



# COLUMNS

THE HONORS PROGRAM NEWSLETTER AT BENTLEY UNIVERSITY • FALL 2012

## THE POTENCY OF IDEAS

### Confessions from an Unlikely Innovator on How Columns Came to Be

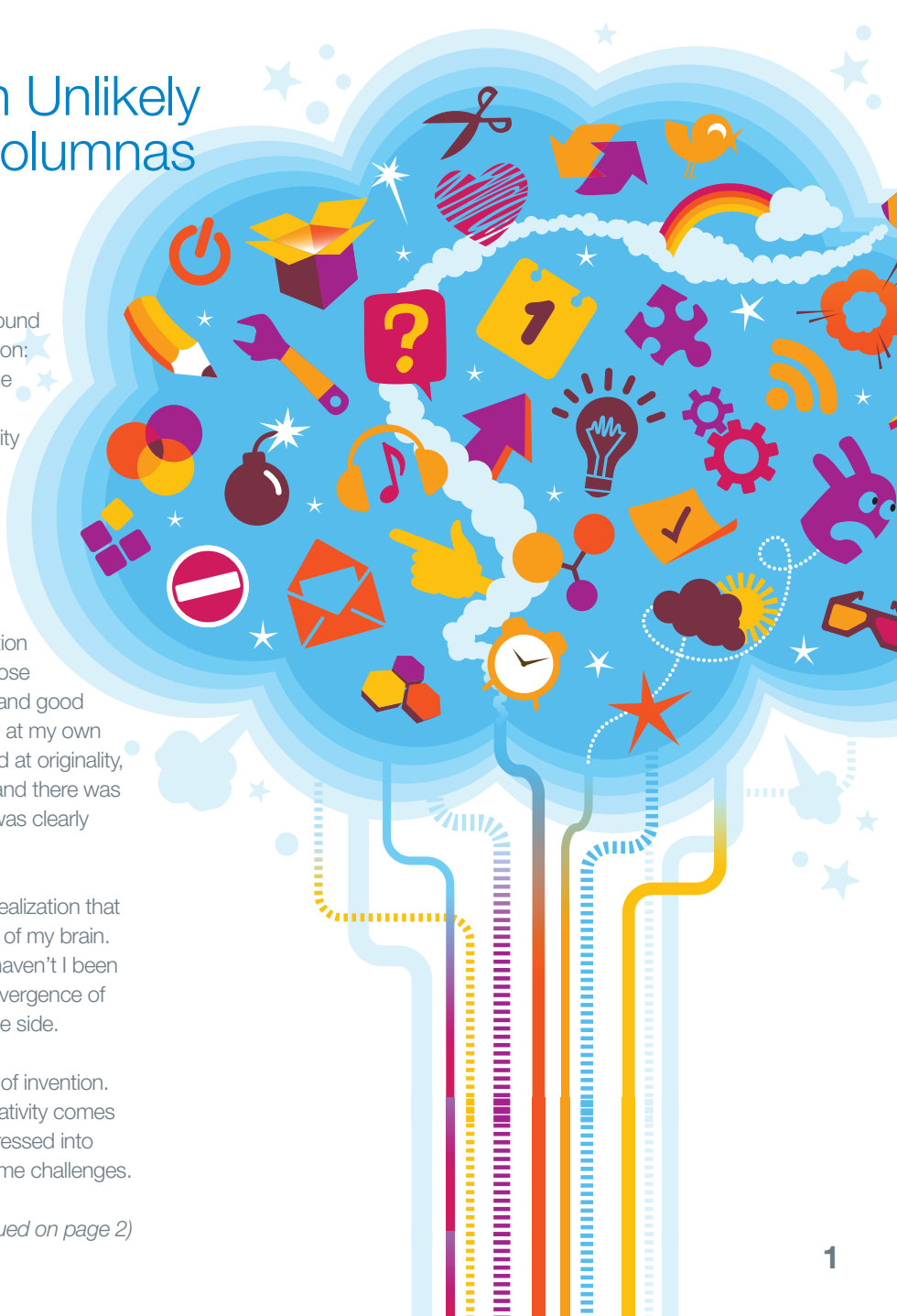
I sat in Wilder Pavilion listening to Bentley President Gloria Larson talk about the strategic vision of the university as we move toward its centennial, and I found myself drifting off thinking about the following question: Where do great things come from? Maybe it was the relentlessly infectious enthusiasm of Gloria’s words, or perhaps it was a manifestation of my own proclivity to find inspiration in the most unlikely of places — whether driving to work, shaving or dozing off in a plane on the long and frequent trips I take back to my hometown of Eugene, Oregon. Probably a little of both, I suppose.

