Setting the Stage

M.F.A. students drawn to top-ranked UI dance program

Fall 2016

GRADUATE EDUCATION at

IOWA

This fall the University of Iowa campus celebrated a *Work of Inspiration*, marking recovery from the historic flood, completion of the stunning new arts buildings, and the installation of the 21st president of the University of Iowa, J Bruce Harreld. President Harreld has challenged our campus to build on its rich heritage of strengths – especially our missions of teaching and research – in providing the highest quality educational experience to our students while training tomorrow’s educators, innovators, and leaders.

The UI Graduate College has already undergone a shift toward increased emphasis on holistic training of graduate students. We support students’ individual success and provide a foundation for successful graduate programs, which ultimately enhances the national reputations of our individual programs and the institution as a whole.

We are further investing in interdisciplinary scholarship, financial support of our students, and expanded career exploration and training. However, now is a time of unprecedented and rapid change in graduate education, making these investments both exciting and complex. We explore the new landscape of graduate education knowing that the investments we are making in our exceptional graduate students today will pay off with dividends in the future.

The following pages, you will read about exciting work taking place on our campus. You will hear about efforts to increase diversity among leaders in academia, Iowa M.F.A. dancers who have performed with national dance companies, insights into developing speech perception, tools to prevent spread of infection in healthcare facilities, discoveries that may inform future treatments for HIV, and efforts to reimagine the next generation of Ph.D.

These remarkable projects are just a sampling of the innovative work taking place on our campus. By fostering a diverse intellectual environment conducive to exemplary research, scholarship, and creativity, the Graduate College is poised to further strengthen the University of Iowa’s reputation as a leading institution of American higher education and prepare the next generation of scholars.

This success is a team effort involving the community, our talented students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends. Your support redresses graduate education at Iowa, enabling us to continue to explore, take risks, and push boundaries. Your support provides opportunities for graduate students to excel and develop into scholars.

I invite you to stay connected as we chart our new course. We will be hosting a number of events on campus this spring, including a free lecture by former UI President and current Secretary of the Smithsonian, David Skorton. Dr. Skorton will share his thoughts on the future of graduate education from his perspective as Smithsonian secretary, former university president, musician, physicist, researcher, academican, and reformer. I hope you will join us.

Thank you for your commitment to graduate education. I look forward to our continued partnership.

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Composing a New Narrative

Anderson shares ACT’s mission to help underserved learners reach success

DaVida Anderson’s passion: Rewrite the narrative about African Americans’ role in higher education.

In 2001, U.S. Department of Education statistics showed that African Americans made up only 9.4 percent of all administrators at U.S. colleges and universities.

Anderson, a Ph.D. student in higher education and student affairs at the University of Iowa, is motivated to create more diversity around the leadership table in academia.

“I come from the mindset that if there’s not enough room at the table, I will pull up more chairs for other people to join,” says Anderson.

Anderson wants to share with society multiple stories of what it means to be an African American in academia. She researches educational inequities that create challenges, such as socioeconomic status, level of privilege, and access to education, with a special focus on African American college women at predominately white institutions. Her goal is to empower these women to overcome these obstacles and create better outcomes for themselves.

Anderson realizes creating a new narrative wouldn’t be possible without funding from the ACT Scholars Program.

“ACT and the University of Iowa Graduate College got it right,” Anderson says. “They provide an opportunity for underserved learners, like myself, to be a fulltime scholar. For a long time, socioeconomic status has been a barrier for a lot of students. Without the ACT scholarship, I would not be able to afford to be a student and focus on my education.”

Without the ACT scholarship, I would not be able to afford to be a student and focus on my education. — DaVida Anderson

ACT’s new ambassador

ACT scholars are required to participate in at least one paid ACT summer internship prior to graduating from their academic programs. Last summer, Anderson furthered her research interests with an ACT internship.

Anderson worked in ACT’s Center for Equity in Learning, which supports research that focuses on closing gaps in equity, opportunity, and achievement. She also attended ACT’s Enrollment Planning Conference and talked about how to better make opportunities in higher education available for underserved students.

“The Center for Equity in Learning’s mission aligns with mine because it helps underserved learners achieve success in college and the workplace,” Anderson says. “This rare opportunity has made me an ambassador for ACT because their mission and my personal passions strongly correlate.”

Anderson is an active listener, responder, and researcher who focuses on the challenges faced by African American female students.

“The work we do finding those equity opportunities for underserved populations and trying to balance the playing field for all students to achieve education and workplace success is tough work,” says Lew Montgomery, program director for community engagement in ACT’s Center for Equity in Learning.

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“I meet several people daily, but every once in a while you meet that one person who simply has something special, and she has it. I know she will do very well in whatever she pursues after her doctoral program is complete.”

