Art Therapy in South Africa
Expanding our Diversity Course
by Becky Jacobson, 2nd year

South Africa was a life changing experience that has inspired me in new ways. I was so moved by the land and the people that I not only want to go back but also am focusing my research on a project where I hope to further introduce art therapy to the people of South Africa. Our group was composed of eleven students from GW Art Therapy, two GW Drama students, a videographer, a blogger, Heidi Bardot, Director of Art Therapy; Leslie Jacobson, professor of GW Theatre and Dance; and Roy Barber, on the Board of Bokamoso Youth Center. We spent three weeks in South Africa and were given the opportunity to immerse ourselves within its culture, beauty, and history.

We started our travels in Cape Town, South Africa, where our tour guides shared their personal struggles and victories living through Apartheid. Seeing the country through their stories personalized the history we were learning about. We visited Robbin Island where Nelson Mandela was held for 18 of his 27 year captivity and the District 6 Museum, people were moved out of their homes and businesses into townships. After our stay in Cape Town we flew to Johannesburg where we visited Soweto township, the Hector Peterson Memorial (a young boy killed in the uprising), and the Apartheid Museum. We also spent a weekend doing art therapy with the Khulumani group, which provides support to survivors of massacres that took place in the early ‘90s. During the first few days in South Africa I was moved, often to tears, by the suffering people endured not so long ago. I was moved just as powerfully as I witnessed the immense strength, forgiveness, hope, and spirit of all those we met who shared their stories with us.

After traveling through different areas of the country
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try and learning about the political history, we arrived in Winterveldt, where we stayed and worked for two weeks at The Bokamoso Life Center. This is a community center for youth to participate in programs focusing on building life skills, such as, leadership, creating career and educational goals, safe sex, and providing much needed guidance and support. Bokamoso has offered theater, song, and dance to the youth but this was the first time art therapy was introduced to the Center. Working with the youth I was incredibly impressed by their openness and willingness in trying different art therapy directives, and by the resultant deep and meaningful discussions. Many of the youth explained that the opportunity to sit quietly and reflect on their personal experiences in this way was not a common experience and they were thankful for the opportunity.

Our trip ended with a weekend safari where we enjoyed the beauty of the land and the magnificence of the animals we saw. Saying good-bye to this incredible country and specifically Winterveldt was very hard and I knew that this experience was life changing. I had learned the personal stories of the people, discovered the rich history, and immersed myself within the culture of the community in Winterveldt. I knew I would miss the rewarding feeling I received in working with the young men and women and the powerful sense of community that was so rich at Bokamoso. I knew I would also greatly miss the spirit of the people. Seeing how receptive people were to art therapy but how limited the resources were within the community I have been inspired to focus my attentions on this population. The historical, cultural, interpersonal, professional, and human experiences I witnessed and experienced in South Africa all have inspired me to bring art therapy back to South African townships in the future.

South Africa, continued from page 1

“What moved me about South Africa was the joy—the song and dance, the smiles on peoples’ faces—and the beauty, of the land and peoples’ hearts.”
—Heidi Bardot

Participants from art therapy groups show off some of their art projects—mandalas and spirit figures
(left) Elise Lunsford, Becky Jacobson and men’s group
(right) Liani Vazquez-Santana, Amanda Andrews and women’s group
Ten Years Ago: The 9/11 Arts Project
by Laura Miles, 1st year

Ten years ago, ninth grade was put on hold for the day as we watched the events of 9/11 unfold. At the time, I was confused about what this meant for the United States and was saddened, of course, but felt like my Tennessee classroom was too far away for it to have a major impact on me. I was too young and naïve to see how a faraway tragedy would change my life.

I have come a long way since 2001. So many people were—and still are—affected by what happened that day. We have gone through periods of mourning, of patriotism, of misunderstanding, of misplaced anger, and of hope. How has the world changed since that Tuesday morning ten years ago?

On September 10, 2011, five 1st year students volunteered at Arts on Foot, a free arts and music festival in Penn Quarter in DC. Two local non-profits, CREATE Arts Center in Silver Spring, Maryland, and the Smith Center for Healing and the Arts on U Street, shared a tent at the event to kick off the 9/11 Arts Project. The project is a year-long collaboration between DC non-profits in the arts, health, and education commemorating the tenth anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks. Their vision is to provide healing and understanding through art and other creative outlets.

