformation, and learned clinical skills back to institutions and individuals who can benefit from the unique program that ICP offers.”

Students in Community Mental Health will also be receiving new scholarship funding. This innovative program is designed to provide skilled therapists for low-income clients and to deliver those services directly to those in need. Instead of learning on the job how to help at-risk clients who sometimes have dual and triple diagnoses, the students will hit the ground running with a curriculum and placements that prepare them for these challenging assignments.

“The Pritzker Family Fund support has allowed CIIS to develop a program that will take mental health services into the community in new and more accessible ways,” said Steven Tierney, the program’s director. “The funds have supported the creation of a dynamic and diverse cohort of students who will be excellent therapists and the next wave of innovative leaders in professional psychology.”

Students in the Community Mental Health program will play an important role in CIIS’s sixth neighborhood counseling center, the Clinics Without Walls, where professionals will reach out to low-income communities in San Francisco, especially adolescents and children. Clinics Without Walls will serve residents of the public housing projects Valencia Gardens in the Mission District and the Rich Sorro Commons in Bayview-Hunters Point.

“Children and youth from low-income families are particularly in danger of falling through the cracks of the mental health care system,” said Subbiondo. “The students who participate in the new Clinics Without Walls will help us address mental health issues in places where professionals can make a real difference.”

“We hope the students who receive these [scholarships] will become leaders in their communities.”

Philip Brooks, CIIS faculty member

By Zack Rogow
Stay in Touch with the Online Alumni Community

Have you had an opportunity to visit the CIIS Online Alumni Community (alumni.ciis.edu)? Since its launch in 2008, more than 250 alums have registered to access this password-protected Web site. The site provides online services to help alums stay connected with each other and with CIIS.

Look for a job on the Job Postings page. Find an “integral psychotherapy consultation group” or fill up your workshop by advertising on the Yellow Pages. The site’s photo gallery offers you a chance to see alums at various events throughout the year, including the fall 2008 New York City reunion, January’s alumni gathering in Seattle, and the most recent CIIS trip to India. The site now offers an online donation feature, and we’re happy to report that alums in Canada and Japan have used this option to contribute to the CIIS Alumni Scholarship Campaign.

The Alumni Office regularly updates the site, keeping you abreast of the latest events, job openings, and money-saving specials being offered by CIIS. Be sure to bookmark it and visit often, as we continue to add new resources and features.

Not registered yet? Contact Cynthia Mitchell at cmitchell@ciis.edu or 415.575.6278 to obtain your user ID and temporary password.

Alumni Reunions

On January 21 Washington state alums gathered at the Wild Ginger restaurant in Seattle to reflect upon how their CIIS education enabled them to create meaningful and interesting careers. This was the second gathering of alums in the region. CIIS thanks alum Marcia Wesley for coordinating efforts to maintain an active and vibrant CIIS Alumni Circle in the Washington area.

(l. to r.) Academic Vice President Judie Wexler,

Tony Rich’s Kohala Ranch home on Hawaii’s Big Island was the beautiful setting for an April gathering of alums and friends living in Hawaii. After dinner, the group reminisced about faculty members who were significant in their lives; recalled memories of CIIS when it was located on Ashbury Street; and made plans for creating a CIIS Alumni Circle in Hawaii.

(l. to r.) Susan Caswell (ISD, ’94), Betsy Duerr (BAC, ’99), Cathy Sweester (ICP, ’93), Janice Helfand (CLN, ’00), Richard Buggs (CLN, ’96)
Ron Pilato (ICP, ’97) offers continuing education workshops in Italy through his business, Pronto Seminars, in an intimate and authentic cultural setting with internationally known presenters in the field of psychology.

Nicholas Carlisle (ICP, ’01) coauthored an article, published in the Journal of Traumatology, about the effects of bullying. In 2003, he created No Bully, a collaboration of experts in the fields of education, psychology, and law dedicated to making schools bully free. In the last five years, he has trained thousands of California teachers and helped many schools implement effective anti-bullying policies and programs.

Catherine Sagan (TLC, ’02) joined other anti-war activists, many of whom were jailed 40 years ago while protesting the use of Agent Orange in Vietnam, on a trip to Vietnam to meet with the Vietnamese Association for Victims of Agent Orange and some of the three million afflicted Vietnamese people. The gracious reception from the Vietnamese people and their compassionate care of the Agent Orange victims convinced her that forgiveness, and extending friendship and support to people hurt by war, are powerful and necessary actions for true healing.

Rodney Davis (EWP, ’03) is a teacher and author of Reaching True Peace: Seven Universal Realms of Spiritual Development (Fern Haven Press, 2005). His work explores the parallels between the Indian tradition of kundalini yoga and the work of the sixteenth-century Spanish mystic Teresa de Ávila.

Elena Beth Hull (EXA, ’04) provides in-depth psychotherapy to individuals and couples at Midtown Marriage and Family Therapy and in her private practice in Greenwich Village, New York. As clinical director at Midtown Marriage and Family Therapy, she is developing an intern training program and practicum site. She is also working with The Joyful Heart Foundation, whose mission is to offer healing to women affected by sexual assault and abuse.

Rainiero Miranda (EWP, ’07) is a licensed MFT working with adolescents and their families in an alternative school in Marin County. A native of Colombia, he has incorporated indigenous wisdom and archetypal/Jungian psychology to complement his clinical training and has developed a group process guide based on the Boys Council model to address their unique needs in a therapeutic setting.

Katie Hymans (SCA, ’07) is a senior case manager with Survivors International in San Francisco, where she coordinates health and social services for survivors of torture, war trauma, LGBTQ hate crimes, and gender-based persecution among those who have fled to the United States. As the liaison between attorneys and health care providers, she facilitates opportunities for survivors to heal from their wounds.

Check out more alumni updates, and post your own, on CIIS’s new password-protected social networking Web site called CIIS Online Alumni Community. Register today by contacting Cynthia Mitchell at cmitchell@ciis.edu or 415.575.6278.
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