

Mellon Mays Fellowship

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“Oh the Places You Will Go”

“I’m filming a documentary in Dubai next winter, and I think that you should come.” In my first semester as a Mellon Fellow, I have constantly heard the word “community” used to describe the program. People talk about how the Mellon Foundation will stay with me after graduation and that the networks I have now will be important in the future. Two events this semester have helped me to understand that those people have not lied to me, and that the Mellon program is serious about community. In October, at the Mellon Mays regional conference, I spoke with a professor at Carlton College, Professor Willis, about my research project that is based in Jordan. We talked for a while, and he described his project in Dubai where he is shooting a documentary on

Black female hip-hop artists. He invited me to join him next winter



2011-2012 Cohort

to help shoot the remainder of the film, and we have been in contact ever since. I have also been in contact with a Wash U alumna of the Mellon program, Jamie Thomas. She contacted me after learning that I had studied Arabic in Jordan this past summer. We bonded over our love of Arabic and discussed different Ara-

bic language programs in the Middle East. My contact with Professor Willis and with Jamie have shown me that there are people in Mellon who have my best interest in mind, and who are willing to tell me about various opportunities. Jamie and Professor Willis had no obligation to contact me or give me advice, yet they chose to seek me out. Why?

Because of the values that the Mellon foundation instills in us. Since I have been treated in such a way, I will continue to foster that spirit of community with younger Mellon fellows. I will continue the legacy that Dr. Benjamin E. Mays began.

— Jessica Page, Junior Fellow

How Dean McLeod Taught Me German



Dean McLeod

For the nearly 30 years I knew Jim McLeod, I was constantly impressed that he knew German. In part, my admiration stemmed from the fact that despite having studied several languages for many years I did not know any as well as Jim knew German. Moreover, as an English professor I always felt a bit deficient not knowing German as I think that language is crucial for a proper appreciation of both British and American literatures. How dare I teach American Transcendentalism without knowing German Romanticism in its original tongue, not in translation! So, Jim's knowledge of German also made me feel a little guilty and more than a little inadequate. Finally, I thought that Jim's knowledge of German was something of a feat for a black person in that it was a language that typically most

people would not expect a black person to know or *to want* to know. There was something about his knowing it that made him singular to me: knowledge is, after all, not the transmission of a gift but the expression of a desire. And his desire for German made him an individual to me in such a way that it sharpened my ability to see the individuality of myself and that of other people whose individuality I had not thought about before. It was the richness of a different angle of perception.

Jim's knowledge of German made him, in ways that perhaps he was not fully conscious of, more teacherly, more a pedagogue. I cannot recall all of the many times he would illustrate a point he was making to me by using a German expression or a German word but they were many. The first time Jim did this in my presence it felt odd because the gesture seemed so pedantic but Jim was one of the least pedantic people I have ever known. He never wore his knowledge like a cape or brandished it like a cane. So, I think it was Jim's way of being a sage of sorts—everyone who teaches in the university aspires to the mysticism of wisdom—putting a kindly human face on pedantry. One does not know for the sake of showing off what one knows, or as an affectation, was something I learned from Jim. One knows for the sake of helping others know. For instance, about a particular matter we were once discussing he said to me I should keep close to the ground, a low profile. "There is a German expression, 'Ein Blitz trifft mehr Bäume als Grashalme,'" he said, "Lightning is more likely to hit trees than grass." And I also think Jim did this because he loved German so and wanted to share his love with others. I began to enjoy very much when he would speak a German phrase to me. There was something both serious and boyish about Jim's tinkering with his ideas by using a German word or saying now and again. He smiled a lot when he did it with me. My youngest daughter majored in German at Washington University, spent two years living in Vienna and earned a Master's degree in German literature at a university in Germany

I am not sure why she started studying German in high school. But she was impressed when she found out that Jim McLeod knew German. She felt quite alone sometimes in her study of the language, as, after all, not very many black Americans learn it. When she found out about Jim during her years at Washington University, it made her feel less lonely about learning the language, less like she doing something strange as a black person. It was perhaps sometime around her first or second year at Washington University that I mentioned to her that Jim had been a Ph.D. student in German. She beamed, "Wow, really. That's cool. Dean McLeod is really something. You know German's a real tough language. Maybe I can get that far."

