Greetings!

There is so much good news at UB! We had a very successful Summer Academy. We hosted our largest ever Social Justice Conference and welcomed five other UB programs, including staff and students from a new UB program at UMass Amherst. We explored a wide range of social justice topics, many related to how the arts can be used to make social change.

All of our 2013 graduates are settled into college, which always makes us proud. You can read some updates from alumni in this issue. We are currently serving 87 students in seven schools. We were able to serve additional students last year whose programs at AIC and HCC had lost funding through a grant from the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts. We have begun to recruit new students in every target area and we look forward to welcoming them into our program in the next few months.

We are very fortunate to have two Commonwealth Corps members with us this year. Joshua Wyman and James Russell are performing a wide variety of duties that strengthen our services and expand our capacity. Our two members are tutoring, advising, developing community service placements, leading enrichment sessions, taking students on lots of cultural and recreational trips, expanding our book donation project and developing a math support component in one of the schools. We are enjoying having them on our team as they bring an amazing mix of strengths, creative ideas, energy and dedication.

UB seniors are working hard on college applications and many have already sent off applications in order to meet early deadlines. Other students are finding wonderful ways to be involved in their communities such as serving on their local school board and doing technical assistance in a community theatre. Students have enjoyed trips to UMass football games and to the UMass Fine Arts Center performances.

I am excited to share that I have recently been voted in as president elect (2014-15) of the Massachusetts Educational Opportunity Association (MEOA). I have served as the MEOA treasurer for two years and I look forward to deepening my work with our state and regional associations over the next three years. We know that TRiO Programs work but the challenge of keeping TRiO programs strong in this political environment require all of us to work hard to support program staff, provide great professional development and make our voices be heard in the discussions regarding the future of TRiO Programs. Breyana Roman, our Springfield advisor, has also joined the board as our new chair of the professional development committee. We are excited to see her step into this leadership role as well. Many thanks to James Russell and Josh Wyman for putting together our fall newsletter. Enjoy!

~ Gisele Litalien
Senior Spotlight - Vasiliki Balis - Greenfield High School

The three summers spent in the UB Summer Academy are some of the most formative experiences in the life of a UB student. The “Senior Spotlight” features in this issue of the UB Scholar will focus upon how students have applied their learning from the Summer Academy throughout the school year.

The leadership skills that Greenfield senior Vasiliki “Vicki” Balis cultivated during her time at NMH UB this summer are already making themselves felt in local politics. Balis now serves as a Student Representative on the Greenfield School Board. In this capacity, she is directly involved in shaping educational policy for her peers. As a Student Representative, Vicki is able to represent her fellow students and articulate their concerns so that they have a voice in their own education. Vicki credits her capacity to take action on this level with the leadership experience which she gained at the Summer Academy.

The experience was “extremely life changing, stretching me out of my comfort zone”. The sense of empowerment that came surging out of the Academy has uplifted Vicki through the duration of her school year.

She strengthened her core classes and AP work, and carried that energy into her college applications. Vicki’s commitment to service has also deepened. She has taken an active role in the Key Club the GHS’ student environmental organization. It was her leadership ability in the Student Council which inspired her to join the School Committee.

Vicki shows the same dedication on the field as she does in the classroom, competing in Field Hockey and Softball. Vicki’s living example of tenacity is at the heart of her advice to new students. “Stick through the program until the end”, she advises, “it will be worth it, trust me”. She also highlights the role of UB staff. “Going through the college application process is so complicated”, and the support of her UB advisor, Sharon Gralnick, was indispensible.
Summer Academy is an intense experience, calling for focus, dedication, and efficiency. Springfield Central senior Tynayko “Ty” Melendez has applied these newly strengthened skills to the demands of his school year schedule of rigorous classes, college applications, study, and service. Even though his tightly-packed schedule only allows Ty a half hour per day for his college applications, he has already completed applications to a number of Universities including Fitchburg, Worcester, and Westfield. These choices emerged from the college interviews he had at the summer UB College Day, which Ty lists as one of the highlights of his experience. Ty’s drive will serve him well in his future career in Computer Science.

