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New liberal studies master’s program takes off

by Carin Mangimeli

In August 2006, the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) Board approved the new Master of Arts in Liberal Studies (M.L.S.) program at Metropolitan State. Carin Mangimeli sat down with Lawrence Moe, director of the new M.L.S., to find out more about how the program came to be, how it compares to similar programs and what it offers students.

CM: Where did the idea for an M.L.S. program come from?
LM: The idea that Metropolitan State University would have an M.L.S. program has been around for a very long time. I started teaching here in 1987, and there was talk even then about how it would make sense to create a graduate-level interdisciplinary program for our students. I went to work on the project in 2000, and I’ve been working with other faculty on it for a little over five years. We were slowed down a little by the state of Minnesota budget crisis, but especially during the last two years, faculty and administration have come to consensus about the design of the program.

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New M.L.S.: A few facts

What courses are required?
The program consists of 32 graduate credits, including the Introductory Seminar and three Exploration courses. The Introductory Seminar allows students to analyze and refine their educational objectives in the program. In the Exploration courses, students will have the opportunity to pursue their individual interests as they relate to the interdisciplinary theme for each class. Students also select 12 credits of graduate-level electives, which can include independent studies or internships, and they complete a capstone course and project.

What’s involved in the admissions process?
Applicants must have a B.A. or B.S. degree to be admitted to the program. They should also have completed significant course work in a liberal arts discipline (or disciplines) and have a GPA of at least 3.0. The application requires letters of recommendation, transcripts, a resume, an essay and a writing sample. The next priority application deadline is the last week in March 2007 for students who will enroll starting fall semester 2007.

For further information
Contact Professor Lawrence Moe, director, M.L.S. program, lawrence.moe@metrostate.edu or 651-793-1429.
New M.L.S. program, continued from page 1

CM: You say the program was approved by MnSCU. Who exactly reviewed it?
LM: MnSCU has an external reviewer requirement in its program approval process. There were three professionals outside of Metropolitan State who reviewed the program. One was the director of the graduate liberal studies program at the University of Michigan, Dearborn; another was the dean of graduate education at the University of South Dakota. A third was an anonymous reviewer chosen by MnSCU. All three found the program to be a very good use of our resources, to harmonize with our mission and to have a solid academic design.

CM: How does Metropolitan State’s program compare to similar programs at the University of Minnesota and Hamline? What would you say to students to get them to come here instead?
LM: One factor is the cost. If you take the current University of Minnesota graduate tuition rate for a part-time student and multiply that by the number of credits in that university’s M.L.S. program, you get a much higher tuition than we have, almost three times higher. Hamline is much more expensive as well. So affordability is one of the things I would point to. Also, at Metropolitan State, we have been in the business of student-centered education for working adults for a very long time. A graduate liberal studies program is a logical fit in our institutional culture. For people exploring options for a degree like this, I’d urge them to come to campus and talk to our students about evening and weekend classes, about advising and about the opportunity to individualize and customize their course of study.

CM: Can students still move on to get a Ph.D. or is this a terminal degree?
LM: I would advise a student whose goal is a Ph.D. in a specific discipline to consider a discipline-based master’s program. An interdisciplinary program is different. We accept students with a four-year degree in any subject. The courses will be at an appropriate graduate level, but they will use the perspectives of more than one discipline. The program is not about the methodology of any single discipline. It’s a more generalist approach.

CM: You’ve really emphasized that the program is interdisciplinary. Can you explain how that works?
LM: For a very long time now, we have been living in a world of specialists and specialization. And all these disciplines are boring mine shafts down into the terra firma of knowledge and understanding, and there aren’t a lot of lateral passages connecting them. Now we can specialize and compartmentalize ourselves right out of seeing the big picture, and that’s why our M.L.S. program emphasizes theorized interdisciplinary study. Look—we’re getting to a point now where they can run a wand over you and see right through you. Should they be able to do that because they can? An ethicist and a computer scientist team-teaching a course about how new technologies affect our political rights and freedoms—now that’s interesting, and that’s what interdisciplinary study is all about.