Gerald Early
Merle Kling Professor of Modern Letters
Department of English
Director
The Center for the Humanities
Washington University in St. Louis

Fellowship Supporters

Dean Mary Laurita, Administrative Coordinator of the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship program, has been a constant presence in the program since 2000. Serving as recruiter, student advocate, planner, and much more, Dean Laurita has been the motivating force behind many of our decisions to apply to the fellowship. She never fails to see our potential, even before we realize it ourselves, and we thank her for that

Dr. Shanti Parikh has been a part of the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program family for many years. Associate Professor of Sociocultural Anthropology and African and African-American Studies, Dr. Parikh's research focuses on inequalities surrounding issues of sexuality. As newly appointed Faculty Coordinator of the fellowship, Dr. Parikh has made it one of her missions to help build an intellectual community that upholds the national foundation's aim to support and foster future "scholars of the highest distinction" who are interested in issues surrounding identity, social justice, and diversity.

Shannon Koropchak has served as the seminar Teaching Assistant for the past three years. As a Ph.D. candidate in the English Department with a research focus on nineteenth century English education, she has been an excellent resource for the fellows as they have expanded their research topics and sharpened their communication style. Shannon will be leaving the fellowship program at the end of the 2011-2012 school year to pursue a Master's degree in Teaching English as a Second Language at Webster University. She will be sorely missed.

(from the left)
Professor
Shanti Parikh,
Shannon
Koropchak,
Dean Mary
Laurita



Senior Fellows

Parsa Bastani

Parsa resides in Town and Country, MO and is studying History. His project, "From the Whores' House to the Husband's Domicile: Labeling the Culprit of Venereal Diseases in Colonial Egypt" examines female skapegoating in the spread of syphilis and gonorrhea in colonial Egypt.



Caleb Bess



Caleb comes to us from Washington DC. Majoring in Anthropology, his project, "North Sarah Development: How the City of St. Louis's History of Decline and Depopulation Undermine HOPE VI Mixed-Income Revitalization Efforts" takes a historical approach to understanding St. Louis' troubled housing markets.

Liz Jordan

Liz hails from Chicago, IL. She studies African and African American Studies and Anthropology. Her project, "*Oil Made Pickaninny Rich*": Sarah Rector and the Social Construction of Race" uses Creek Freedmen as a case study to explore the social and historical construction as well as the geographic dependency of racial identity.



Marcia McIntosh



Marcia was born and raised in Bartlesville, OK. She studies English Literature and African and African American Studies. Her project, "Steven Barnes the Mythmaker: Exploring the Black Hero in Alternate History Novels *Lion's Blood* and *Zulu Heart*" analyzes speculative fiction novelist Steven Barnes' creation of a black mythic hero.

Mariana Oliver

Mariana, from Memphis, TN, is majoring in Latin American studies and Spanish. Her project, "Notions of Home: Mutual Assistance Housing Cooperatives in Uruguay and the Future of a Counter-Hegemonic System" examines the sustainability of housing cooperatives in post-modern Latin America.



Meet
the
Fellows



Oluwakemi (Kemi) Aladesuyi Arogundade

Kemi comes to Wash U from Springfield, IL and is majoring in International and Area Studies. Her project currently titled "Music as Activism: Fela Anikulapo Kuti & The Movement of the People" tries to understand the different audiences that have been influenced by the politicism of Fela Kuti's music in 1970's Nigeria to his death in 1997.

Yasmin Boakye

Yasmin lives in Mitchellville, MD and is double majoring in Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies and Anthropology. Her project, which is currently titled "Gender Exclusion in Ghanaian Crafting and Female Empowerment Through 'New' Crafts" examines the new development of hairdressing as a profession in Ghana.



Joelle Julien

Joelle, an Iselin, NJ native, is currently double majoring in Anthropology and Educational Studies. Her project, currently titled "Haitians in St. Louis: A Community Ethnography," examines the internal and external power structures that contribute to the lack of visibility of the Haitian community in St. Louis.

Sophia Nunez

Sophia, who resides in Colorado Springs, CO, is majoring in the Interdisciplinary Project in the Humanities and Spanish. Her research project, "Reading the Real Biblioteca del Escorial: Dangerous Books, Readers, and Populations," compares the library's incorporation of hazardous books with early modern Spain's treatment of mistrusted people.



Jessica Page

Jessica lives in Claremont, CA and is majoring in International Area Studies and Arabic. Her project titled "Digital Ink: An examination of Social Media in Jordan" looks at the ways Jordanians express their political views in light of the Arab Spring.



