This issue of the BIS Connector highlights the accomplishments of our students, alumni, and faculty/staff; we also explore several new developments in the program.

At the May 9th BIS Capstone presentations, Friderike Butler and Claudia Enriquez received the Robert T. Hawkes Award for Outstanding BIS capstone projects. Pam Newcomer received the award for her exceptional creative project, and Charis Sherman for her outstanding project in the public interest.

Friderike’s project was titled “Feeling At Home Abroad: A Study of the Acculturation Processes of Foreign-National Family Members During Job Assignments in Washington DC.” Catherine Crampon, of the School of Business, was Friderike’s mentor.

Claudia’s project was titled “The Social and Economic Impact of M-Pesa in Kenya’s Unbanked Population.” Constant Cheng, of the School of Business and Global Affairs, was Claudia’s mentor.

Pam’s project was titled “Assistive Technology for English Language Learners.” Cindy George, of the School of Education, was Pam’s mentor. Charis’s project was titled “The Role of NGOs in the Promotion of Universal Primary Education Among School-Aged Children in Liberia.” Robert Gaudian, of the School of Business, was Charis’s mentor.

We also honored Ryan Hampton on May 9th for receiving the Robert R. Thomas Jr. Scholarship from CHSS and the National Defense Industrial Association ROTC scholarship. Ryan is serving as a peer mentor/leader in UNIV 304, BIS Transfer Transitions this fall. He is in the Green to Gold program, which provides active duty enlisted soldiers an opportunity to complete a baccalaureate degree or a two-year graduate degree and earn a commission as an Army Officer. I am sure you will join me in celebrating these students’ impressive achievements.

Included in this newsletter are two articles by current BIS students on their work, Laura McDonald and Mark Friese. Laura’s capstone project was on Urban Ecology. This

Continued on Page 2
Letter from the Director

summer she completed her final course on Citizen Science based on her work in Clifton, Virginia. Mark Friese is a Merrill Lynch financial advisor who works with the families of special needs children; his capstone project is on the need for more training for special needs children.

We also include a profile of a BIS alumna in this newsletter. Academic Advisor, Linda Hemm, profiled Emily Gilbert, a 1981 graduate of BIS who started her BIS program after raising three children. Her concentration was in Women’s Studies; her mentor was Karen Rosenblum of Sociology, who was impressed by Emily’s devotion to “understanding and improving the status of women.”

We are proud of our alumni and will continue to write about their accomplishments in the future. Please update us on your activities regularly.

As in previous newsletters, we include profiles of our faculty and staff and news about their recent accomplishments. Kristin Scott has taught for BIS since 2010 and recently received a grant to develop a hybrid (part online part face-to-face) BIS 490, which she taught for the first time this summer. Her scholarship is on digital cities; she will complete her PhD in the spring of 2015. She has made invaluable contributions to BIS for many years.

We will include a piece by another BIS faculty member in our next newsletter. Joe Killiany was a very successful teacher of writing at George Mason who went on to become a fellow in the DC schools and a technical writer at Northrup Grumman. He is also one of the founding editors of the online and print literary magazine, Barrelhouse. We are pleased he has returned to Mason.

We are very proud of our new Student Services Manager, Julie Allstrom, who is a BIS graduate. Julie did her BIS capstone project on adult degree completion and the job market after working in social services and administrative support for many years. Julie brings a wealth of knowledge about the program to the job as well as an interest in helping us recruit new students. Julie became Student Services Manager in March, replacing Lenore Butcher Kuch. Lenore continues to work for BIS on a project-specific basis. She put together this newsletter, for example.

We also include in this newsletter Janet Ha’s piece on our new course, UNIV 300/304, BIS Transfer Transitions, which we offered for the first time in the spring of 2014. The course is held on two Saturdays each semester and is designed to ease the transition to Mason and introduce students to the BIS program and make sure they have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed at Mason. Another new development at BIS is that this fall we began offering our introductory course, BIS 300, at the new Mason Loudoun campus at Signal Hill Plaza on Route 7 in Sterling. We are pleased to have Beatriz Cuartas, who is completing her PhD in Public Policy and Well Being Studies at George Mason, teaching the class. We share the location with NOVA and look forward to making it easier for Loudoun residents to attend Mason.