But the question still stands. I think about this question on occasion, not because I’m a narcissist (I think those that know me would sincerely insist on my humility and good nature), but rather because I’m genuinely perplexed at my own ability to generate ideas. For most of my life, I looked at originality, creativity and vision with disdain — I didn’t have it, and there was no hope for me to ever acquire a creative inking. I was clearly born without a “right brain.”

Over the past several years, I’ve come to the slow realization that maybe I do have both the creative and logical sides of my brain. Why did it take me so long to figure this out? Why haven’t I been able to unlock that potential until now? I think a convergence of things have come to pass to help unlock my creative side.

First, as is always the case, necessity is the mother of invention. Why be creative unless you have to? For some, creativity comes natural; for others (like me) creativity is oftentimes pressed into service to help solve problems, fill a need or overcome challenges.

*(continued on page 2)*



# THE POTENCY OF IDEAS

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*Columnas* is one such example. Although I knew that I had big shoes to fill after taking over for Professor Greg Hall as the new director of the Honors Program, I also knew that there would be opportunities for improving the program (no matter how good you are — and Greg was great — I'm of the mindset that there is always room for improvement). And, being an academic at heart, I'm constantly questioning and contemplating the status quo.



**We should have our own newsletter! Why don't we have a dedicated webpage?** What can we do to attract the best students to the program, and to Bentley? How can we improve the cultural, social and educational opportunities of our best and brightest at Bentley?

These are the things that keep me up at night. Well, maybe not literally, but they do keep me very busy. Once again I find myself disdaining my ideas, no longer because I don't have any, but because now it seems I have too many for my own good! When I see these opportunities, my enthusiasm and work ethic tend to take over, and won't let go until things are firmly and safely in the victory column. This would seem to lead squarely to a second key set of ingredients to great ideas: hard work and determination.

Of course, there are other things that make for good ideas. I'm a big believer in the mantra that it is better to be lucky than good (probably because my beloved Oregon Ducks football teams for so long fell into the former category). Obviously, the experiences you have throughout your life will also play a big part in how you think about the world, and hence how you shape ideas.

But all of these things put together only get you to the *genesis* of ideas; ultimately, to make good (or bad) ideas great, you need collaboration and feedback. Since assuming the director's chair, this has been a crucial tool for me to hone my ideas from drawing board to practical implementation. I've been fortunate enough to have colleagues at Bentley that I know I can rely on to bounce ideas off of, and they won't tell me what they think I want to hear; they'll give me their candid assessment. It is hard to overstate how valuable this kind of feedback can be in any context. And of course, working with the main players of the Honors Program — Professor Greg Hall, Assistant Dean Leslie Doolittle, the Student and Faculty Honors Councils and the new associate director, Professor Nathan Carter — I've been able to get excellent viewpoints and feedback on what to do, and how best to do it.

But none of that matters if you don't take a chance. Lots of people probably have much better ideas than I do, but may be unwilling or unable to act on those ideas. Nokia had the idea for a smartphone before Apple did, but shelved the idea — how'd that work out for them? Challenging yourself, stepping out of your comfort zone once in a while, and taking risks are a necessary part of any successful endeavor. If you take that leap, while harnessing the creative process in earnest, you are bound to have more successes than failures. Notwithstanding spectacular failures, you will inevitably be remembered more for the successes, while the duds will quickly become a distant memory (and a learning experience as well).