“As festival attendees came to the tent, they were invited to create a Dream Scroll sharing their vision or wish for the future in a post-9/11 society,” said 1st year student volunteer Katelyn Moore. With children, who were often too young to remember, the direction was altered a bit to allow them to envision a wish for the world. Katelyn was excited to see their optimistic and hopeful outlook on the future of the United States and the world beyond. She stated, “Quite a few of the kids were born post-9/11, and I feel confident their generation will help set the stage for peace.”

Only two weeks into the graduate art therapy program, this was a first chance to engage people in art-making, to educate them on the impact of art therapy and the role GW students have in the DC community. 1st year student Stephanie Tyler noted that she was surprised how comfortable she was with inviting strangers to participate in the art project. “I thought to myself, ‘Okay, maybe I don’t know much of anything about this person. But what I do know is that wherever they were in the world [on 9/11], they experienced it in some way,’” she said. “9/11 became our common ground and I no longer felt disconnected from them once the art making began.”

It was amazing to see what people included on their scrolls. Many contained messages of hope, happiness, unity, peace, and love. Seeing them lined up on the table was powerful. The impact of these expressions made me realize that, even ten years ago, I wasn’t as alone as I had thought.

The intention of the 9/11 Arts Project is to engage the public in events and programs in different creative capacities—including art exhibitions, dance and music concerts, theater and literary performances, interfaith services, and film screenings—that promote social justice, multiculturalism, religious tolerance, individual healing, and community involvement. These events will take place in various locations around DC until September 11, 2012. I feel privileged to have been a part of the city-wide kickoff for such a timely and important project.

For more information about the 9/11 Arts Project’s “Year of Healing,” visit www.911artsproject.com
Pine Ridge South Dakota: Year Two
By Elizabeth Warson, GW Assistant Professor

During our last evening together, our guest speaker Virgil Bush asked my students “Why my reservation? What made you all come out to our reservation? We are the poorest Indian reservation.” This was the sentiment expressed throughout. Why should we care so much about this community? Programs come and go throughout the summer months on Pine Ridge. Most are geared toward repairing homes and providing community meals. Our American Indian Art Therapy program was unique. We brought our art supplies, enthusiasm for the healing arts, and an awareness of the culture. Eleven graduate art therapy/counseling students teamed up for this 18-week immersion program each bringing a “gift” to share with the community. Becca, a certified equine therapist, took the lead role in our equine/art therapy program; Ricardo brought his knowledge of indigenous flutes and integrated this practice in all our programs (the horses were even soothed). Anna and Colette became our resident experts on Lakota culture. Sara, Cassie, Kristen, and Patti took the lead on developing culturally-relevant art projects; Diana shared her knowledge of computers with the Red Cloud family who produce quill work full-time. Sue Anne drew upon her knowledge and experience with the healing arts at the Sun Dance; and Song shared her South Korean culture with many attentive children.

With only two sites confirmed upon our arrival, we announced our program location and dates on the American Indian-owned KILI radio station. This started the chain reaction of requests for art therapy services throughout the reservation (this approach is also the norm for this community). Students provided three groups a day at different locations throughout this expansive reservation. It was not uncommon for us to end the day with an invitation to attend a ceremony, cultural event, or even dinner. Time became a secondary focus as we adopted a Native way of being in the moment. Many of us learned to drop our agendas and go with the flow. This was critical when working with many of the underserved youth in the community. Creativity was also key in terms of how we approached each site.
Pine Ridge Kid’s Club: Upon our arrival we soon learned that this program lost part of its funding and were struggling to locate supplies and food for the kids. Our focus for this program was to provide a sense of community through the visual arts. This was achieved through murals created on portable canvas banners. Our approach empowered the older youth to become leaders for each team and help organize a theme for each mural. Once completed, the murals were attached to the fencing around the playground to provide an aesthetically pleasing environment reflecting the creativity of the youth. Five murals in total were produced and will be displayed in the tribal office.

Wounded Knee School: This school is open during the summer months for community members to have a safe environment to go to. The area where this school is located is referred to as “murder town” by locals. During the daylight hours, the school is a friendly environment for the children, and many Christian groups provide supportive services there as well. The resource room provided with ample space, tables, and chairs, and we were able to conduct individual and dyad sessions. Many of the children in this environment are at-risk for suicide and our goal was to focus on art therapy projects to boost self-esteem and personal strengths. We also introduced novel art processes such as feltmaking and handmade books. Our culminating project entailed the creation of individual quilt squares, in keeping with their quilting tradition, which is now proudly on display in the school’s front office.