As mentioned above, we are developing hybrid versions of BIS 390 and 490 because so many of our students work full time and have difficult commutes; the online component should facilitate timely degree completion. The first of these courses, developed by Kristin Scott with support from Distance Education at Mason, was taught this summer. Joe Killiany received a similar grant last semester and will offer a hybrid version of BIS 390 this coming spring. But we continue to begin the program with our two entirely face-to-face courses (BIS 300 and UNIV 300/304) to ease our students’ return to college, prepare them for the work to come, and foster more connections between students.

As always, BIS is an advising intensive program. If you are a current student, you should make an appointment to see our BIS advisors, Mark Sistek and Linda Hemm, at least once a semester to go over your concentration and course of study. If you are a BIS alumnus we look forward to hearing from you regularly and learning about your accomplishments as well as your thoughts about our program. You can update BIS on your address and contact information by emailing bis@gmu.edu. If you are willing to assist current BIS students, please let us know. We—and our current students—would love to draw on your experience and expertise.
Paul Hurley (BIS '12) is a disabled veteran who recently won a bronze medal at the World Rowing Championships, where he rowed the LTA (Legs, Trunk, and Arms) Double Scull with teammate Natalie McCarthy.

Previously, Paul had set a record time on an indoor rowing machine—the infamous ergometer or “erg”—in Chicago and was invited to the National Indoor Rowing Competition, the CRASH-Bs in Boston. There he connected with Natalie McCarthy, a blind rower, who had heard about his times posted at CRASH-Bs.

Natalie was rowing out of the Paralympic training center in Oklahoma City with Team USA and needed a partner who could meet the disability requirements of the LTA Double Scull at the World Rowing Championships. Paul and Natalie trained with a “ton of dedication” and three practices daily, which paid off when the team made it to the championships.

Paul’s boat was very different from other competitors because he rows with one leg (no prosthetic on), a rare case. Paul says that he really needs to get a prosthetic that will qualify for competition, which will allow even weight distribution, but he has not found one. Paul injured his right arm at that race due to the uneven weight balance but is considering a come-back for 2016.
Kristin Scott
Leads BIS Distance Education Efforts

Last year, long-time BIS instructor Kristin Scott received a grant to develop BIS 490 into a hybrid (distance education) course. In the summer of 2014, she taught the first hybrid course. The hybrid course blends online with classroom learning, giving our busy students more flexibility with their coursework.

As a first-generation and non-traditional age college student herself, Kristin is particularly passionate about working with non-traditional age students. She has mentored a number of students in capstone and advanced projects, including BIS and OSCAR (Students for Scholars program). Cultural studies is her primary field of study precisely because of its interdisciplinarity, as well as how those in the field work to identify and interrogate practices of everyday life, meaning-making processes, institutional structures of power, and offer possibilities for praxis. The knowledge and experience Kristin brings into the classroom thus derive from and contribute to a number of disciplines and fields of study, including urban studies, anthropology, literature, sociology, history, women’s studies, globalization studies, and digital and media studies.

Broadly, Kristin’s doctoral research explores the interconnections between digital technologies, the public sphere, and urban environments. Through her examination of three major cities in the U.S. (New York, Seattle, and San Antonio), she considers what economic, political, and social factors and goals motivate each of these cities to call itself “digital,” how each city complicates or problematizes current debates about digital spheres; the role of digital technologies in the functioning of civil society; and how abstract concepts of the digital city articulate with each city’s actual digital technological claims and programs. This past spring, Kristin was granted two awards to support her research: the Applied Urban Communication Research Award from the Urban Communication Foundation and a Term Faculty Development Award from George Mason University, both of which supported fieldwork in Copenhagen, Denmark this summer on the use of mobile technologies in digitally sustainable smart and intelligent cities.