All of this has created the perfect storm upon which *Columnas*, the semi-annual newsletter of the Honors Program at Bentley University, was born. The newsletter provides feature stories and articles about its students, alumni, faculty, and other members and events of the Honors and Bentley community, and is written from the perspective of those involved in the Honors Program. With a nod to Latin traditions, *Columnas* celebrates intellectual curiosity, highlights the achievements of those within and around the Program, and underscores the importance of service, culture and community. Like the name suggests, *Columnas* (Latin for "pillars" or "columns") references the written columns, but also the pillars of support, and is intended to demonstrate the strength and finesse of the Honors Program, while also recognizing the four pillars upon which the Honors Program and its students are guided: *excellencia* ("merit"), *sapientia* ("wisdom"), *integritas* ("integrity"), and *latitudo* ("breadth").

I can't say if *Columnas* will be great or not, but the only way to find out is to just do it. Ultimately, if my crackpot theory on where great things come from is correct, at least it stands a chance! Nonetheless, it is with great enthusiasm that we launch the very first edition of *Columnas*, written by and for Honors Program students, alumni and faculty. I invite you to sit back and page through the articles, and please let us know what you think! And if you have ideas for future articles, or wish to write your own contribution, please don't hesitate to let us know. While you're at it, check out the new Honors Program webpage, and please pass these links on to other potentially interested alumni and friends. Thanks for reading! ■

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**Aaron L. Jackson** is the director of the Honors Program, and associate professor of Economics at Bentley University. He has been at Bentley since 2002.



# LA DOLCE VITA

## Living the Sweet Life on my Semester Abroad in Florence

**This past academic year, more than 400 Bentley students pursued education abroad in areas around the world, seeking to enrich their academic experience and learn about a new culture.** For me, the past spring semester is best described by the phrase “La Dolce Vita,” Italian for “the Sweet Life.” I spent my sweet life in the culturally rich and distinctive Italian city of Florence, immersed in Italian language and culture during the spring 2012 semester.

I first traveled to Italy in the summer of 2008 with my high school Italian class, and knew I wanted to go back someday. After carefully crafting my four-year course load, I realized I had the flexibility to go back for an entire semester. The experience was characterized by a homestay living arrangement, six credits of Italian language, and courses pertaining to economics, environmental studies and the European Union. While unable to capture my entire study abroad experience here in a short essay, I feel the best way to characterize my time abroad is through my homestay living arrangement and the fine touch of homemade, authentic Italian cuisine. With my living situation for the semester, I found myself swept up in the gastronomic experience of a lifetime.

I arrived at my temporary Italian home after a long journey with planes, trains, busses and cabs. Eventually, I found myself outside of the historical center of Florence, in a more urbanized area, dominated by apartment high rises and mom-and-pop stores. When I finally arrived at my homestay, I noticed the distinct smell of Italian herbs and spices coming from under the apartment door. My expectations for an eating adventure were rising. When I finally mustered the courage to knock, I was greeted by a 72-year-old Florence native, who opened the door with a rush of scrumptious smelling food that followed her. She indicated to me early on that her English was limited, and began to speak to me only in Italian. It had been a few years since I had used my Italian in high school, but it all came back very quickly (as I realized I was

going to need it to survive). She then showed me around her apartment, and told me to make myself at home. It took about 10 minutes to unpack my bags, after which she knocked on the door, asking, “Hai fame?” or “Are you hungry?” Given the smells in the kitchen when I entered and the growling of my stomach, I would have eaten anything, but my host mom in Florence didn’t prepare *just anything*.