Brewer Ranch: Equine and art therapy sessions were held during the evening hours. Our co-facilitator was Morris Brewer, counselor and equine therapist, who acclimated us to Lakota customs and practices such as smudging the group participants and horses with smoke emanating from dried sage. Art therapy became an integral component to equine therapy from a Lakota perspective, encompassing painted images on the horse (tempera paints) reflecting Lakota symbols such as hailstones, lightning bolts, and hand prints. Sculptural pieces from natural materials were created in response to the trust exercises, nonverbal communication, and Lakota stories and prayers. Our participants ranged from adults from a recovery program to adolescents in residential treatment. Community members, therapists, and parole officers also joined us to participate in this unique collaboration of art and equine therapy.
Equine Therapy and Art Therapy: A Match Made in Pine Ridge
by Becca Bryan, 2nd year

As a practicing, registered instructor with PATH, Intl. (Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International) and a candidate for a master’s degree in Art Therapy from the George Washington University, I found the summer institute to Pine Ridge, SD to be an incredible combination of my two passions. In a culture which greatly values both the horse and the creative process, art-based equine therapy seems to be the perfect “therapy of choice” in a place where striving to keep a culture alive is a daily process.

In my training and practice in equine facilitated therapy and learning, I use riding skills to work on therapeutic goals such as frustration tolerance, impulse control, and planning skills. In unmounted, therapeutic tasks involving communicating effectively with an animal ten times your size, it is an incredible feeling of personal accomplishment to make a horse trust you and follow your lead. Working with horses also keeps you humble—as they may literally “walk all over you” when you are not looking if you have not established your boundaries! What a great metaphor for life and creating a sense of self and control over your future.

The integration of art therapy with equine therapy increases the benefits exponentially. In working therapeutically with horses, much of the bond with the animal is felt emotionally and can be difficult to put into words. In art therapy, where the process is designed to be nonverbal, participants can use art materials to help express the process they went through while working with the horse. At this point, it may be easier to speak either literally or through metaphor about one’s own therapeutic process, and how it relates to issues they have and will be working on to better themselves. I greatly look forward to returning to Pine Ridge to continue this type of work.

“Much of the bond with the animal is felt emotionally and can be difficult to put into words.”

Cassie Gabriel and Becca Bryan at Morris Brewer Ranch

Becca working with fellow art therapy student, Cassie Gabriel, and two children

Harmony Loudhawk with Lesley College Student, Collete Crowley and GW Counseling student, Ricardo Sanchez
Emotional Resources Free Style: Beyond
by Sara Oppelt, 2nd Year

As art therapy students, we are all learning about the fundamental mantra of practicing self-care. Self-care can originate with something as small as a piece of dark chocolate, include yoga once a week, and hopefully include scheduling regular therapy sessions for ourselves. While most of us are living on a student’s budget, the expense of therapy can often be a source for hesitation in contacting a therapist. One method in which we can take care of ourselves in a healing way is looking into support groups. Most support groups are united by a particular shared characteristic and guided by members. Members are able to relate personal experiences, provide sympathetic understanding and validation, as well as establish a social network. This healing provided in support groups is also mirrored in many spiritual settings that congregate together united in purpose. Often churches, temples, or other spiritual organizations provide spiritual counseling, weekly small group meetings, as well as a supportive social network system. While support groups can not take the place of professional counseling, they can be helpful when you are feeling in need of additional support.

If you are interested in looking into a support group in the area, check out Mental Health America’s web page that provides a list of various groups as well as a group locator search at: http://www.nmha.org/go/find support group

Freedom in Creation Collaboration
by Heidi Bardot, Director, GW Art Therapy Program

On January 20th, GW hosted the workshop, “Reciprocity: Building Bridges in a War-Affected Community” in collaboration with Freedom in Creation, founder Andrew Briggs and Peter Odoch who traveled from Uganda to present. The program was focused on Freedom in Creation’s approach “utilizing art as therapy to meet psychological, education, and economic need.” The information included didactic information on cross cultural approaches as well as an experiential collaborative art project. The art project included two banners that were to be only halfway completed by GW workshop attendees. Both banners were then taken by Briggs and Odoch to the Ugandan program where the children and youth completed the other half. They will keep one banner for display in their facility and the other banner will be returned to GW to be displayed in the Art Therapy Gallery.

The hope is that through this collaboration Freedom in Creation will gain valuable information on how to utilize art therapy techniques to continue healing in the war ravaged country of Uganda and the GW community will gain valuable cross-cultural information regarding working with trauma in other cultures.

