

# Bachelor of Individualized Study

FALL NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 1, 2009

## SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- BIS enrolls 80 new students for Fall 2009
- Lauren McGill, wins Spring 2009 Psychology 301 award for best report
- Current student, Bob Nissen, featured in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*
- New BIS website goes live
- BIS joins Facebook—become a fan!

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## A Message from the Director

As I start my second year as Director of the Bachelor of Individualized Study (BIS) program at George Mason University, I am in a position to reflect on the past year and look forward to the current and future years. Our distinctive degree program is thriving. Our talented faculty, staff, students, and alumni all contribute to our vitality as a degree program for returning adult students. This newsletter showcases many of our successes and program initiatives.

The 2008-09 academic year was focused on revising and refining our BIS courses. Each of our 3-credit core classes has been refreshed to provide students with the needed support to create a challenging academic program and to design and implement strong interdisciplinary research. The program also is shifting the timeline for students to submit their educational contracts. All contracts must include a rationale state-

ment that frames the courses listed on the contract as a coherent course of study. Students now are encouraged to identify a faculty mentor to discuss which courses should be included in the self-designed concentration soon after BIS 300.

The BIS program has attracted more students. This fall approximately 80 new students joined BIS and about 65 of these students are enrolled in BIS 300. The surge in popularity is due in part to improved partnerships with Admissions, dedicated follow up with prospective students, new recruiting literature, and old-fashioned word of mouth. This year's class is almost twice as big as the group of BIS students who began their studies in fall 2008. If you meet someone who might be a good candidate for the BIS program, please send him or her our way. As you read this newsletter, be sure to note the honors earned

by our students. We have showcased new developments such as

our honors program in BIS and articles on current students. Check out our new website complete with Alumni Profiles. BIS is indebted to current BIS student, Pamela Martin, for her work collecting the data and writing these compelling stories.

Please keep in touch with BIS and help us support current students. We have a small endowment that funds scholarship awards up to \$1,000, but the needs of our current students are great. Please consider giving a donation to George Mason University and designate the BIS Scholarship Fund as the program you want your contribution to support. We need you more than ever.



Jeannie Brown Leonard,  
Director

## Announcing Honors in BIS

BIS is proud to announce the launch of an honors program for highly qualified and motivated BIS students. One of the first comments our Director heard from graduating students was that there should be an honors option in BIS. Now there is! Students who are interested in graduating with honors are encouraged to apply the semester before they intend to enroll

in BIS 390. They need to have taken or be enrolled in an appropriate methodology class. Once accepted, students will enroll in BIS 391 (The Research Process for Honors) rather than BIS 390, followed by an individualized section of BIS 490 guided by their faculty mentor. BIS Honors students must maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.75 or higher, complete BIS

391 and 490 with at least a 3.5, and successfully present their research in BIS 491. In addition to these requirements, the BIS 391 honors proposal must be original, empirical research involving data collection. For more information, please visit <http://bis.gmu.edu/bishonors>.



Dr. Monimalika Day (left) stands with two of her BIS students, Cynthia Doku (center) and Karen Griffin Roberts (right).

## 2009 Outstanding BIS Faculty Mentor

Thank you and congratulations to Dr. Monimalika Day from the College of Education and Human Development!

Her skills and expertise have benefited BIS students past and present!

## 2009 Student Project Award Recipients

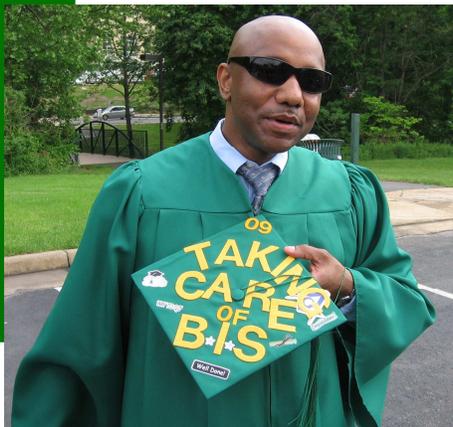
**Victoria McGough** The Robert T. Hawkes, Jr. Award for Outstanding BIS Project  
Project: *Obscurity or Eternity: The Influence of the Black Death on Art Patronage in Trecento, Italy*

**Karen Griffin Roberts**, Most Creative BIS Project  
Project: *Modifying the Preschool Classroom to Include Children with Autism: A Manual for General Education Preschool Teachers*

\* Learn more about Karen's project by visiting <http://bis.gmu.edu/articles/533>