Ty also particularly liked the Senior Writing class which focused on college essays, and the Honors class which focused on Native American history. In his Honors class, the class read *Bury my Heart at Wounded Knee* and wrote a research paper related to the book. Tynako presented his work to a panel of faculty and students.

In addition to his academic experiences, Ty remarks on his experiences working on the NMH farm, harvesting crops during his elective unit and making chocolate-covered strawberries. The Academy’s focus on social justice has also increased his own commitment to service.

Tynayko currently volunteers in his school’s coffee house, enriching the experience for his fellow students. He also sings in his school’s Gospel choir, and is adding new songs to his repertoire. Tynayko also actively serves at his church.

When asked what advice he would have for new UB students, he recommends “Do all of the work and receive the help” noting that “some students do not like the help, but they should.” Ty has made the most of what Upward Bound has to offer, and continues the cycle of service by giving of his own time to serve others.
Senior Spotlight- Jacob Charette—Holyoke High School

The Summer Academy is a dress rehearsal for the collegiate experience, with classes, roommates, dorm life and a rigorous schedule. In addition to preparing UB students for College, the summer experience helps students to explain what college is like to others. Having lived through three summers in a college-like environment, Holyoke High School senior Jacob Charette can now describe college to other UB students and to his younger sister. In his role as Senior Leader, Jacob has been a role model while providing support to other students in getting adjusted to the college going culture.

Jacob has applied a Growth Mindset, a concept developed by Carol Dweck that he learned at UB. The idea focuses on cognitive strategies which help students overcome obstacles to academic success. The Growth Mindset has made a big impact upon Jacob and his peers. “I think, sometimes this is too much” he says, “and then I do it anyway, and realize that it is easy. I thought this was going to be tough, but it’s not that hard.” UB students learn that they can increase their academic abilities with effort and persistence, rather than focusing on the idea of natural ability.

Jacob was inspired by his tennis elective this past summer and he has decided to continue playing at his school. Jacob enjoys the sport because “people do not take tennis as seriously as other sports” and so there is more opportunity to play for the love of the game. This year he has played singles.

As Jacob enters his final year with UB and completes many college applications, he is exploring a major in either Criminal Justice or Computer Science. Jacob is inspired for the first choice by seeing friends who are working in these fields. His current interest in working with computers drives him towards the second choice.

In looking towards the challenges that remain this year, Jacob describes himself as a “calm senior”, saying that “he doesn’t get overly worked-up” when considering the future which lies ahead.

When considering what advice to give new students in the program as a UB veteran, Jacob advice to his peers is to put a focus on time management. “Don’t wait until the last minute”, he advises, “and then you will get more done”. From Summer Academy to the tennis court, Jacob’s own ability to “get more done” is visible indeed.
Where are UB Seniors Applying this Year?

- American International College
- Amherst College
- Bay Path College
- Bennington College
- Boston University
- Bowdoin College
- Brandeis University
- Bridgewater State College
- Clark University
- Colby-Sawyer College
- College of the Atlantic
- College of the Holy Cross
- Connecticut College
- Dowling College
- Elizabethtown College
- Elms College
- Fairfield University
- Fitchburg State College
- Framingham State College
- Franklin and Marshall College
- Gettysburg College
- Greenfield Community College
- Hartwick College
- Hampshire College
- Hobart and William Smith Colleges

- Holyoke Community College
- Marist College
- Marlboro College
- Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts
- Mount Holyoke College
- Nazareth College
- New England College
- Nichols College
- Pratt Institute
- Providence College
- Quinnipiac University
- Salem State University
- Sarah Lawrence College
- Smith College
- Springfield College
- Springfield Technical Community College
- State University of New York at Potsdam
- St. Michael's College
- Stonehill College
- UMASS Amherst
- UMASS Dartmouth
- UMASS Lowell
- University of New Haven
- Ursinus College
- Western New England University
- Westfield State University
- Wheaton College
- Worcester State University
UB Alumnus Interview: Kibbs Fortilus (Central High ‘09)

Would you tell us about your current service in India? Where in India are you located, with whom are you serving, and in what capacity?