CM: An M.L.S. sounds like more of a degree to better yourself intellectually and philosophically. Is the degree useful in the job market?
LM: M.L.S. students will find advanced liberal arts studies intensely practical because of the emphasis on reasoning abilities, verbal abilities and critical thinking abilities. One of the most valuable skills is logical reasoning. We attempt to address that throughout this program. The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development Web site states that occupations requiring high-level skills like these not only have relatively high wages, but are rapidly growing in number. In one of the other local programs here in town, about 25 percent of the students are employed as public school teachers. They get raises when they get master’s degrees; it’s a very practical outcome.

That said, I don’t want to diminish how this degree is also about expanding one’s human potential. There is an obligation in a democracy for students to be informed and engaged. I would put it to you that subjects like philosophy, history, women’s studies, ethics and communication all contribute toward understanding the real issues of the day and exercising advocacy and even leadership. That is right at the heart of Metropolitan State University’s mission.

Carin Mangimeli is the editor of The Metropolitan student newspaper and is majoring in writing and professional communication.
New resident faculty in CAS

The following faculty members started teaching in the College of Arts and Sciences during fall 2006.

**Michael Boston** is a new tenure-track assistant professor in the Ethnic Studies Department. He teaches courses in ethnic studies and African-American studies, participates in curriculum development and provides leadership in developing the African-American studies area. He also works collaboratively with the African-American community.

Michael comes to Metropolitan State from The College of Wooster, where he was a visiting professor for the 2005–2006 school year. During the previous year, he was visiting professor at Iowa State University. He has also taught at Syracuse University, Erie Community College, Niagara Community College, Memphis University and the State University of New York at Buffalo. He holds a B.A. in psychology and history from the State University of New York at Oneonta; an M.A. in history and an M.B.A. focusing on strategic management and marketing from the State University of New York at Binghamton; and a Ph.D. in American history with specialization in African-American history from the State University of New York at Buffalo. Michael is currently working on an oral history project on African Americans in Niagara Falls, New York, from 1920 to 1970.

Michael says of his first few months teaching at Metropolitan State, “The students seem to really want to learn and not just get a good grade.”

**Ramin G. Daghigh** is a new tenure track assistant professor in the Natural Science Department. He teaches physics and earth science courses, advises students and collaborates in the development of physics and earth sciences curriculum and laboratory facilities. He is also participating in the enhancement of the applied mathematics major.

Ramin comes to the university from the University of Winnipeg, where he was a postdoctoral fellow since September 2004. Earlier he was a temporary assistant professor at Arkansas State University, a visiting researcher at Queen’s University in Belfast, UK, and a physics teacher at Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education. Ramin holds an M.S. in physics from Middle East Technical University in Ankara, Turkey, and a Ph.D. in physics from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. He twice received the National Science Foundation Travel Award to participate in the Chalonge courses in Erice, Italy, in 2000 and Palermo, Italy, in 2002.

Ramin enjoys “the small university setting of Metropolitan State University where I can easily interact with the faculty members and staff of different departments. Everyone at Metropolitan State is very friendly and efficient in what they are doing. I also enjoy the diversity of the students, staff and faculty members of our university.”

**Margaret Ann Mortensen Vaughan** is a new tenure-track assistant professor in the Ethnic Studies Department. She teaches courses in ethnic studies and American Indian studies and provides leadership in developing the American Indian studies program. She is also working collaboratively with the American Indian community and is involved in scholarly and professional activities.

Margaret comes to Metropolitan State from Park University at Davis-Monthan Air Force Base, Ariz., where she was an adjunct instructor. She was also an editorial assistant for *Anthropology and Education Quarterly* at the University of Arizona. Previously, as a graduate student, she was an instructor for the American Indian Studies Programs at the University of Arizona. She holds a B.A. in anthropology from the University of Maine, and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in American Indian studies from the University of Arizona.