**Bryan Corle**, Outstanding BIS Project in the Public Interest  
Project: *Archaeological Assessment of Site 44FX185*

BIS graduate, Shareef Rahman, shows off his cap at the Spring 2009 CHSS Convocation ceremony



## Congratulations to the BIS Class of 2009!

## Dropped Pack: A Marine's Transition from the Field to the Classroom

**Written by:**

**Stephanie Barnett** The first time I spoke with Staff Sergeant James

Miller in January 2009, he was calling from Iraq on his last tour of duty with the U.S. Marine Corps. The voice on the other end was often interrupted with long pauses due to the DSN (Defense Switched Network) lines. Despite that, he was excited and eager to learn more about his opportunities at Mason and how the BIS program would utilize what he learned in training to apply it to a degree. When I met James in person a few months later, he was eager to begin his newest assignment – becoming a student.

Growing up in the town of Gillette, Wyoming, James, the son of a retired Navy Petty Officer 3rd Class, always had the intention of joining the military. When asked about his choice to join the Marine Corps, he stated, "As fate would have it, the day I went to enlist, the Navy's office was empty." So on August 5, 2001, he began his first adventure into the unknown; one that took him over 6,000 miles away from home. In his time with the Marine Corps, James gained the discipline and leadership principles that he lives by today. In regards to his choice to leave the Marine Corps, he stated, "Serving with the finest men and women our country has to offer was a great privilege; however, it was time for a change."

That change came for thousands of veterans when the Post-9/11 Veterans Educa-

tional Assistance Act of 2008 became law on June 30, 2008. Commonly referred to as the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, the new law's provisions came into effect on August 1, 2009. With the knowledge of the influx of veterans across the country that would be taking advantage of the new G.I. Bill, colleges and universities prepared in various ways to meet the needs of these new students and to ease their transitions into the classroom. Mason was one of twenty institutions to receive a Success for Veterans Award grant in the amount of \$100,000 from the American Council on Education and the Wal-Mart Foundation. This grant funded new positions within Mason's Office of Military Affairs to create a one-stop-shop for current and prospective military students - from academic advising to psychological counseling. And their newest employee is none other than Mr. James Miller, Veterans Transition Coordinator. In this role James provides academic advising, coordinates academic resources and provides guidance on career and program planning to military and veteran students and their families.

Who would have expected that his choice to leave the Marine Corps would open so many doors so quickly? On August 3, 2009, President Obama headlined a G.I. Bill kick-off event at George Mason and James was honored with introducing the President to attendees. "It's been a very exciting year; new school, new job, and new lifestyle – I'm adjusting



**James Miller (center) stands with President Obama at the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill kick-off on August 3, 2009.**

well. It's the first time in eight years that I've had sideburns!" His academic interests lie in business communication and he chose the BIS program because it offers him a chance to combine his interests as well as use the credit he gained through his military training toward his degree.

Despite the many exciting changes, James' connection to the Marine Corps is still evident. "I miss the esprit and wearing the uniform." Once a Marine, always a Marine. James Miller has charted his path as a student at George Mason, and remains always faithful by providing military and veteran students the guidance they need to make a smooth transition into Mason. So here's to new experiences and learning without limits. Semper Fi.

*"Serving with the finest men and women our country has to offer was a great privilege; however, it was time for a change."*

# Family Ties

**Written by:**

**Linda Hemm**

It's "all in the family" at the Gordon house. Nine years ago in 2000, Diane Gordon, nurse, real estate agent, mom and student finished her BIS degree in "Conflict Resolution and Mediation" at GMU. Today, Bryan Gordon, her son, is completing his last semester as a BIS student in "Corporate Communication."

When asked how he heard about the BIS program, Bryan remembers ten years ago when his mom was at Mason and talked about how much she loved the BIS program. Since that time, Bryan has worked as an instructional assistant for special needs children in the Fairfax City Public Schools and is now working in logistics for the Government Services Administration. He has been to several colleges but did not complete his degree. His mom recommended BIS knowing that he would thrive in the non-traditional program. When asked about his experiences in the BIS program, Bryan said his BIS courses have definitely helped him with his writing skills.

Diane Gordon had a three year hospital diploma in nursing when she began the BIS program in 1998. Although Georgetown University would pay for completion of her degree, it was a traditional program which did not offer the flexibility to meet her needs with two jobs and three children. She started a conflict resolution concentration in the BIS program. This way she could get credit for her nursing courses and take classes relevant to her interests and goals. Her faculty mentor in the Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (ICAR) was a strong motivational factor in her academic study at Mason. Her concentration courses in conflict resolution gave her knowledge and skills useful in her position in patient advocacy as well as her real estate sales work and other facets of her life.