BIS Alumna Julie Allstrom Keeps the BIS Program on Track

Julie Allstrom, 2012 BIS graduate, joined the BIS Program Office as Student Services Manager in March 2014. She previously worked in Mason’s Human Resources and Payroll Department.

Julie’s interdisciplinary coursework in Human Resources Management and Communication led to her BIS concentration, Aging Workforce Studies. In her capstone research, Julie analyzed the results of postsecondary education completion on older workers’ employment situations. Before graduation, she received research grants from Mason’s OSCAR to develop a feasibility study of employment in not-for-profit organizations in Northern Virginia. The Council of Undergraduate Research (CUR) published Julie’s article “Advice to Older Students” in its Spring 2013 issue, which is available on bis.gmu.edu.

Julie and her husband Eric have made their home in Leesburg, VA for the past 15 years. Their five daughters and seven grandchildren live in northern Virginia, Atlanta, GA and Austin, TX.

Julie Allstrom, 2012 BIS graduate, joined the BIS Program Office as Student Services Manager in March 2014. She previously worked in Mason’s Human Resources and Payroll Department.

Julie’s interdisciplinary coursework in Human Resources Management and Communication led to her BIS concentration, Aging Workforce Studies. In her capstone research, Julie analyzed the results of postsecondary education completion on older workers’ employment situations. Before graduation, she received research grants from Mason’s OSCAR to develop a feasibility study of employment in not-for-profit organizations in Northern Virginia. The Council of Undergraduate Research (CUR) published Julie’s article “Advice to Older Students” in its Spring 2013 issue, which is available on bis.gmu.edu.

Julie and her husband Eric have made their home in Leesburg, VA for the past 15 years. Their five daughters and seven grandchildren live in northern Virginia, Atlanta, GA and Austin, TX.
BIS Creates New Transfer Transitions Course

In the spring of 2014, BIS created a new one-credit course for our students called BIS Transfer Transitions.

We developed the course in response to student feedback about the program with support from the Center for Academic Advising, Retention and Transitions (CAART). The pilot section, UNIV 300, was taught by BIS Advisor/Graduation Coordinator, Janet Ha Poiriot. Beginning this fall, this class is designated as UNIV 304. It will be offered twice a year, on two Saturdays each semester. This fall, the course is taught by Joe Killiany, a BIS and English Department faculty member.

The main objective of UNIV 300/304 is to assist BIS students with their transition to Mason and introduce them to the BIS program, to BIS faculty and staff, and to each other. Last spring, Learning Services, the Copyright office, the Writing Center, OSCAR and the GMU library ran presentations and workshops and offered their expertise to students to help them navigate the pathways to academic success. There was a faculty panel on the BIS sequence of courses and a panel on faculty mentors. Going forward, the course will make it easier for BIS students to learn from one another and stay in touch.

Because the BIS program is an interdisciplinary research and a writing intensive program, special emphasis was placed on the research and writing tools available at the university. The Library’s Gateway Services introduced students to the use of research databases and did a workshop on the research tool Zotero. The Writing Center did an introductory presentation on how to use their services and the Director did a follow-up presentation on citing sources and avoiding plagiarism. Learning Services did a presentation on critical thinking and OSCAR on support for student research at Mason. Finally, faculty from outside BIS introduced students to courses relevant to several BIS concentrations. Through these presentations and panels students acquired the academic skills and knowledge of Mason they need to succeed.

UNIV 300—BIS Transfer Transitions was held from 9am to 4:30pm on two Saturdays last spring with breakfast and lunch included. Feedback from students who took the class was overwhelmingly positive and everyone felt that all BIS students should take the course. Several students recommended that the course be mandatory. For now, the course is optional but we encourage all BIS students to enroll.

BIS Graduates

Andrew Hawkins, Rujelio “Rudy” Ruiz, Kristin Kuck, Ben Chisler, and Matthew McCarthy (BIS 2014)

BIS Students Prove Academic Success At Mason

George Mason has joined with the Education Advisory Board to initiate the use of a new academic advising tool called the Student Success Collaborative (SSC) in the advising process. It uses 10 years of Mason historical academic data to assess risk factors to degree completion.