Helping change the narrative

Anderson is a member of Professor Sherry Wart’s multicultural initiatives research team. This group of scholars researches how to develop skills and strategies for facilitating difficult dialogues across cultural differences. Anderson is completing a manuscript with Assistant Professor Cassie Barnhardt and fellow graduate students Laila McCloud, Ryan Young, and Carson Phillips on a new study of faculty and African American female student engagement.

“Oftentimes research is provided by certain authors who share a one-dimensional perspective,” Anderson says. “Exposing society to multiple narratives from the lens of African Americans and what it means to be an underserved learner in higher education can help provide better insight.”

Through all her work, Anderson is positioning herself to help African American women succeed in higher education administration.

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The University of Iowa’s Department of Dance has a strong national reputation, drawing top performers to campus. In 2015, Dance-Colleges.com ranked Iowa sixth in its list of the top 50 dance schools in the United States. “We’re included on the short list when people are thinking about going to graduate school,” says Jennifer Kayle, director of the M.F.A. Program and associate professor. “We’re able to recruit amazing people.”

Typically, Iowa recruits two or three critically-acclaimed professionals in each cohort. The last two years combined, however, the Dance Department has landed 11 such performers from dance meccas like Chicago and New York City.

What draws these dancers to the University of Iowa for graduate school? “I’ve toured in Iowa City twice, my first time in 2010, and there’s always an energy about the city and the Dance Program, which is very attractive to me,” says Marc Macaranas, a first-year M.F.A. student who performed with major Chicago productions, DanceWorks Chicago, and Luna Negra Dance Theater.

The University of Iowa’s M.F.A. Dance Program offers first-rate teaching opportunities and fellowship support that is almost second-to-none. Eight current students are partially funded by Iowa Arts Fellowships from the Graduate College. This combination of funding support and teaching opportunities sets Iowa apart from many of its competitors.

“The UI’s M.F.A. Dance Program combines a rigorous studio curriculum with theoretical, conceptual, and historical coursework designed to prepare these performers to teach in academia. These dynamic graduate students, who have reached great heights in their profession, inspire and exhibit passion as they teach technique classes in ballet, modern dance, jazz, and hip-hop to about 800 students a year. “I’ve had my career as a performer. I’m here primarily to become a better instructor and teach students how to become performers,” says Flowers.

“[At Iowa], while you’re focusing on your [academic] track, you’re also learning to teach and articulate your work. You’re bridging the gap between many different aspects during this immersive time.”

“The University of Iowa’s Department of Dance excels at preparing its M.F.A. students to teach in an academic institution and/or train pre-professionals in dance studios.”

Graduates of the M.F.A. Dance Program have teaching positions at institutions all over the country, including at the University of California-Berkeley, University of New Mexico, University of North Carolina-Charlotte, Penn State University, University of Utah, Berklee College of Music/Boston Conservatory, and the University of Iowa.

In 2015, Dance-Colleges.com ranked the University of Iowa’s Department of Dance as the sixth in its list of the top 50 dance programs in the United States. These dynamic graduate students, who have reached great heights in their profession, inspire and exhibit passion as they teach technique classes in ballet, modern dance, jazz, and hip-hop to about 800 students a year. “I’ve had my career as a performer. I’m here primarily to become a better instructor and teach students how to become performers,” says Flowers.

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M.F.A. students drawn to top-ranked UI dance program

Setting the Stage

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M.F.A. students in the University of Iowa’s Department of Dance: (top row, from left) Ramon Flowers, Autumn Eckman, Marc Macaranas, and Jesse Factor; (bottom row, from left) Angella Carlos and Kwame Ross.
Prize-winning Researchers

The 2016 dissertation prize winners make advances in their fields

Based on their excellence in doctoral research, three University of Iowa graduate students have been recognized for having the best dissertations in their fields at the UI in 2016.

The Graduate College honored Effie Kapnoula with the D.C. Spriestersbach Dissertation Prize and Deborah Burdsall and Ernest Chivero with the Rex Montgomery Dissertation Prize.

Kapnoula, who earned her Ph.D. in psychology in 2016, won the Spriestersbach Prize in the social sciences.

Burdsall, who earned her Ph.D. in nursing in 2016, and Chivero, who achieved his doctorate in molecular and cellular biology in 2015, both received the Montgomery Prize, which is awarded annually in the biomedical and health sciences disciplines.

The scholars were nominated by members of their dissertation committees and will be honored during a ceremony at the James F. Jakobsen Graduate Conference on March 25, 2017.

Dissertation prize namessakes

The Spriestersbach Prize is named for Duane C. Spriestersbach, who served as Graduate College dean from 1965 to 1989. When the prize was founded over 30 years ago, Spriestersbach hoped it would “serve as tangible evidence—as ‘gold standards’—of the outstanding work of which graduate students are capable and to which all others should aspire.”