Margaret finds the most surprising and interesting parts of her first semester at Metropolitan State are “the interconnections between departments, the many opportunities for professional development, and how the institution itself works.”
Writing across borders

By Solveig Corbin and Peggy Maher

In fall of 2005, Metropolitan State University received a grant to work with the University of Massachusetts, Lowell, on a project to provide solar energy equipment to people living in Peruvian mountain villages. This is the first grant Metropolitan State has received for service-learning work abroad. Two students in the M.S. program in technical communication—Solveig Corbin and Peggy Maher—participated in this unique project and wrote this article.

At an April 2005 service learning conference in Saint Paul, Helen Correll, Metropolitan State professor in the Communication, Writing and the Arts Department, met John Duffy, professor of engineering, at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell. Duffy had been involved in an engineering department project to provide solar energy equipment to Peruvians living in remote mountain villages without electricity or telephones. Correll had been teaching the graduate course, Technical Communication in International Contexts, for several years. The two professors discovered some common and complementary interests. The result was an international, cross-university, interdisciplinary, collaborative project.

Addressing a community problem

Duffy’s program involved sending Lowell student engineers to Peru to install and maintain solar energy equipment, including radio transceivers, refrigerators, ceiling lights, task lights, lantern chargers and water purification systems. The problem was that, with the exception of a 70-page manual for the radios, the residents didn’t have instructions on how to use or care for the equipment. As a result, the equipment was not maintained.

Correll’s graduate class tackled the problem of ineffective documentation by creating alternative manuals better suited to the population in Peru. Doctors and nurses in a Peruvian village use instructions developed by Metropolitan State students to set up solar-powered radios.

The class was split into three groups, one per type of radio. Each group took a different approach for each manual:

- **Storyboard approach**: a manual from the perspective of a frustrated person using the radio for the first time.
- **Basic directions**: a manual using graphics and color to explain basic functions.
- **Detailed directions**: a manual using graphics, color and diagrams.

Making the journey to Peru

When the manuals were finished, two students, Solveig Corbin and Peggy Maher, traveled to Peru (with Lowell engineers) to complete usability tests on the manuals. The trip was supported by Minnesota Campus Compact, with funding from 3M.

Each of the dozen or more mountain villages visited by the team had a clinic with a nurse or medical
Two students in the M.S. program in technical communication went to Peru in January 2006 to help provide solar energy equipment to people living in remote mountain villages. Solveig Corbin, one of the students, returned to Peru in June 2006. She writes her impressions of the two trips.

January 2006

Two little girls dressed in brightly colored dresses and carrying babies in mantas on their backs quietly watch us install our solar equipment. They seem interested in our work but keep their distance. We are in the village of Huallmi, the first gringos to visit here. Word travels fast in Huallmi, and by nightfall I can feel people watching us as we work in the clinic. Using our headlamps (the only light), we are busy connecting the radio, battery and overhead lights. At one point, I shine my flashlight around the room and discover a large crowd surrounding us. Men and boys border every square inch of the walls. I feel like a celebrity!

I am getting something from the truck when I hear a loud cheer. The lights have gone on! I wonder if the villagers have seen lights before. Communication is difficult here because the main spoken language is Quechua. After setting the radio frequency and giving the nurse (who speaks Spanish) instructions along with our manual, we shake hands with all of the villagers. We drive back to Quillo and try to contact Huallmi on the new radio but have no luck. It is frustrating as there are no more days left to try to figure out what is wrong; that will have to wait for the next trip. We continue our descent, counting 27 hairpin curves on our way back down the dark mountain.

June 2006

In June, I have the privilege of returning to Huallmi. I cannot believe the changes! A new two-level clinic had been built, and the villagers are excited to see us return. We move the old solar system down the mountain to the new clinic and reinstall it. Their radio has been working well, as it turns out. In the six months of using the radio, there have been no deaths in the community. This is due primarily to being able to contact the hospital in Quillo for medical advice and transportation. In the six months prior to having the radio, 12 deaths had been reported, mainly infants who died in childbirth.