A recent SSC report comparing academic majors in the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS) reveals that BIS students have the 3rd highest average cumulative GPA, 3.2, among 23 CHSS majors. Only Creative Writing (3.29) and Environmental & Sustainability Studies (3.24) were higher.

It should come as no surprise to BIS students that the BIS program challenges and rewards their hard work and dedication towards degree completion.

Congratulations BIS Graduates!
Spotlight: Emily Gilbert

BIS Class of 1981

A chance encounter between former BIS director, Jeannie Brown Leonard, and BIS graduate Emily Gilbert led to this profile by Linda Hemm.

Emily Gilbert, a 1981 graduate of the BIS program, started her coursework at NVCC after raising three children and being involved with political activities in Richmond and the League of Women Voters. With her son’s encouragement to pull together a bachelor’s degree, she applied to Mason and was admitted to the BIS program in 1979.

Emily says that she enjoyed the BIS program and had some great experiences while at Mason. She did a concentration in Women’s Studies which included women’s studies courses, philosophy, legal studies and social work. Karen Rosenblum in Sociology was her faculty mentor.

Emily enjoyed attending Mason especially since the students in the BIS program were older. She enjoyed the women she met in her studies and the professors she had. She said that many of the women professors teaching women’s studies did not know each other but the students helped bring them together. She said the university benefitted greatly from the BIS program.

Asked if she would choose the BIS program again, Emily said “definitely!” Her recommendations to students now in the BIS program include: (1) know what you want to do and find courses that support your goals (2) work closely with faculty and staff on how best to put your concentration together.

Dr. Karen Rosenblum, founding Director of the Women’s Studies Program and Women’s Studies Research and Resource Center, served as Emily’s BIS Faculty Mentor. Currently on the faculty of Mason Korea, Dr. Rosenblum wrote:

"Emily was the first BIS student I had and, as I recall, she had to work hard to talk me into being her advisor! I was a brand-new faculty member (and brand-new Ph.D.) and felt quite overwhelmed with my job. But Emily was serious about her education and serious about Women’s Studies, and that quality of commitment really radiated from her. I remember sitting with her in what was then the cafeteria in the lower portion of what was then SUB I, and being struck by how fully Emily devoted herself to the task of understanding and improving the status of women. It felt very much like being taken in hand by a wise feminist -- I was the one being guided to take my subject matter seriously and to see education’s potential for social change. Emily has had a profound and continuing influence on me, as I am sure was the case for other professors. What a remarkable woman!"
When Tuan Nguyen, BIS ‘12 noticed that some of his younger classmates were arriving late to class or showing up with incomplete homework assignments, he wondered what was wrong with these kids. Then he realized he was just like them when he had first set foot in a college classroom years ago.

Nguyen started studying information technology (IT) and computer science at the University of Virginia directly after high school, but he recognized he still needed some time to mature. Attracted to the discipline, camaraderie, and potential work experience, Nguyen enlisted in the Army National Guard in 1991 with the intention of serving for six years and earning educational benefits. Nguyen did not know what to expect by enlisting, but he promised to do his best and see where it led. Nguyen is a noncommissioned officer in the Virginia Data Processing Unit supporting Army Cyber Command.

His unit’s mission is to assess the Army’s web servers, ensuring they are secure and any information released does not provide enemies with insight. When he is not mobilized, Nguyen’s service schedule includes one weekend a month and 15 days throughout the year. Nguyen is also the founder and president of Eminent Solutions Inc., an IT consulting firm.

Throughout his career with the guard, Nguyen has gained a tremendous amount of IT training and education.

During his second mobilization (he is currently on his fourth), Nguyen expanded his education by completing an associate of science degree in IT from Northern Virginia Community College. He then took the next step of enrolling in George Mason University’s Bachelor of Individualized Study (BIS) program, an interdisciplinary concentration for adult learners working toward degree completion. This unique degree allowed Nguyen to design a curriculum based on military operations and IT.