New Sophomore Fellows



Vintia Chaundry

Vintia is a Women, Gender & Sexuality Studies and Anthropology double major and Public Health minor from Cockeysville, MD. Her project, “Gaysi” in America: Experiences of South Asian American Queer Youth,” looks at the mental health issues (specifically depression) of South Asian American queer youth.

Davida Farhat

Davida is an Anthropology major from Baltimore, MD. Her project, “Societal Impact on the Liberian Woman’s Sexual Health and Agency,” seeks to explore current opinions and values regarding sexual autonomy and their effects on women’s health in the West African country of Liberia.



Zach Hernandez

Zach comes from San Antonio, TX and is studying Environmental Policy and Anthropology. His project, titled “Cultures of Urban Mobility: Investigating Bogotá’s Informal Transportation Sector,” focus on the motivations, practices, and strategies of informal transport operators in the peripheral neighborhoods of Bogotá, Colombia.



Danielle WU

Danielle from St. Charles, MO, is studying Art History and Archaeology with a minor in Art. Her project, “Global Quest for the Ideal Body,” explores how depictions of women during the Italian Renaissance reveal the struggle for women to find a satisfactory identity in society.



2014 Cohort

“Se hace el camino al andar”: Charting My Academic Path and Discipline



Sophia Nunez

“Such decisions are not easy, especially for someone who ponders long over ice cream counters.”

Given that my primary major is in the Interdisciplinary Project in the Humanities, I’ll admit that choosing a specific discipline’s methodology and tools for analysis has not always been foremost in my mind. Indeed, my project, concerned with the interactions among Christians, Muslims, Jews, and their somewhat converted descendants in Early Modern Spain was inspired by at least two different classes and a variety of genres. I am currently using the Real Biblioteca de San Lorenzo de El Escorial as a lens onto these larger cultural exchanges. As I investigate why this royal, religious library held books in Arabic, Hebrew, and books prohibited by the Inquisition, and what it means that these books were preserved there rather than burned, I hope that my work sheds light onto the similarly complex relationships to the ‘others’ behind these apparently dangerous books.

At times I have claimed to be ‘reading’ the Real Biblioteca del Escorial, yet it has become clear over the summer and the semester that reading a library is not quite like reading a novel or a poem or a historical document. With which discipline’s tools does one read a library?

Conversations with a few professors and graduate students have indicated that there is no single academic path that I must follow to work on my project topic. Rather, I can reasonably pursue my interests through graduate studies in history, Spanish, or even specific cultural studies programs. I could even pursue library sciences or book history for a few years before continuing on to a PhD in another discipline. I am beginning to understand that graduate school is more about pursuing your own research interests, which can be interdisciplinary.

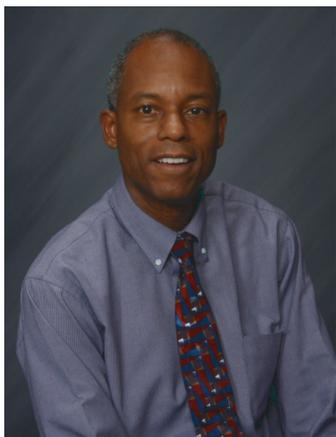
The choice then is in which methods I will employ to study the library, and also what sort of teaching I would eventually do. My current sources may be historical, but my way of reading them is in many regards literary, and I have yet to rule out either discipline. I am coming to terms with this indecision, and I will look for graduate programs that allow for interdisciplinary flexibility.

Such decisions are not easy, especially for someone who ponders long over ice cream counters, yet I am increasingly realizing that the lack of an obvious path for pursuing interdisciplinary work like mine need not cause anxiety. Rather, it is an opportunity to draw on methods and sources from across disciplines to help answer my questions. Moreover, while ‘se hace el camino al andar,’ this path is not made alone. Scholars and mentors are perhaps the best resource, and I have been blessed with wonderful guidance toward the tools and texts needed for this construction. *Le agradezco mil veces por guiarme en el camino.*

— Sophia Nunez, Junior Fellow



Librarian Legacy Mr. Rudolph Clay



Mr. Rudolph Clay, Head of Library Outreach and African and African-American Studies Librarian

In terms of legacy, one member of the Washington University community who has been involved in the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program and research process since its establishment in 1993 is academic librarian Rudolph Clay. I got a chance to sit down with Mr. Clay and ask him about his experience at Wash. U. as a librarian and his contribution to the Mellon Program and its goals.