For more information about Freedom in Creation, visit their website at: www.freedomincreation.org
The term outsider art is the English derivative of the French term l’art brut, or raw art, which was coined by artist Jean Dubuffet to describe forms of creative expression that exist outside of accepted cultural norms, those made in their “raw” state, not manipulated by cultural or artistic influence. Today, many of the artists to whom this term applies are those that stand on the fringes of society, or for various reasons have not been culturally indoctrinated or socially conditioned. This type of art is found covering the walls at Miriam’s Kitchen, where I am one of the art therapy interns. Miriam’s is not only a close-knit community where meals are shared, but where creative expression thrives. Though most of our guests are chronically homeless, their displacement does not hinder their inspired outpouring of expression.

In October, some of our guests participated in Outsider Art Inside the Beltway, an annual juried invitation of outsider and self taught art, sponsored by Art Enables, a studio and gallery space for emerging artists with developmental disabilities in Washington, DC. Art Enables seeks to further an understanding and acceptance of the alternative, visual method of communication that is many times necessary for those that are marginalized in our society. Art Enables and the OAIB show raised awareness for these individuals.

The OAIB show, which ran from October 15-28th, was a great success. It was incredible to witness the sense of accomplishment and pride that the Miriam’s guests had in displaying their art when I attended the opening night. In interviewing some of the guests that participated, they all shared a sense of empowerment, both in the display of their work, as well as in the process of creating it. Carlos, a familiar, bright member in the Miriam’s community, had two pieces in the show. When speaking about his experience, he stated he was so happy to look at all of the artwork and was especially proud of the colorful rainbow painting he submitted. Dale, one of Miriam’s more comical guests, commented that he liked to watch people step up to see his art, so he could say “I am the artist,” and maybe give them an autograph. For Dale, his artwork is a form of empowerment.

In conversing about the meaning of outsider art, Dale shared “it means we are creators, not necessarily artists.” Mary-Francis, another guest and participant, stated that to her, “outsider art means that anyone can be an artist.”

That is the mindset that the open studios of both Miriam’s Kitchen and Art Enables communities embrace—no matter what ethnicity, age, or hindrance we face, we all have an inherent need to create.
Images of the Soul: Students Learn the Principles of Soul Collage

by Stephanie Tyler, 1st Year

This November a workshop, organized by PATA and GW and led by Karen Baer, was an interactive and personal experience that encouraged self-exploration and self-acceptance. Soul Collage is different from other collage art therapy activities in that it involves creating a deck of collaged cards from found images. The cards, arranged in suits, each explore a different aspect of the self and may be guided by an important life question or issue. This Jungian-inspired process is a unique entryway that welcomes people to begin speaking about themselves in a safe and accepting environment.

In my soul card, I used images from magazines to explore my curious self. The next step in the Soul Collage process is the “I-Am-One-Who” journaling exercise. In this stage, Karen encouraged the group to speak from within the image, rather than about the image, and to write through the energy of the cards. Once the group had completed their cards, we observed our images and recited our “I-Am-One-Who” statements to a partner, who then recorded them for us. My statements: “I am the one who climbs, asks questions, touches everything, and searches for answers...” My partner then read my statements back and shared her own thoughts on my soul card: “You are the one who makes it work, turns on the power, and embraces exploration.” This meaningful exchange was a wonderfully powerful way of connecting with my curious self. While I chose the images for my card intuitively, their meanings transformed and deepened when they were given a voice. This role-playing of the soul cards enables those who create them to experience a new way of telling the story of who they are, and of revealing and connecting with one’s inner wisdom, personality and soul.

Using images as fuel to describe a part of me enabled me to better know that part. Even more, hearing another person read aloud who I see myself as, inspired me to be honest about and accepting of myself. The Soul Collage process was a freeing experience as I zeroed in on a single fragment of myself rather than all the overwhelming, complex layers that form me. This fun and creative outlet can be used to empower individuals to develop a deeper understanding of who they are and of their personal life journey.

To learn more about applications and how to become a facilitator, visit http://www.soulcollage.com/
Student Art: The First Year’s Set the Stage

The Fall 2011 Incoming Student Exhibit featured an inspiring array of both two and three dimensional art works. The first year students are sure to bring their ingenuity and creativity to the culture of the GW Art Therapy Program as well as to their future clients.