Nguyen describes the BIS program as “rigorous. It’s fair and challenging but also gives you the flexibility of pursuing a degree that is helpful in your current career endeavors.” Faculty members are aware of each student’s needs, which vary significantly. Some BIS students arrive at orientation with a clear vision of what they want to study, whereas others need guidance creating a program that combines their work experience with their previous education.

The BIS student population includes returning veterans, people interested in a career change or advancement, or those seeking personal fulfillment. They all share a deep appreciation and desire for higher education, something Nguyen recognized more than two decades after starting at the University of Virginia. Nguyen explains that BIS students have the benefit of life experiences and the knowledge that education is a privilege; this combination makes them more motivated to succeed. They are balancing work and family obligations, and many have been away from formal education for years. All these factors make them work harder.

Nguyen’s service quickly became a passion and now, after 20 years, he has earned the honor to retire but plans to stay with the guard while it remains fun and challenging.

Since his guard service can be as brief as 39 days a year, he emphasizes the importance of treating each day as a job interview because there is so much weighing on each encounter. He says, “if you’re asked to show up two days a month, and you don’t, it shows and it’s a reflection on your reputation.” If Nguyen can improve a process or a system, or a younger soldier’s outlook, he believes these small pieces will have a larger outreach.

Today Nguyen actively mentors younger soldiers, advising them on how to succeed in the military and translate their skills to the civilian world. He reminds them that service provides soldiers the opportunity to succeed but work performance, character, knowledge, and skills still have to be earned. Nguyen has returned to the classroom and is currently pursuing his masters in management of secure information systems within George Mason’s School of Management.
Early in 2014, the BIS Program began hosting information sessions for prospective students in Loudoun County. This continued effort to increase recognition and understanding of the BIS Program by individuals and local businesses resulted in new applications for admission to the program. At the same time, the Mason in Loudoun instructional site prepared to relocate in Sterling VA with some Northern Virginia Community College personnel and programs.

Supported by Mason’s Office of Regional Campuses, the BIS Program agreed to offer BIS 300 at the new Loudoun site in Fall semester 2014. The venture has been a success. The BIS 300 students enjoy all the amenities of the new Mason in Loudoun location – well-equipped classrooms, meeting spaces, student lounges, video-conferencing capability, and free parking. As other Mason programs expand course offerings in Loudoun for Spring 2015 and beyond, BIS students who live or work in Loudoun County will continue to benefit.

More information about Mason in Loudoun can be found at loudoun.gmu.edu.
Financial Planner Mark Friese on Autism and his BIS Concentration

Advocacy work is never easy and the path one follows to be successful in it can sometimes take you in many different directions. Twenty seven years ago I started a career in the financial services industry. I provided advice and guidance for a wide variety of people and companies.

Eighteen years ago my second child Christopher was born and my whole life changed. Christopher was diagnosed with autism at the age of a year and a half. I knew nothing about autism or the planning that our family would have to do to make sure my son Christopher was OK and on a good path. Resources on the subject were scarce and the long-term specialized planning that a family should do with a special needs member was difficult to find. Today, I travel throughout the United States talking to families like mine about their journey and what they can do to be prepared. I head one of the leading teams in the country specializing in financial planning for families with special needs members.

A significant amount of my work requires research and writing skills. In the fall of 2013, I entered the BIS program in part to help me develop these skills. Class sizes are small and I have received lots of individualized guidance. I am confident that the new skills I am developing through BIS will help me to be more effective at campaigning for changes in the education and training of special needs children and associated planning by families, businesses and the government.

In recent years, I have seen many successful outcomes for families with special needs children. But I have also seen many lingering problems. The laws and rules for the disabled are outdated and in some cases make no sense in today’s world. As an example, to be eligible for government benefits your earnings and the amount families are allowed to save must be near poverty levels. In order to get the word out and encourage support for a change in this area, I have become heavily involved on many boards that help the disability community. Our team recently testified to the Senate Finance Committee as a supporter for new legislation that could make additional savings possible. My BIS program is developing the research and writing skills I need to do this work more effectively.