One of his main aims in working with the fellowship is to connect fellows with one or more subject librarians. “I wanted to stress the idea that any librarian is the right librarian,” he says. “You do not need to choose one that works in your project area, especially since many of the projects are interdisciplinary, because they are all skilled in finding information.” He describes the relationship as one that should be long term and not isolated to a single meeting, so that students can access little-known resources such as microfilm, books, and newspapers. In addition, those who utilize the subject librarians will have another set of eyes looking for more sources that may become available as the two-year project unfolds.

Mr. Clay became interested in librarianship when he worked at Olin library as an undergrad were here at Wash. U. As a student of psychology and black studies (now called African and African-American Studies), he was influenced by both the late Dean McLeod and Dr. Charles Churchwell, who was Dean of Libraries at the time. “[Dr. Churchwell] wanted to make sure that the library was a resource to Wash. U., but also to the surrounding community. A place where people could come in and use the materials and the staff would be open and welcoming. He was also interested in creating more diversity in librarianship.” Dr. Churchwell influenced Mr. Clay in his decision to pursue a Master’s degree in Library Science at the University of Michigan before returning to Wash. U. to work as a full-time librarian.

Mr. Clay gives back to his community through participation in the American Library Association’s Black Caucus and by attracting students of color to the profession. He also studies the research process for undergrads, saying that “librarians have an ideal research process, [but] we’ve needed to first learn how undergrads approach their research and instead of transforming them to search as we would like them to, inject our process into their process... [adapting has] made libraries and librarians more flexible.” This flexibility has taken over information search and retrieval, but there is still a place for libraries in that process. “We will probably move from [being] warehouses of books to providing other types of services for researchers. There will be more online, but the library will still be full of books.”



Dr. Charles Churchwell, Former Dean of Washington University Libraries

— Marcia McIntosh, Senior Fellow and Master’s candidate in Information Science at University Texas at Austin

Annual Speaker: Mark Behr and the Smell of Apples

“Behr’s childhood was defined by a society in the midst of Apartheid”



Mark Behr

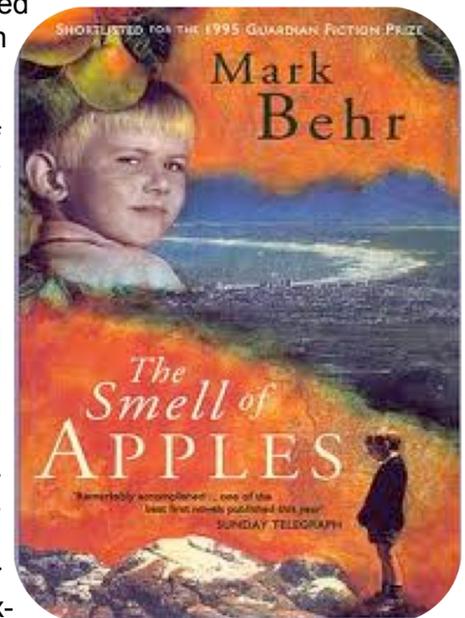
On Tuesday, January 31, 2012, the Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellowship Program proudly hosted Professor Mark Behr. As an author of novels, short stories, and essays, Professor Behr has been teaching in the English Department of Rhodes College, offering courses in fiction writing, post-colonial literature, queer and gender theory, African literature, and literature and war. His talk focused on his creative response to heteronormativity and gender roles in South Africa.

Born in Mbuyu, Tanzania (formerly Tanganyika) in 1963, Mark Behr grew up in a heavily segregated environment during a time when anti-apartheid literature and movements were slowly gaining ground. Born only one year before Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for the next twenty-five years, Behr and his family moved to South Africa after the nationalization of white-owned farms in East Africa. It was in South Africa that his family began to define themselves as Afrikaners, a South African ethnic group descended from German, Dutch, and French settlers, and who spoke Afrikaans, a type of Germanic language. Behr’s childhood was defined by a society in the midst of Apartheid (1948 – 1994), with an Afrikaner-led government that heavily reinforced racial segregation and restricted the rights of South Africa’s non-white populations. Behr’s family sent their son to the prestigious Drakensberg Boys’ Choir School for two years, and later an Afrikaans language high school. After high school, Behr found himself, along with many other young boys his age, enrolled in the South African Defense Force (SADF). During his time in the SADF, Behr served as a marine Corps junior officer in the Angolan Civil War, a guerilla war between the Portuguese Armed Forces and Angolan Forces. The war became a part of the struggle against Portuguese colonialism, and left a very bloody aftermath in its wake. Though the war ended in 1975, the conflict was followed by a civil war and consequent mass emigration of white Angolans out of the country.