Dinner that first night featured her homemade lasagna, filled with local Italian products. We didn’t get to chat too much that night over dinner, as I devoured what seemed like 10 pounds of delicious lasagna, to which she proceeded to ask, “Ancora?” or “More?” in Italian. Before I could respond, another heaping portion would land on my plate, and without any hesitation, I would proceed to eat the entire piece.

That first night of homemade lasagna set my expectations pretty high for what I was going to be enjoying in my homestay. My subsequent meals throughout the semester didn’t disappoint, and included classic Florentine and other Italian dishes, all made with her homemade touch. Some of the other great meals I enjoyed included “Il Papa di Pomodoro,” a soup-like dish filled with crushed tomatoes, basil, garlic and other local herbs and spices. I also had Florentine polpetta, or the Italian equivalent of meatballs. Simply put, I ate extremely well every night and personally feel that I enjoyed the best cooking in all of Florence.

Through studying in Italy, I achieved gastronomic bliss and found myself often trying to recreate the dishes of my host mom. However, I have found that my Italian dishes never quite taste like hers. The experience has made me realize that there is nothing quite like the homemade Italian touch. ■

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**Spencer Tirella '13** is an Economics-Finance major, and serves on the Student Honors Council.



# OBAMA, ROMNEY OR WHATEVER

## The Political Landscape in the Eyes of Today's College Students



Life for every college student is hectic. School days are spent trying to stay on top of the increasing load of homework while attempting to maintain a slot of time for relaxing. However, politics are not compartmentalized into a student's life the same way a finance or literature class is. College students, though open-minded in their opinions and ideals, are struggling more than ever to relate to a system that has been in place for hundreds of years. For many college students, this year marked a major step in their lives: the first election any of them had an actual say in.

While this should be a time for discovery of political ideals, students are clearly discouraged. With the current political struggle for government power in the wake of the Occupy movement, feelings of disconnect are mounting between the students and not only the political candidates, but also the political parties themselves. The principles of both the Republican and Democratic parties have been known and accepted within their partisan boundaries for quite some time. However, never before have these parties been so polarized and unwilling to compromise for the good of the nation. In an unscientific survey conducted for this article, 65 percent of students expressed concern with the polarization of political parties.

Students view the political system to be in a stalemate in more ways than one; growing dissatisfaction with decisions and the length of time it takes for actions and consequent effects to be realized is a large part of this negative outlook. Despite these growing feelings of discontent, students want to engage: they want to be a part of something that is meaningful and effectual in the world. Many college students voted in the recent election, whether they were educated on the candidates and the political parties' ideals or not. To this end, just over half of college students voted as their parents did, never bothering to question the beliefs that have surrounded them all their lives.

However, more students are breaking free of the path expected of them, becoming more liberated in the way they view their place in the political world. Each has his or her own identity and dogmas to support. It is perhaps this very reason of trying to support their own convictions that students are becoming agitated with the media instigating a political cat-and-mouse game between candidates. Attack advertisements, edited negative comments and generic quotes hinder students' education on the candidates they wish to support.

In the context of this political landscape, it is not surprising that first-time student voters are skeptical of their actual impact on the election. Out of the college students I surveyed, 74 percent think their vote has no importance. However, students were still willing to cast their vote despite the uncertainty of its actual significance.

During the lead-up to the recent presidential election, discussions between students about politics were seen more often around campus than in previous months. Teachers mentioned television ads and engaged students in the pros and cons of each political party's beliefs. Students initiated conversation about flaws in the political system and the ways in which certain policies may affect our economy. These young adults are grasping to better establish their own beliefs and understand a system that may not be working as well as it could be. Excitement about the presidential election is just the start of this self-discovery, on politics and other beliefs, which these students, some of them future leaders of the world, will follow throughout their lives. ■