I am working for The Center for Tribal and Rural Development (CTRD) Trust in a small village in Tamil Nadu called Devala. I work as a teacher in the Government Tribal and Rural (GTR) Middle School. Moreover, I live in the CTRD orphanage/old age home (basically a retirement home). After school, I tutor the children at the orphanage. At the middle school, I teach 1st, 6th, 7th, and 8th grade. At the orphanage I tutor the 6th, 7th, 8th, 9th, and 10th graders.

How did your experiences at the College of the Holy Cross, and subsequently as an educator, prepare you for your current service?

At Holy Cross I participated in a Spiritual Exercise called, "5 Days of Silence", twice. Though it was difficult, I'm very happy I did it. My spiritual advisor at the time called it "inscaping". So often we find external means of escaping but never think to sink within ourselves. I am alone in my village. To visit another volunteer I would have to take a day’s trip via three busses, and a six hour train. I've had a lot of time to reflect and find myself here, because I had practice at Holy Cross. I was a substitute teacher before coming here. It was extremely difficult. But the experience taught me classroom management, patience, and self control. After my experience as a substitute teacher, nothing has shocked me in a classroom.

What factors led you to choose the College of the Holy Cross? What about this college would you like current UB students investigating colleges to know?

I chose Holy Cross after a college visit. I wanted to choose a small school because, to be quite honest, I needed to be held accountable. There are many distractions in college, and I knew that if I went to a large school, and didn't have to go to class because the teacher doesn't take attendance, I wouldn't go to class. I need to have a personal relationship with the teacher to be fully invested in my work, and I need to be talked to, rather than talked at. Holy Cross was the perfect fit.

I would tell UB students to not concern themselves with the racial demographics of a college. I was always checking statistics to see how many black people were at the school. Though it was difficult at first to adjust in a predominantly white school, the discomfort caused me to grow much more than I would have if I'd gone to a Historically Black College. I left HC with a newfound confidence, and I made sure to leave an impression.

What are your goals following your current term of service?

My goals are to familiarize my students with the English language, set a strong foundation of grammar and sentence syntax for future volunteers to build upon, and bring attention to CTRD and the great work they are doing. On a personal note, I never leave anywhere without making a positive impression. I dance, sing, act out poetry, box, and wrestle with my students. I hope to show them that learning is fun, and being a teacher involves just as much learning as being
a student. The students teach me the various cultural dances, the written and solely spoken tribal languages, and pop culture.

**Which of your experiences in UB have been applicable to your work in India and in Springfield?**

At UB I found my mentor. His name was Jay. He was the Dean of Students. When I first came to UB I hated him. He annoyed me and I always felt like he was picking on me. I was really immature at the time, and Jay was actually thinking of dismissing me from the program. I didn't know this until last summer when I worked alongside him as a Tutor Counselor.

In high school, Jay would sit me down and tell me that although Springfield is currently the center of my universe, I have the potential to travel somewhere where no one has heard of Springfield. I decided to give it a try. I figured I had nothing to lose. I took home the books he gave me at the end of the summer; "Wildseed", "Native Sun", "Anthem" by Ayn Rand, and "The Autobiography of Malcolm X". I read them all within a month.

I began to take the advice he gave me in other aspects of my life. I rarely watched T.V., I distanced myself from my old friends, and I started taking Honors and AP classes. At the time, I didn't believe I could do it. I only did those things because he said I could do them. I just said I'd give it a try.