This historical context is the basis for Mark Behr’s internationally-recognized book, *The Smell of Apples*. Translated into ten languages, including Afrikaans, the book has been a Booker Prize nominee, and recipient of the Art Seidenbaum Award for First Fiction from the Los Angeles Times. A movie is set to be released soon. The novel, which is semi-autobiographical, describes the story of Marnus, an eleven-year-old boy, who recounts his childhood in apartheid South Africa. Like Behr’s own family, Marnus’s family is a part of the Afrikaner population, and migrated to South Africa after their farm was expropriated by the government in Tanganyika. The story evolves as a coming-of-age story, and is a haunting portrayal of the racial discrimination and political turmoil of South African society. Behr depicts a loss of innocence that is characteristic of conflict zones, and reminds us of the deep psychological toll that these conflicts take on children.

As both a literature professor and a former Research Fellow at the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo, Norway, Mark Behr has both the gift of rhetoric and first-hand experience of the difficulties in defining identity within a repressive society. The Mellon fellows were thrilled to welcome Professor Behr to our campus, where he discussed his novel as well as his own research interests and trajectory to becoming a professor. While reminiscing on the event and the discussion that was stimulated by it, I highly recommend reading *The Smell of Apples*.

— Mariana Oliver, Senior Fellow



Alumni Spotlight: Jamie Thomas



Jamie Thomas in Dar es Salaam

With trowel in hand, I felt the surrounding of cold mud and wet dirt and grass were inconsequential. It was me just sifting slowly through centuries until I found it: an unusually huge, intricately decorated piece from a clay pot made by someone who lived near St. Louis, Missouri, long before Lewis and Clark. I was probably sitting in the ruins of their kitchen hearth, only in that moment, in the year 2004, it comprised a thin stratum that would need to be explored, catalogued, and interpreted.

When I was below ground level, as part of a dig, it made sense to measure time diachronically, and now, in 2011, on days when I am in the open marketplace, at street level in the classroom, or at a roadside restaurant, I feel compelled to measure time by the relationships I build with people encountered.

My advice to any current Mellon Mays Fellow is to continue to be open to new experiences and new voices, and to welcome new connections because they will lead you to exactly where you are supposed to be. When I entered Washington University in 2002 as an Ervin scholar, I remember Dean McLeod advis-

ing us to pay attention to our relationships. I realize now that what he was really encouraging us to do was to take stock in the people around us by demonstrating that their presence is valued, and their input is well-regarded. In turn, we move through life as stronger individuals, growing in our capacity to learn from and with others.

In the field, doing dissertation research, you get a lot of alone time, and for me, this has led to a good deal of self-reflection. I have since come to understand how important my friends and family are to me, as sounding boards and allies. Never more have my relationships been so important as when I have been farthest away from them.

But then you have relationships of another kind, the ephemeral sort you develop over the course of a cultural investigation. And in these short-term connections with grocers, talkative taxi drivers, drunken expats, and cantankerous librarians, I am learning that they all have something to teach me. As a result, I am realizing that my interpretation of events and people and places is ongoing, and that the way we make sense of and put meaning into our relationships with things and people drives our worldview. It also makes its way into the research product.

I am proud of my connection to the Mellon Mays Program because it has reminded me of the benefits of gaining from other's perspectives, and the importance of the impact of our work on others. Uncovering new information and making informed interpretations, we as researchers have an unparalleled opportunity to help others gain a deeper appreciation for the human experience. With this in mind, I know that the time I am spending in humid Dar es Salaam classrooms will help me contribute to a fruitful discussion of the interspace between language and culture, giving me even more to share with the world.

— Jamie Thomas, Mellon alumna



Jamie's Classroom in Dar es Salaam

Mellon Mays Midwest Regional Conference

Hosted by the University of Chicago and Northwestern University



Downtown Chicago taken from Northwestern

On October 13, we had the great opportunity to travel to Chicago for the bi-annual Mellon Midwest Regional Conference. (We made sure to get a taste, or bellyfuls, of Chicago style pizza, and Garret's popcorn!)