From top right, clockwise:
“Onion”
Whitney Maclin

“Exposed”
Mark Borys

“Curiouser & Curiouser”
Todd Stonnell

“Wonderwall”
Susan Lee

“Untitled”
Sarah Pitkin
On Snail Mail
by Julie Blankenship, 1st year

I believe in the solidarity that a written letter provides, generally speaking. I grew up in Lexington, Kentucky. I have lived a slow, suburban lifestyle in favor of pickup trucks, going to the grocery twice a day, an undergraduate school that my entire family attended, and being mistaken for my older sister until I turned 18. Growing up, I had a few pen pals, and you could never find me without a few notes in my pocket through middle and high school. Written word was a measure of quality in my adolescence. Now, if you look through my closet, you’ll find a small, brown box with the word “LETTERS” stamped across the lid. Open the box, and you will find a variety of scripture. Love poems from boyfriends. Notes passed back and forth in Señora Shores’ AP Spanish class. Torn-out entries with doodles from diaries. Red envelopes from my pen pal in Louisville, Nora Jane. More recent letters from friends around the country with whom I have worked. Why do I keep them all?

As an artist and as a burgeoning therapist, I have learned to value the externalization of the internal world. As an artist and a writer, I have learned to value the documentation of the internal world, whatever form it may be, and from whomever it may come. Painting a picture is expressive for me in nature, and so is writing a letter; they serve the same documenting function. So upon uprooting my Kentucky home, and moving to Washington, DC, I asked my current pen pals one thing: to continue to provide me with a moment of slow reflection in my new, fast-paced life. Among the constant commotion of clients, presentations, process and progress notes, once I month I may come home to a letter about a trip to Guatemala, a note from Powell County, Kentucky, or a sketch from Kansas City, Missouri.

Adapting to a speedier lifestyle has had its challenges; however, I continue to ground myself in my creative roots: documenting in raw materials of communication. As I develop as a therapist, student, and artist, I add to my own identity by taking in the work that other people send me, whether it is visual or verbal.

Keep sending me letters. I will keep them, and you’ll hear back from me soon.

My Journey to Art Therapy
by Sue Ann Hastings, 2nd year

In December 2009 I was watching a show about art therapy on television. My heart was responding to the therapist working with a little girl. The little girl drew a stick figure angel on the page and the therapist drew a large angel next to her holding the little angel’s hand (left, my own rendition). I felt tears rolling down my cheeks. I knew at that moment, this was what I wanted to do! If a process was that powerful to be able to touch me by just observing it on TV, I needed to learn it. I began searching the internet and the energy carried me. I was able to complete extensive prerequisites and land myself in the greatest graduate program in the country.

When I started reading about Joan Kellogg’s story, it reminded me of my journey. She completed high school, joined the Navy, married and moved her family around with her husband’s job. Kellogg read that Hahnemann Hospital in Philadelphia was using art with patients and “knew [she] wanted to do that, whatever THAT was,” state’s Carol Cox (1994). Her prior studies of Carl Jung’s work led her to her own educational process and the creation of the MARI and “The Great Round” (Cox, 1994, 2004).

I completed high school, did a little college, joined the Navy, married, and moved my family around with my husband’s job. My introduction to art therapy was a serendipitous event and here I am today at GW. I only hope I will be able to contribute to the field of art therapy in a way that will emulate the great work of Joan Kellogg and her “Great Round.”
During the weekend of October 1-2, 2011, the Puerto Rico Department of Education sponsored a conference for special education public school personnel at the Sheraton hotel in San Juan. On Saturday, GW professor Donna Betts, PhD, ATR-BC, presented “The use of Art Activities and Strategies with Students on the Autism Spectrum.” On Sunday, GW adjunct professor Rachel Albert presented “Strategies to Manage Autism Spectrum Disorders in a School Setting.” The conference was organized by GW Art Therapy alumna Maricel Ocasio. We were delighted to promote art therapy and GW’s graduate program in this context to an enthusiastic audience of 500 social workers, psychologists, teachers, and other personnel!

Rachel Albert, Maricel Ocasio, and Donna Betts in Puerto Rico

Drawn from the Circle is going digital! Much of our newsletter is designed with beautiful, colorful art and photos; however, due to costs, sadly this copy you have received is in B&W. You can access color copies on the GW Art Therapy website (www.gwu.edu/~artx/alumni/newsletter.cfm). Additionally, in an attempt to save trees we will be transitioning to only digital copies and will send you an email notice with the link when a new edition has arrived. If you would prefer to continue receiving paper copies, please email artx@gwu.edu or call 703-299-4148 and let us know by April 2012.