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**Lindsey Albert '13**

*is a Managerial Economics major.*



# FROM BENTLEY TO BROOKINGS

## How I Ended Up at a Top D.C. Think Tank

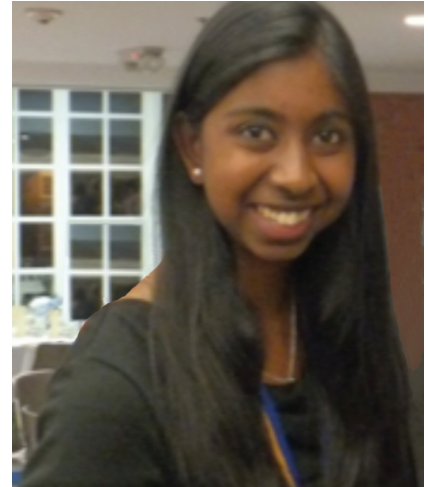
At 22 years old, I was standing in an elevator and burst into tears. Luckily no one was in the metal box but me. I had just walked out of a final-round interview and landed my first job.

I had known about Brookings through listening to NPR and had a brief encounter with one of the initiative directors when I attended a development conference at Harvard in the fall. I was always impressed by their professional, in-depth and insightful reports. Through some research online, I found a research assistant opening at the end of May after graduation and applied right away.

After a month and a half, I received an email from Brookings. I was accepted to interview for the position. In the weeks that followed, I had two rounds of phone interviews. They consisted of both HR inquiries and technical economics questions. My summer of vacationing made me a little rusty, but I was determined to be prepared. After my phone interviews, I was thrilled when I found out I was a final-round candidate for the job. I would be flown down to D.C. to interview with Dr. Kemal Dervis, the vice president of the Global Economy and Development Program. If selected, he would be my direct supervisor.

I vividly remember pangs of nervousness surfacing as I walked to his office. As I met Dr. Dervis, this feeling quickly subsided. He was extremely nice and down to earth. In the interview, we spoke at length about the euro zone crisis and possible outcomes. He also asked me about my short-term faculty-led trip to Chile under Kristin Sorensen, my Fed Challenge experience with Dave Gulley and Aaron Jackson, and much more. At the end of the interview he told me, "You have a very positive energy and impressive resume. I am a quick decision maker and as far as I am concerned I would love to have you on our team." I kept it together until I was safely alone in the elevator, where I lost it from sheer happiness. Afterward, as I walked around D.C., I called my parents, sister, roommates, close friends and mentors to tell them the news.

As exciting as the job offer was, reality quickly set in. I came back home to Boston and needed to find a place to live. With a little bit of fuss on Craigslist, I found a nice three-bedroom apartment with a 20-minute commute to work. I Skyped my potential roommates and they seemed extremely nice. They let me know at the end of the week that they selected me and now we are living together.



I know this job is not going to be easy. In my first two weeks, I learned that work does not stop outside the office. Research is never-ending because something new and relevant is always happening. Since the work of a think tank is to delicately balance the line of journalism and academia, I can never read enough about my subjects of research.

At the same time, I could not imagine doing anything else. My team is exceptionally brilliant (one is a PhD candidate, the other holds his Masters), the Global group is multi-ethnic (which makes for the best potlucks), and I can proudly say I am learning something every day. I'm sure my experience will be filled with the same type of adventure and challenges that I experienced while I was in the Bentley Honors Program and I cannot thank my professors enough for preparing me for *this opportunity!* ■

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**Edith Joachimpillai '12**, was an Economics-Finance major, and is currently a research associate at the Brookings Institute, Washington, D.C.

# HONORS PROGRAM ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Interview by Jose Gutierrez



**ALUMNI:** David LeClair '11, CPC

**MAJOR:** Management

**LSM:** Earth, Environment and Global Sustainability

**CAMPUS INVOLVEMENT:** Student Diversity Council, Honors Student Advisory Council, P.R.I.D.E., Bentley Green Society, Bentley International Relations Organization, FYS Peer Facilitator, and Orientation Leader

**FAVORITE HONORS COURSE/COURSES:** Social Psychology with Aaron Nurick

**CURRENT EMPLOYER:** Athenahealth

**POSITION:** Payer Intelligence Associate

## How did your honors courses prepare you for the professional world?

They helped me build my professional social and networking skills, which I use every day in the workplace in my interactions with co-workers and trading partners. Honors courses also helped me get used to working collaboratively . . . only once I got established at my company did I start to really appreciate all of the group projects I had to do while at Bentley, and the honors projects were among the most challenging.