Parsa presenting his project at the Chicago conference

Since both Northwestern and the University of Chicago hosted the event, we attended workshops, seminars, and discussions on various topics related to graduate school in downtown Chicago and Edwardsville, IL. One of the most fulfilling aspects of the conference was presenting our work to a new group of encouraging and diligent Mellon fellows.



Joelle and Liz dancing on the Lake Michigan Cruise

But the weekend wasn't all work! Saturday night all of the fellows and coordinators took part in a dinner cruise on Lake Michigan. It was nice to see everyone loosen up after a weekend of workshops, presentations, and lectures. Mellon's know how to have fun too!



Liz and Yasmin smiling for the camera

All in all, the Chicago conference was a time well spent with scholar-leaders in the making. It was enlightening to see such a large community of like-minded, intellectually curious, minority college students considering pursuing careers in academia. We met interesting fellows from other universities, visited a new city, and began to see ourselves in the world of academia.



2011-2012 Mellon Mays Fellowship



Dean Diana Hill

Current fellow Caleb Bess interviewed Diana Hill, a Mellon Mays alumna who graduated with a B.A. degree in Psychology and African and African-American Studies from Washington University in 2003, and a Ph.D. in Social Psychology from Princeton University in 2010. Diana Hill currently serves as the Pre-Graduate Dean in the College of Arts and Sciences, where she mentors undergraduates interested in pursuing graduate degrees. During their interview they discussed her path to academia, and her suggestions for students interested in pursuing a Ph.D.

Caleb Bess: Could you tell me more about your background and your path to becoming a Pre-Grad Dean at Washington University?

Dean Hill: Going to graduate school, being involved with the Mellon program and having people who were extremely supportive was pretty significant in terms of my experience and even deciding to go to graduate school. And then once I got to

graduate school, I very much enjoyed the research and the work, but I found myself more drawn to mentoring and advising students. So in terms of being a Pre-Grad Dean here, my interest in graduate school and being a recent graduate and getting my Ph.D. makes me a natural advocate for that path and then also someone who's accessible to students. You see your professors, but they've been teaching for twenty or thirty years, so it's difficult for young people to imagine themselves and project that far out. But perhaps, projecting only ten years out and seeing someone who's just done it isn't quite as difficult.

CB: How did the Mellon program and graduate school prepare you to be a Pre-Grad Dean at Wash U?

DH: Mellon helped me in terms of receiving critical feedback and then also being able to give it in terms of critiques. It also gave me the confidence to go to graduate school before I really believed in myself. In graduate school, through working in collaboration with others, learning how to think critically about the material, asking questions, and engaging, I became more prepared for this role. You have to be interested in lots of different projects and not just those in your own discipline. I do pre-grad advising for the entire College of Arts and Sciences, that spans a gambit of natural sciences to the humanities and so while my area might be Social Psychology, I need to be able to understand if someone is in Religion and they're interested in studying something else.

CB: Among the Wash U Students you advise what is a major concern about Ph.D. programs?

DH: I am often asked, "Am I selling out on my community if I go into the 'ivory tower' and do research, vs engaging with people who did not have this experience?" It's almost as though people feel guilty for the privilege that they've been given, so when they do give back they go to other communities that aren't as privileged, which is fine but it doesn't also mean that you can't be in graduate school and it doesn't mean that you aren't serving your community in a different way. It might not be directly, in that you're working in a community center day in and day out, but you might be doing studies that are relevant to those people, whether you inform the policy that others are going to write around funding or doing something else.

CB: What advice would you give to someone who's interested in pursuing a Ph.D. program?

DH: I would advise them to find a faculty member who is teaching in the subject area that they are interested in and that they think might have an interest in them. You can never have enough people who are interested in you because that means that they will do as much as they can to get you where you want to be. So, talk to faculty members, talk to TAs or current graduate students. Of course, I encourage everyone to talk to me about pre-graduate work and to really get involved and do research in a topic or a subject area that you are interested in, and do an independent project. And there's a benefit to that, because you can get three credits for an independent study. So it's not for nothing.

CB: In your opinion, what's the best way to encourage undergraduates from underrepresented groups in academia to pursue a Ph.D.?

DH: Talk to them. Tell them that they're more than capable. I think a lot of times people need others who have more faith in you than you do in yourself and your abilities.