"Kibbs, you're going to India", Jay told me last year. "Okay, I'll give it a try", I responded. He's the reason why I'm here. I couldn't conceive this experience in my wildest dreams. But he said I could do it, and I thought I'd give it a try.

In India, I'm looking to have the same impact my mentor had on me. The tribal people are the lowest ranked in the caste system. I give my students similar speeches to those that Jay gave to me. In every assignment, I look for amazing results and they rarely disappoint. I am also looking to make them self sufficient; encouraging them to review their notes, look in a dictionary, or work with a peer. I tell them to use me as a last resort.

Overall, though the work here may be difficult sometimes, I am blessed because I work with a perfect group of kids. I wake up every morning looking forward to going to work. My fellow teachers have even called me, "The King of Smiles". What can I say? I love my job.

**Stay informed of Kibbs’ progress on his blog at:**

http://kibbsheartindia.blogspot.in/
2013 Commonwealth Corps Members at UB: Josh Wyman and James Russell

Northfield Mt. Hermon Upward Bound is hosting two members of the Commonwealth Corps at our service site. Commonwealth Corps (CC) is a state-funded program administered by the Massachusetts Service Alliance, whose purpose is to “to engage Massachusetts residents of all ages and backgrounds in direct service to rebuild communities and address unmet community needs.” (1) Since its establishment by Gov. Deval Patrick in 2007, CC has had the distinct mission of increasing volunteerism and building the capacity of non-profit organizations within our state.

In this academic year, NMH-UB is hosting two full-time CC members, Joshua Wyman and James Russell. They offer advising, tutoring, and enrichment services at Springfield, Holyoke, and Greenfield schools from Tuesday through Thursday. On any given day, Josh or James might be delivering an SAT preparation lesson, facilitating a Senior Day in which final-year students prepare their applications, or supporting students in accessing community service opportunities. Both CC members spend Mondays and Fridays at the NMH office, consulting on the week’s plans, and preparing lessons and service projects.

Since this is the first year that CC members have been placed at NMH, this year presents an exciting opportunity to contribute to the development of a new CC service site.

Josh and James also regularly gather with other CC members from across the State, who are serving in a variety of organizations striving on issues from environmental protection to refugee support. They share learning and insights on common challenges such as volunteer recruitment and organizational capacity-building. Updates from Josh and James’ years of service will follow in future newsletters.

Josh and James recruiting volunteer tutors and increasing the visibility of UB at the Greenfield Community College Community Opportunities Festival.

1 <http://www.mass-service.org/service_volunteerism/>
Focus on Education Access:
Bard College experiments with a new alternative to standardized testing

Colleges assess thousands of applicants for admissions and many rely heavily on standardized tests such as the SAT/ACT in addition to grades, essays and recommendations. Recently, standardized testing have been under sustained scrutiny. Some professionals charge that the SAT/ACT only measure a narrow range of the field of human intelligence, that they do not recognize creativity or original thinking, and that test results demonstrate a consistent ethnic bias.

Many college admission offices are increasingly finding that such tests are not an effective predictor of student success in college. An increasing number of institutions of higher education are offering alternative admissions criteria, or eliminating the SAT requirement altogether. Even within this ongoing movement, Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson’s bold new alternative admissions option has turned heads since it was detailed in the New York Times. Bard now invites students to submit no standardized test scores, no grades, indeed, no numerical quantifiers altogether. Instead, students can submit four 2,500-word research essays on a selection of challenging topics. Mark Primoff, Director of Admissions at Bard, stated in a telephone interview that while traditional admissions routes are still available at Bard, the College has found that the SAT criterion does not serve students from non-traditional backgrounds. For example, students from urban backgrounds may have access to SAT coaching services for which there may be an access barrier for rural students. Since the goal of the Admissions Office is to identify which students would best benefit from a Bard education, not only who had access to tutoring, the essay option may serve as a better indicator.