Maria Luisa, the obstetrician, told us that one day she had been off delivering a baby and one of the village men used the radio in the clinic to contact the hospital about an emergency. I like to think that our radio instructions helped him know how to call for help.

While the radio documents were intended for well-educated, Spanish-speaking medical technicians and nurses, our challenge for the future is to understand the farmers, the housewives and the people that make up the communities, and to base our work on the understanding that evolves. Our hope is that the engineering projects and technical communication pieces can bring the local people into the process through an improved understanding of the culture and the needs of each individual village. By asking questions and using audience analysis to develop this understanding, technical communication students can play a significant role in this project.
Faculty news

Camille D’Ambrose (Communication, Writing and the Arts) performed in the Jungle Theater production, Last of the Boys. Allen Hamilton (Communication, Writing and the Arts) performed in the Jungle Theater production, The Rivals. Both Camille and Allen also do radio and television voice work.


Kris Frykman (Communication, Writing and the Arts) did a presentation at the Transformative Language Arts (TLA) The Power of Words Conference in October 2006. The presentation uses a cross-disciplinary focus incorporating guided visualization, movement and written and visual exercises to facilitate personal insight among participants.

Kathy Graves (Communication, Writing and the Arts) cowrote and edited the recently-published book, Indians in Minnesota (5th edition), University of Minnesota Press.

Maythee Kantar and Kathy Wellington (Communication, Writing and the Arts) attended the annual Project SHINE meeting in Portland, Ore. in October. They also presented a paper, “Using a Model Program to Leverage Institutional Support for Service Learning” at the Sixth Annual International Conference on Service Learning Research, also in Portland. Project SHINE is a national service-learning initiative that provides a framework for university-community partnerships.

New math and science initiative

Five CAS faculty members (Cindy Kaus, Rikki Wagstrom, Todd Lafrenz, John Schneider and Tom O’Connell) attended the National Science Foundation-sponsored Science Education for New Civic Engagements and Responsibilities (SENCER) workshop in summer 2006. The team then submitted a follow-up proposal and received a supplementary grant of $3,000 from SENCER that will be used to help develop new liberal arts core math and science classes that emphasize civic engagement. Proposed classes include Math for Social Justice, Math and the Environment, and Chemistry, Society and the Environment. CAS will host a workshop related to the SENCER initiatives for resident and community faculty in spring 2007. For further information contact Cindy Kaus at cindy.kaus@metrostate.edu.

Student news

Jason Allen (Social Science) received third place for his paper, “The Heart of a Community: Structure and Activities,” in the Caroline Rose Undergraduate Paper Competition sponsored by the Sociologists of Minnesota and the Wisconsin Sociological Association during the annual meeting at the University of Wisconsin–River Falls, October 2006.

Clyde Braden (alumnus, Writing) had his novel, The Wolves Cried, published in May 2006. Two of his short stories were also published in the anthology, Quality Short Stories. He is working on two more novels. He writes, “Not too bad for a 73-year-old salesman!”

Chris Brazelton (alumna, Social Science) has been a child support officer in Wright County for the last three years. Since graduating from Metropolitan State, she has been sent twice to Tanzania in East Africa by the League of Women Voters on a state department project to assist women in advancing democratic principles.

Brad Cochrane (alumnus, Technical Communication) recently started working at Microsoft in Redmond, Wash. He is a media producer, supervising the creation of video projects. He writes, “I am excited to be at the hub of the evolving technical communication trend, combining print, video and digital into one model.”

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Sherry Lee (Communication, Writing and the Arts) is the new curator of the Women of Color Readings sponsored by SASE: The Write Place. The readings take place at Patrick’s Cabaret in Minneapolis.