As winner of the Spriestersbach Prize, Kapnoula is the UI’s nominee for the Council of Graduate Schools/ProQuest Distinguished Dissertation Award. This national award is the most prestigious prize in North America for dissertations written in the biomedical and health sciences disciplines.

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Insight into early stages of speech perception

Effie Kapnoula’s dissertation, “Individual Differences in Speech Perception: Sources, Functions, and Consequences of Phoneme Categorization Gradiency,” examined speech perception, specifically the nature of the categories we use to process speech. The big question of speech perception is whether its categories are categorical (people retain only whether a sound is “ba” or “pa”) or gradient (they preserve how “ba-like” or “pa-like” a sound is).

What makes a listener gradient? What are the consequences for other aspects of perception? To answer these questions, Kapnoula conducted four studies with over 450 participants.

Kapnoula concluded that a gradient description characterizes people on average, but when you look at people individually they differ. Some are categorical and others are gradient.

In addition, she discovered that there are two ways to show a gradient pattern of performance. You can be truly gradient or you can unsuccessfully attempt to be categorical (making an either/or decision). People with impairments (dyslexia, brain damage, etc.) are the latter.

Furthermore, Kapnoula showed that more gradient people are better able to integrate multiple cues to verbally distinguish one word from another.

“It’s rare that a dissertation is 100 percent successful, but Effie’s was,” says Bob McMurray, professor of psychology and Kapnoula’s dissertation advisor. “It has opened up our understanding of speech categorization like few other bodies of work. I can think of it as making clear links to practical concerns, and it links brain and behavior like few other projects.”

Kapnoula is advancing her research as a postdoctoral fellow at the Basque Center on Cognition, Brain, and Language in Spain.

Preventing infection

Deborah Burdsall’s dissertation, “Exploring Inappropriate Glove Use in Long Term Care,” took a significant step in identifying an overlooked cause of healthcare-associated infections (HAIs): inappropriate use of gloves by healthcare providers.

HAIs are a major cause of health concerns in people treated in healthcare facilities. Decreasing HAIs would substantially prevent the associated complications and save millions of healthcare dollars.

Burdsall addressed the issue of HAIs by developing a glove use tool (GUST), which is the first tool of its kind. Her dissertation found that health care providers may be overusing gloves.

Burdsall’s findings show that contamination of the patient and/or environment with gloved hands far exceeds contamination with bare hands. Appropriate glove use must be incorporated with hand washing measures to prevent cross-contamination and HAIs.

“I believe this tool will be widely adopted by healthcare providers in order to decrease the inadvertent spread of infections within the healthcare environment,” says Sue Gardner, professor in the College of Nursing and Burdsall’s dissertation advisor.

Fighting virus with virus

Ernest Chivero’s dissertation, “Tropism of Human Pegivirus (formerly known as GB Virus C) and Host Immuinomodulation: Insights into Viral Persistence,” focused on an unusual human virus: human Pegivirus (HPgV). One of only two RNA (ribonucleic acid) viruses that cause persistent human infection, the other being hepatitis C virus. Chivero characterized cells containing HPgV RNA and found it in several cell types (T and B lymphocytes, NK cells, and monocytes). Interestingly, he found HPgV RNA in small vesicles of human origin that are able to transmit this viral RNA to various immune cells, thus contributing to viral spread. These findings could explain the reduction in immune activation observed in individuals infected with HPgV and HIV.

Despite use of antiretroviral therapy, immune activation and inflammation continue to affect a large proportion of individuals. HPgV infections, while causing no apparent disease of its own, has been shown to prolong survival in individuals infected with HIV.

In an effort to understand why an RNA virus could persist even for decades, Chivero examined the effects of HPgV on natural killer cells that, among other immune cells, play important roles in viral clearance; he found that HPgV inhibited IL-12 receptor mediated signaling in these cells, thereby reducing immune activation.

“Dr. Chivero conducted extremely creative work with direct clinical and translational application during his Ph.D. training period,” says Jack Stapleton, professor of internal medicine and microbiology and Chivero’s dissertation advisor. “The studies described in his thesis are creative, original, and of high impact in understanding virus-host interactions associated with persistent infection.”

Chivero currently is a postdoctoral research associate in the Department of Pharmacology and Experimental Neuroscience at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

 Effie Kapnoula

Deborah Burdsall

Ernest Chivero

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The journey of today’s Ph.D. students in the humanities doesn’t lead in one direction. Students are realizing that their degrees and training are in demand in many settings, not just in traditional academic positions.

In an effort to transform the culture of graduate education so that humanities Ph.D. recipients are prepared for a broad range of careers, the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) designed the “Next Generation Ph.D.” initiative. The University of Iowa is one of 25 colleges and universities that have been awarded planning grants that will enable them to reimage graduate education with an eye toward enabling Ph.D. recipients to have greater career flexibility. The $25,000 year-long grant has been matched by $25,000 from the UI Office of the Vice President for Research & Economic Development.