Mr. Primoff highlights how the SAT does not indicate how well students can process information, only their ability to generate the “right” answer as per the Educational Testing Service. Colleges want to see what the SAT does not show, namely, students’ thought process and reasoning ability which can be obscured behind the veil of numbers and grids. The Director of Admissions also remarked upon the stark dissimilarity between the SAT and the actual work which students will undertake in their first year of College. Rarely will they be bubbling-in grids. Rather, students will be taking part in class discussions and seminars, writing essays, and generating new insights. The SAT does not anticipate a student’s capacity to complete such tasks.

The eschewing of the SAT in favor of essays also opens the gateway for students with high capacity from backgrounds whose abilities may not be well represented by tests, such as rural students, and homeschoolers.

Some questions remain about the degree of widened access Bard’s new approach permits. Writing four 2,500-word essays is a time-consuming exercise, in addition to standard schoolwork, which may form a barrier for students with employment or childcare responsibilities. This mode of application also presupposes an effective training in prose composition, which may be inadequately taught in some schools. Students with dyslexia may not find this approach more accessible than traditional testing. This being said, Bard’s new admission’s framework is a welcome contribution to the broader movement towards assessment frameworks which value a broader range of intelligence and capacity.


In addition to offering tutoring and enrichment services in the classroom, Upward Bound offers cultural enrichment and recreational trips for students to complement the academic experience, to reward active participation, and to foster a college-going culture.

On November 14th students from the Holyoke and the Springfield service areas were lead on a trip to a performance by Yamato, a group from Japan’s Nara Prefecture that uses Taiko drums in their performances. The students Jared LaFontaine ‘15 and Ellen Rice ‘15 at Holyoke High School and Tynayko Melendez ‘14 and Leila Melendez ‘14 at Renaissance High School were ecstatic to be able to attend such a provocative performance. All four of these students are currently involved and performances at their school, Tynayko a member of the chorus at Renaissance; Leila a participant in this year's school play; Jared a member of the HHS band and Ellen also a member of the band; so this showcase really resonated with them (pun intended). The performance made possible through the Angel Tickets Program at UMass Amherst was a two hour storytelling experience, with each song performed telling a different story through both traditional and specialized drumming techniques, having each drummer put their full bodies into work on their drums. Each song was accompanied by a vivid stage layout, set up perfectly to accent the music being played, and each drummer had their own personality in their drumming while maintaining perfect rhythm with the other members. The Yamato group formed in 1993 and have performed over 2,600 times, every year touring for 6-10 months at a time, making their unrelenting drumming that much more impressive. At one point a few of the members held their drums over their shoulders while another member struck each of them in perfect time, which made for a truly impressive sight. But the most engaging piece came at the end, when the leader of the group brought the whole audience into the show by having them clap along to a given beat, alternating the audience's clap with drumming from the stage. This portion made it that much more memorable for the students, who walked away feeling energetic and moved by the performance, saying they were all very glad that they had gone on the trip.
Upward Bound students from the Holyoke and Springfield Areas were invited to a performance of Word Becomes Flesh on October 10th at UMass Amherst’s Bowker Auditorium. The production put on by The Living Word Project, a theater company that uses spoken word poetry, contemporary dance, and live music in their performances, is a series of letters written from a single father to his unborn child. Each letter addresses different social issues including misogyny, racial frustrations, and gender identity. The performance, which was the last stop for the troop, was also performed for high school students earlier that day, some of our Renaissance students were able to attend this performance and had a positive experience and great things to say about it. The students who attended the night time show were equally as moved by the message and were grateful for the opportunity to attend such a unique stage performance. The trip was made possible through the Angle Tickets Program at UMass Amherst and our NMH Upward Bound staff, who organized and transported the students.

For over forty years, Sweet Honey in the Rock has performed their legendary blend of jazz and gospel music infused with socially conscious messages. UB students had the opportunity to experience a Sweet Honey performance at the UMass-Amherst Fine Arts Center, with tickets kindly donated by the University.