Daryl Parks (Literature and Language) has accepted an invitation to join the advisory board for the Teacher Education Council at the University of Minnesota. This board of 16 includes state legislators, district superintendents, and other educational leaders who provide feedback to the College of Education and Human Development on its programs that serve over 5,000 full-time students annually. Daryl also coauthored a chapter, “High School Students’ Struggles with Class and Race: Discussions of Affirmative Action in a Literature Classroom,” in the forthcoming *Late to Class: Social Class and Schooling in the New Economy*, SUNY Press, 2007. He published the article, “Birthfathers: Adoption Stories’ Silent, Complex Characters” in *Mutuality*, autumn 2006.

Erica Rasmussen (Communication, Writing and the Arts) has had several recent exhibitions, including “Paper Road,” an international juried exhibition in Austria and Germany and “Facets of Surrealism,” Elaine Erickson Gallery, Milwaukee, Wis. She also showed her work at the Korean Hanji Festival, Jeon-Buk Cultural Center, Jeon-Ju City, South Korea.

Andrew Ward (Practical Philosophy and Ethics) presented the paper, “Medical Necessity, Needs and Justice: Helping the Medically Uninsured,” at the Minnesota Philosophical Society in October 2006.

**ICS cohosts conference**

The Information and Computer Science Department cohosted the national Association for Computer Machinery’s Special Interest Group for Information Technology Education (ACM SIGITE) conference in Minneapolis in October 2006. Capella University was the other cohost.

The whole department pitched in for this event. Larry Gottschalk was the conference registrar and was responsible for lining up volunteers for the conference. Tonia Baxter, advisor in the ICS department, worked along with other faculty members at the registration table.

Jigang Liu, Kuodi Jian and Larry Gottschalk presented a workshop on how to teach Web technology using Open Source software. Ahmad Kasrawi, a graduate student in the master’s program in computer science, prepared three hands-on labs that were used in the workshop. Later, Larry, Jigang, and Kuodi presented a poster paper on the leading books in the field of computer forensics.

To highlight Metropolitan State University’s role in the conference, ICS participants wore brightly colored t-shirts with the university’s theme, “Where life and learning meet.”

**Student news, continued from page 6**


Tony Gamble (alumnus, Biology), a Ph.D. student in conservation biology at the University of Minnesota, won the 2005–2006 Outstanding Conservation Biology Graduate Student Award at the university.

Kate Gilbertson (alumna, Biology) has been accepted into the University of Montana M.F.A. program in science and natural history filmmaking.

Ted Hovey (alumnus, Writing) has been accepted into Hamline’s M.F.A. program. He started in September.

Tony Lemm (alumnus, M.S. Technical Communication) recently started working as a project manager in the design department at Wells Fargo.

Nancy Murphy (alumna, Social Science) received second place for her paper, “Coordinated Community Response: A New Response to an Old Problem,” in the Caroline Rose Undergraduate Paper Competition sponsored by the Sociologists of Minnesota and the Wisconsin Sociological Association during the annual meeting at the University of Wisconsin–River Falls, October 2006.

Josiah Titus (alumnus, Writing) received a Nolte-Miller Scholarship to attend the Split Rock Arts Program workshop, “The Fiction Writer’s Fingerprint.”
Send us your news!

- Your news—activities, accomplishments
- News of other Metropolitan State faculty, staff, students and alumni
- Book notes: title and author of a book you’ve read recently along with a few sentences of commentary

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Don’t miss the spring theater production

Plan now to attend the Metropolitan State University spring theater production—Cat’s Paw, by William Mastrisimone. Cat’s Paw focuses on an unusual terrorist, one who is brilliant, articulate and possibly... right? Victor is the head of a group responsible for a bomb attack at the White House. His mission? To prevent the destruction of the world’s water supply. The play was a hit at the Seattle Repertory Theatre and at San Diego’s Old Globe Theatre. Don’t miss it.

Preview: Thursday, March 29, 7:30 p.m.
Opening Night: Friday, March 30, 7:30 p.m.
Other performances: Saturday, March 31, 2 p.m.
and 7:30 p.m.; Friday, April 6, 7:30 p.m.;
Saturday, April 7, 7:30 p.m.
Where: Whitney Stagedoor Theater, Minneapolis Campus

For more information, call 651-793-1550.