## From an alumni perspective, what are the benefits you see the Honors Program offers current undergraduate students?

I think the Honors Program offers a greater challenge and a more personal Bentley experience in smaller classes with the best professors. Like I said above, it prepared me in many ways for the working world.

## What skills do you feel you acquired through the Honors Program?

My honors experience grew my project management and teamwork skills. Honors also helped me develop my self-management skills, which become very important when deadlines aren't as clearly defined, and your manager is asking for updates daily rather than only twice a week.

## How has your experience in the workplace been similar to the experiences you had in your honors courses?

Imagine every second of every day is a group project; that's what my current position is like. Not just one or two projects . . . but multiple projects, and many of them with the same people. Lots of collaboration, debate, and plenty of work, but you don't get graded for it (our clients just get angry when their software doesn't work right).

## What was the highlight of your experience as an honors student?

Definitely my Capstone. I dreaded it for three years, but once I got into it, I didn't mind the work involved, and the result was one of my most rewarding academic experiences at Bentley. I'm very glad I did an individual project and picked a topic I liked, because this made it much more interesting and meaningful for me.

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**Jose Gutierrez '14** is a finance major, and serves on the Student Honors Council

# BEYOND THE BOOKS

## An Honors Student's Extracurricular Experience

One of the challenges of being an honors student is time management. Expectations to take what we have learned in the classroom and apply these lessons beyond our campus can lead to opportunities to expand our horizons, but it places high demands on our schedules. Although there can be a bit of stress in balancing classes, leading group meetings and participating in extracurricular activities, the rewards are also high. Gaining knowledge and experience outside of the classroom is an important part of the Bentley experience and nothing demonstrates our commitment to this better than our well-known Service-Learning Center, which has served as an example for other colleges and universities when adopting similar programs. For the past three semesters, I have participated in service-learning in our hometown of Waltham and have found the experience important on a number of levels.

I have had the opportunity to work at Dana Court, which is a low-income housing neighborhood located in Waltham. During my weekly participation, I help the children of the neighborhood with their homework. The children seem to enjoy our company and love asking questions and, overall, I would say that the presence of Bentley students creates a positive environment for each student, which has encouraged their interest in learning. The beneficial impact to the children in this program extends to Bentley students as well; we have all learned something important from our time at Dana Court. We have developed our leadership skills, we have witnessed tangible results from our efforts, and we have learned something about the community in which we live.

My personal experience has led to an opportunity to reinforce classroom concepts and lessons in a practical setting and has given me a firsthand look at an educational system very different from the one in which I was raised. Seeing an educational system which poses challenges to the youth of Waltham has greatly impacted the way I view education in America and has given me a great sense of appreciation for the quality of schools that I have been so fortunate to attend.

Not all service-learning programs are the same, but they all provide us with an opportunity to contribute to our community and learn, or to reinforce the things we are all taught in the classroom. Naturally, classes and academics need to be our priority, but participating in service-learning is a learning experience in itself, challenging us to use our time-management skills for an excellent purpose, and uniquely designed to enhance our Bentley experience.

If you are an honors student and haven't yet become involved in service-learning, I would really encourage you to drop by the center and find out more about the programs that are being sponsored. A few hours each week can make a big difference to someone out there in our community and can broaden your horizons to issues and ideas that you might never have considered otherwise. We are fortunate that Bentley has provided a forum to promote learning through community involvement. Seize the opportunity! ■

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**Elizabeth Doerr '15** is a Managerial Economics major, and serves on the Student Honors Council.

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