The University of Iowa’s successful grant proposal, entitled “The Newly Composed Ph.D.: Writing Across Careers,” was written by Judith Pascoe, senior scholar for the digital arts and humanities and professor of English. Pascoe is directing a planning process that brings together faculty, graduate students, librarians, center directors, and staff members, along with visiting experts from both within and beyond the academy. Planning process collaborators include Humanities Advisory Board Co-Director Russ Garnier, director of the Division of World Languages, Literatures, and Cultures, as well as Digital Scholarship and Publishing Studio, and Graduate College staff members.

Since the University of Iowa is known as a center of writing innovation, the planning process was designed to enable graduate students to gain greater proficiency at writing for varied audiences and to cultivate proficiency with new digital technologies. The events include a series of symposia organized around rhetorical forms: the dissertation, the footnote, the tweet, the blog, the CV or resume, and the elevator pitch. The symposia activities offer public conversations at which planning committee members and visiting experts explore how a particular form could serve entrepreneurial graduate students in a variety of careers. The grant proposal highlights the Departments of English, Rhetoric, Classics, and History, along with the Division of World Languages. However, the grant activities and planning meetings are open to all.

Visiting experts have included Amanda Viscomi, whose online and freely accessible dissertation, entitled “InfiniteLyrics,” is a participatory digital edition of James Joyce’s masterwork, and Nick Sousanis, whose “Unflattening,” a dissertation in comics form, experiments with making arguments through images.

“I hope our students can be inspired and empowered by seeing these people who invented their own paths. Their dissertations are being held up as interesting and innovative projects,” Pascoe says.

The University of Iowa

The Newly Composed Ph.D.

THE NEWLY COMPOSED PH.D.: WRITING ACROSS CAREERS

The University of Iowa

THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA

“Students are feeling, especially at an institution like this one where they teach a lot for their funding, a sense of ‘how are we going to do all these things?’ What I tried to do in the grant proposal is to find ways to defuse those tensions by imagining how the competing pressures could become integrated,” Pascoe says.

There will continue to be conventional 300-page dissertations. However, more dissertations may include digital components in the future.

Discussions about these topics are at the center of “The Newly Composed Ph.D.” planning process.

“A lot of this is going to start with the dissertation committee,” Pascoe says. “There is an expectation that students will meet certain rigorous disciplinary standards, showing that they have some kind of authority over a field. Those who are working in new formats will need to convince their committees that they are still accomplishing the desired tasks and developing the necessary skills in the new formats.”

Creativity will lead the way

Erica Damman, a Ph.D. student in interdisciplinary studies, talked with members of her dissertation committee about composing a non-traditional thesis. Damman, who attends symposia offered by Pascoe’s group, is creating a dissertation that features three board games focusing on environmental topics, particularly climate change and human vulnerability to its ramifications.

Damman designed and tested the games, which resemble the popular board games Scrabble, Memory, and Clues and Ladders. Each game is played by two different groups (a random group and a group with specific variables) and has a theoretical or conceptual basis. Damman believes that gaming is a great way to bring people to the table to talk about climate change.

“My dissertation committee was eager to have me measure the impact of the games in some way,” says Damman, a former Graduate Institute on Engagement and the Academy Fellow and Humanities without Walls participant at the I Herman Center. “It’s a game equal to one chapter of my dissertation, or two chapters! We had to come to a negotiated agreement about what the work would actually look like in terms of how much writing would be accompanying this.”

Damman’s dissertation will include an approximately 120-page companion piece.

“I don’t mind doing the writing because it’s a type of scholarship that other people still know,” Damman says. “Even though I’m doing a hybrid dissertation, there’s a part of it that other people will recognize as scholarly work.”

Damman’s innovative dissertation may inspire more graduate students at the University of Iowa to experiment with non-traditional components in their theses.

“She’s one creative person. We’ll continue to get creative people knocking on the door of digital dissertations,” Teitle says. “This, to me, is how the real change will happen. If the students create a culture and a movement that we don’t have to bestow on them, they’ll do it by piece by piece.”
Save the Date

David J. Skorton, M.D.
Thursday, March 30, 2017, 7:30 p.m., Hancher Auditorium
Presented by the Graduate College

Currently the 13th Secretary of the Smithsonian, Doctor David J. Skorton served as the 19th president of the University of Iowa from 2003–2006 and was a member of the UI faculty for 26 years before becoming the 12th president of Cornell University. A renaissance thinker, Skorton will share his thoughts as a university president, Smithsonian secretary, musician, physician, researcher, academician, and reformer. Free and open to the public.