My capstone project focuses on the potential consequences of the rising Social Security and other governmental disability benefit claims as they relate to the autism community. Based on my research, I explore various options for employer- and employee-based training to create more jobs for individuals with special needs. A consequent lower demand for government resources - and more effective use of existing resources - may allow Social Security Disability benefits to last longer and help make the system financially stronger. This would leave additional resources for traditional Social Security beneficiaries and be available for future persons with disabilities.
Laura McDonald on her interdisciplinary approach to citizen science and urban ecology.

I am a rare species – a native of Fairfax County and a witness to the ever-expanding growth and development that has occurred over the past four decades. As our natural resources have dwindled, replaced by asphalt, roof tops and strip malls, my career path has developed and followed my passion: to preserve the unique ecosystem that is Northern Virginia and educate people along the way.

It was a great disappointment to learn that funding for my position as an environmental scientist, responsible for construction site stormwater management compliance at Fort Belvoir, was eliminated due to budget cuts. With that news I began to research the next logical step to effectively utilize my unique skill set – hands on practical experience and the ability to energize friends, neighbors and co-workers to care for and take interest in our most precious natural resources.

Building on my first degree, an Associates in Applied Science in Horticulture, I developed a unique curriculum in Urban Ecology for my BIS concentration. It is a relatively new and emerging field of science. This branch of ecology strives to understand the intricate relationship between humans and natural ecosystems in densely populated areas. Urban ecologists study the complex ecosystems that include humans living in cities and developed landscapes. Attention is placed on the relationships that have evolved between humans and nature.

Simply put, my BIS concentration in Urban Ecology is a subfield of the science of ecology focused on the complex ecosystems that include humans living in cities, urbanized landscapes and the relationships that have evolved between humans and nature. The focus is often on a specific plant, animal or a localized community of plants or animals as well as ecosystem levels of processes and organization.

My program pieces together pertinent course work that enabled me to apply it locally. The Washington D.C. Metropolitan area is an environmentally important ecosystem. It is the northern most point for many southern species and the southern most point for many northern species. The increasing density and sprawl continue to contribute to the overall degradation of the area. My educational goals focused on the ecology, development, and its impact specific to Northern Virginia and the greater mid-Atlantic region.

Urban ecology is interdisciplinary by nature. The building blocks include, but are not limited to: ecology, biology, geography, engineering, urban planning, economics and public policy. It can also include the disciplines of forestry, horticulture, public health, ornithology and entomology. The emphasis of these disciplines varies geographically.

My capstone project was a continuance of a semester long independent study of indigenous butterfly abundance and diversity. I examined ten years of observations collected during the North American Butterfly Association Fourth of July Count. It involved data compilation and statistical analysis from the Occoquan Bay Count Circle where for more than two decades, a
local group of citizen scientists, led by naturalist James Waggener, have been working diligently to document bird, butterfly, dragonfly and plant populations. Their dedicated efforts have provided a vast repository of information. Achieving this would have been impossible without public involvement. Organizing and analyzing this information was the next crucial step in fully exploiting the valuable contribution of the many volunteers. The end result provided useful statistical analysis, as well as a provisional checklist of butterflies and skippers.

I am currently working on my last class - an independent study on citizen science and community-based conservation. This project will focus on another local program sponsored by the Audubon Society of Northern Virginia, Audubon at Home. This grass-roots driven organization has been the leading voice for more than 30 years to connect people with nature. From the beginning of the program (1989) and publication of “The Nature of Change: Preserving the Natural Heritage of a Dynamic Region” (2005) to the current wildlife sanctuary certification program, citizen scientists from the region have volunteered thousands of hours to nurture our precious resources.

In accordance with the program's objectives to foster a better environment, I am working with others in my neighborhood to revive an environmental committee. Our objectives will be to raise awareness and engage our neighbors to become good stewards of our land.

Learn more at: thesuburbanecologist.wordpress.com/

BIS Student Project Awards 2014

The 2014 Student Project Awards were announced at the May 9th Senior Capstone Project Presentations.