Diane has the following advice to pass on to current BIS students:

- BIS is a unique program that gives you the opportunity to take the courses and do the things you want to do.
- Work closely with your faculty mentor. Be open about your true interests and needs so s/he can give you good feedback and ideas about interesting courses and opportunities.
- Take advantage of graduate level courses.

She also wants to pass on some real world life lessons learned in the BIS program that are still important to her ten years later:

- People have different world views. They do not necessarily lie or have the wrong view. It's a learning experience to look at life from the perspective of another.
- When you say you're sorry, don't end the sentence with "but" followed by an excuse.

Both Diane and Bryan believe that the BIS program has given them a good foundation for pursuing their career goals and handling the challenges of everyday life.

# Putting a Spin on Basketball in India

**Written by:**  
**Rashad Mulla**

Senior Robin Brahmbhatt, who is pursuing a Bachelor of Individualized Study degree with a sport management concentration, has been studying the prospects of basketball in India, a country dominated by cricket.

Brahmbhatt partnered with associate professor and sport management coordinator Robert Baker, who is also involved with a basketball project in India.

“This is traditionally more of a hard science program,” says Baker of the Undergraduate Apprenticeship Program. “But [acceptance of his project] is a real recognition of the value of qualitative research and Robin’s insights. He’s looking at the development of a sport in India and development through sport.”

Brahmbhatt explored the ways basketball could be successful in the country of more than one billion people. He also found that any development of the sport in India would be pioneering work.

“I did a database search for basketball in India, and I found nothing,” Brahmbhatt said. “Nothing scholarly has been written on basketball in India.”

He adds, “Sports are on the tail end of development in In-

dia. It is still viewed as a frivolous activity [there].”

So, in his research Brahmbhatt looked at basketball’s popularity in China and cricket’s popularity in India to determine what factors were critical to those sports’ success. He also explored sports as a development tool and combated the notion of sports as a frivolous activity.

Brahmbhatt developed recommendations on how to popularize and improve the success, participation, competition and awareness of basketball in India.

The work is a first, according to Baker.

“Robin’s research is a building block in a much bigger puzzle,” Baker says. “In some places, sports is a leading component of development. In India, it’s trailing. Robin is trying to pinpoint a different approach for India.”

Brahmbhatt began to apply his research almost immediately.

He traveled to Ahmedabad, Gujarat, India – a city of more than four million people – on Aug. 12 to design, develop and implement a citywide Ultimate Frisbee league. This project is courtesy of a 12-month fellowship Brahmbhatt earned from Indicorps, a nonprofit organization dedicated to grassroots service in India. His goal is to ensure the league can survive after his stay in the country is over.



Senior Robin Brahmbhatt and sport management professor Robert Baker. Creative Services photo.

## ATTENTION ALUMNI

Let us know what you’re doing.

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We want to hear from you!

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## Support BIS!

### **Bachelor of Individualized Study**

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Your contributions help us continue to enhance the BIS program. If you would like to make a financial contribution, visit <http://supportingmason.gmu.edu/contribute.html>. Be sure to specify either BIS Program Fund or BIS Scholarships! Thank you for your generosity.

For information about Alumni Affairs go to: <http://www.gmu.edu/alumni>. Be sure to keep your information up to date.

**Learning without Limits**



## Student Recognitions

- Congratulations to Lauren McGill—Spring 2009 winner of the Psychology 301 award for Best Report!
- Bob Nissen was featured in the Chronicle of Higher Education article, *A Maintenance Man Crosses Over to the Classroom*, that discusses his studies in Educational Psychology through the BIS program.
- Congratulations to our 2009-2010 BIS Scholarships winners— Marshelle Harris and Pamela Martin!
- Congratulations to Pamela Martin for winning a scholarship from the American Association of University Women (AAUW).
- Congratulations to John Tuohy who was selected to participate in a playwrighting intensive at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts!

## Upcoming Events

- BIS participates in the first-ever Alumni Weekend—October 3, 2009, Johnson Center lounge, 3rd floor (CHSS Alumni Reception), 4:00-6:00pm.
- 2009 Moments of Truth Lecture: Harry Markopolos —October 15, 2009, Center for the Arts Lobby, 3:00pm.
- Fall 2009 Senior Capstone Presentations— December 15, 2009, further event details TBA, visit the website for more information as the event date nears.