Students were awestruck by the vocal ability of both new and veteran cast members. On this special tour, Sweet Honey performed a tribute to great vocalists including Odetta Holmes and Nina Simone. The group combined their original compositions with innovative covers in a show that kept the audience on its feet. Though Sweet Honey in the Rock’s soaring vocals would be enough to inspire any audience, Upward Bound students enriched and sustained their fellow audience members’ enthusiasm. Senior Tynayko Melendez, himself an experienced Gospel performer, started rounds of clapping with which the rest of the audience joined in!
UMass Football Games at Gillette Stadium

Part of the mission of UB is to develop a college-going culture. College will give our students many new social, cultural and recreational opportunities in addition to academic offerings. UB students had the opportunity to experience some of the atmosphere and pageantry of the big University experience at two UMass football games this season. Both games were held at Gillette Stadium, the home of the Patriots. Tickets were generously donated by the University, who offered us incredible seats in section 101. Along with our enthusiasm, UB students must have brought some luck with them, because they witnessed UMass’ only win of the season against Miami University of Ohio. Our Commonwealth’s flagship campus did not repeat its victory on our second visit, but even so, students had an exciting foretaste of their college experience to come.

Students were particularly impressed by the intricate and elegant performance of UMass’ marching band. Francisco Alvarado (UB ‘14) of Holyoke was so inspired by the performance that he is planning to take ideas for marching routines and uniform design back to his own high school marching band.
UB Alumni Updates

Meredith Brown, Turners Falls ‘13
UMass-Dartmouth
Meredith is enjoying her experience at UMass-Dartmouth. She is making many new friends, and is especially enjoying her art classes.

Caitlin Anable, Holyoke ‘11
Bay Path College
Berlin, Germany and Warsaw, Poland are two cities which Caitlin will soon visit on a voyage funded by her College on Holocaust Studies. She is pleased to report that she will have visited three countries (including Canada) by the age of 21! Caitlin is an example of steadfastness as a student, taking sixteen credits in addition to working 36 hours per week between two jobs. Transcending these challenges, her classes are going well and travel abroad awaits!

Mariann Ortiz, Holyoke ‘10
Worcester State University
“Absolutely amazing” is how Mariann Ortiz describes her collegiate experience over three and a half years at WSU. She has made the Dean’s List twice, and is aiming for a threepeat. As a new Senior, she anticipates graduating in May with her BS in Psychology, accompanied by a minor in Spanish. Mariann has stepped up to be a student leader, and is now President of the TWA program. Learning how to be a positive role model is one of the most powerful lessons that Mariann has taken from UB, and she continues to make an impact with it at WSU!

Gordon Burnett, NMH UB ‘08, Holy Cross ‘12
Tutor Counsellor, Asst. Dorm Head, and Chemistry Teacher
Gordon has had a great start to his second year as a teacher, and has dedicated most of the summer to preparing for classes in both physics and chemistry. As well as his teaching is going, he still misses his youth at UB

Takeesha White, NMH ‘97
Takeesha White is pleased to announce the birth of her son, Frankie Dudley Marcelo, on July 19th 2013. He was 8 lbs, 7 oz. and 20 inches.

Leida Cartagena, Holyoke High ‘97, Americorps Member, and Tutor Counsellor
Leida now works in the Department of Developmental Services of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts as a Service Coordinator. She is happy with this change in her career, and is looking forward to spending more time with her family.
THE UPWARD BOUND PROGRAM at NMH is a federally funded (Department of Education) initiative designed to provide low-income students with the skills and motivation needed to succeed in college. The students are usually the first in their family to go to college. UB scholars receive tutoring, advising, enrichment, a rigorous, six-week summer program and intensive assistance with the college and financial aid application process. Additional funding comes from the Community Foundation of Western Mass and the Webster Foundation.

Striving for the future, each and every day!