Robert T. Hawkes, Jr. Award for Outstanding BIS Project - shared by Fridenike Butler and Claudia Enriquez

Most Creative BIS Project - Pamela Newcomer

Outstanding BIS Project in the Public Interest - Charis Sherman

These outstanding projects will be available to view on bis.gmu.edu soon.
Popsicle Junkie

By Kimberly Ruff, BIS ’11, MFA ’14

Courtesy of CHSS Cornerstone 2013

My daughter is a popsicle junkie. Year-round, if you offer her a choice of ice cream, chocolate candy, or a Popsicle, she will choose a Popsicle every time. She loves the red, white, and blue rocket pop, but her favorite favor is classic cherry. Through trial and error, I have found a few varieties that she refuses to eat, including any healthy types that interfere with the standard sugary make-up of a Popsicle (reduced sugar, sugar-free, and sweetened with Splenda), the slow-melting brands, and the miniature ones on a regular stick, which she has decided are “messed up.” From the moment she wraps her toddler-size fingers around the wooden stick, she can’t be bothered, not even to help Scooby-Doo solve a mystery. Sometimes she’ll lick the frost from each side, and other times she’ll chomp down on the frozen treat with her front teeth. When I hear the sound of her front teeth slice through the flavored ice, it sends a chill up my spine and makes my sensitive teeth throb.

Over the summer, we came across a type that I remember eating as a kid. There’s nothing special about the packaging or the flavor, but the sticks have jokes imprinted on them. My daughter is also an up-and-coming comedian, so purchasing popsicles with jokes on the stick was a no-brainer. She picked a red Popsicle from the box, selected a purple one for me, and decided we should sit outside. That August day was part of a nine-day stretch of temperatures over 100 degrees. It had been a long summer filled with weekends to the beach, family visits with all-day tours to D.C., multiple trips to the National Zoo, and most every other day spent at our apartment pool. The cloudless, sunny days reddened her fair skin and bleached her strawberry-blond hair, leaving her with white hair that resembled mine when I was her age.

We barely sat down before the frosted sides of our frozen treats were glossed over and melting onto our fingertips. I ate mine quickly. For once, so did she. “Mommy,” she said, handing me her red-stained Popsicle stick. “Can you read my joke?”

“Sure, hun,” I said. “What’s everyone doing at the same time, but at different rates?”

“I don’t know,” she said.

I hesitated reading the answer, choking back a lump in my throat and the urge to squeeze my daughter as hard as my grandmom hugged me the night my grandpop died.

“Mommy,” she persisted.

“Growing older,” I said.

Kim Ruff graduated with an MFA in creative writing with a concentration in nonfiction in 2014. After serving eight years in the U.S. Air Force, Ruff published numerous editorials, columns, and press releases for the Wetumpka Herald, Elmore County, Alabama’s leading newspaper, and Philadelphia’s premiere science museum, the Franklin Institute. Her interpretation of a short story by Ambrose Bierce was accepted for inclusion in the Literacy Reference Center produced by EBSCO Publishing. She was awarded an apprenticeship as a writing fellow for research that focused on student writing and the revision process. Her personal essays have earned her two scholarships and publication in the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities. She was an instructor of composition in Mason’s English Department; the driver coordinator for the largest literary event in the region, Mason’s Fall for the Book; and performs as a storyteller in the Washington, D.C., area.

Kim now resides in North Carolina with her husband and children.

Contribute to the BIS Scholarship Fund

The BIS Scholarship fund provides approximately $1000 to BIS students each year. Students may apply through the Financial Aid Office. Scholarship applications are reviewed in the Fall semester through the combined efforts of the BIS director, advising staff and with the support of the BIS Scholarship founder, Karole McKalip, who serves as an advisor.

Your contributions help us to enhance the BIS Program. Please visit the BIS website, bis.gmu.edu, and click on “Give.”

Thank you for your generosity.
Upcoming Events

- Mason Alumni Weekend
  September 19-21, 2014  alumniweekend.gmu.edu
- Senior Capstone Presentations
  December 12, 2014
- Winter Graduation and Degree Conferral
  December 18, 2014
- First Day of Classes, Spring 2015
  Tuesday, January 20, 2015