Social Responsibility in Action: 30 Years of the LOS Program

Since its founding in 1864 by members of the Religious Society of Friends, Swarthmore College has offered an education designed to prepare students for “lives that speak” through ethical and effective action in the world. Founded in 2001, the Eugene M. Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility advances the College’s mission of preparing students for life-long leadership in civic engagement and positive social change, public service, advocacy and social action.

The Lang Center and the programs it administers reflect many Quaker traditions and values that the College, its students, staff and faculty hold dear, especially a commitment to the common good and to the preparation of future leaders who will influence favorably a changing and complex world. While Swarthmore College celebrates the life of the mind, the Lang Center provides opportunities for the practice of the mind too, facilitating discovery, fostering ethical intelligence, and empowering students through signature scholarship and grant programs.

The Lang Opportunity Scholarship Program is one such signature program – founded in 1981 through the vision and endowment of Eugene M. Lang ’38, and administered by the Lang Center since its founding in 2001. A primary intention of the Lang Opportunity Scholarship program is to empower Swarthmore students to create and implement original, innovative solutions to pressing social problems in a sustainable fashion. Whether building local capacities, providing packages of innovative products and services or building a movement to increase the voice of marginalized groups, the LOS Program has enabled Lang Scholars to collectively provide social value to thousands of people in hundreds of communities close to home and around the world for 30 years!

On February 19, 2011 the College celebrated the contributions and lasting impact of Mr. Lang.

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Steadfast Commitment to Social Action

Bella Liu ‘07

“Born in Guangzhou, China, I moved with my parents to the United States at age 12. Growing up, I experienced many obstacles common to the Chinese immigrant story, from language and cultural barriers to my family’s economic struggles. Yet looking back now, I think the experience built my character greatly.

One quality I came to acquire was certainly self-motivation, gained from watching my parents work so hard and take so much pride in my achievements. Other qualities, which I think are not as commonly attributed to growing up in an immigrant family, were empathy and compassion, acquired from meeting people different from myself and from experiencing adversity first hand.

To me, with the understanding of people different from oneself, their hopes, needs and problems, comes the wish to make a difference for others. Throughout high school, college and now medical school, I have been passionate about several activities that could potentially translate this wish into action. In high school I first found out about a blood selling scandal in rural central China as a global AIDS campaign organizer for Amnesty International: in the 1990s, hundreds of thousands of farmers in several central provinces in China, notably Henan, were infected with HIV when, to alleviate their poverty, they sold their blood in places where unsanitary techniques were used. In an area where a large portion of the working-age generation has succumbed to HIV/AIDS, the blood-selling disaster today represents both a serious health issue and a severe socio-economic problem. During my time at Swarthmore College, I was determined to find ways to help the families affected.

Today very few programs are in place to support the psychological and long-term well-being of the children of these afflicted families. Working through a Chinese charity allowed me to operate in the area, and under the mentorship of my advisors at the Lang Center, Pat James and Deb Kardon-Brown, I founded China Memory Book Project as my Lang Opportunity Project in the summer of 2004 to offer emotional support and future guidance to the children.

I designed the memory books, which are printed “activity booklets” with guiding prompts asking the children to record information such as memories of their parents, contact information of relatives as well as their dreams and aspirations. By giving the children their own memory books to fill out and keep, I hoped to help the children emotionally deal with the grief, fear, confusion and anger toward society that often resulted from the illness or death of their parents. (cont’d p. 3)

Did You Know...?

- For the past 30 years, the LOS Program has empowered 164 Lang Scholars to put their ideas to work in 30 countries around the world, including:
  
  Bolivia
  Cameroon
  Chile
  China
  Colombia
  Egypt
  England
  Ghana
  Guatemala
  India
  Japan
  Kenya
  Myanmar
  Namibia
  Nepal
  Nicaragua
  Panama
  Peru
  Philippines
  Poland
  Romania
  Russia
  Sierre Leone
  South Africa
  Switzerland
  Turkey
  Uganda
  United States
  Zimbabwe
Just as important, the memory books were designed to encourage the children to take charge of their own lives and to not lose hope.

As I worked on the memory book project, I realized how important a connection with society would be for these children as they grow up. Without any guidance, many of them would be left questioning, even doubting their future role in society. With this in mind, I started a Big Sister Big Brother mentorship program in the summer of 2006, pairing the children with student mentors at three major Chinese universities.

Now in my third year at Harvard Medical School, I have continued my involvement with these children affected by HIV/AIDS in China. Working with a former colleague from China, I helped launch the Pediatric HIV/AIDS Treatment Support Project (PATS), a non-profit organization that provides medications for children living with HIV in rural central China, and also funds and trains local community healthcare workers there to care for them.

I have also helped other groups adopt the memory book model:

- They were adopted as medication diaries for HIV-positive children in central China by the Henan Center for Disease Control.
- They were the basis for an HIV care manual for HIV-positive children nationwide funded by the Beijing National Center for Disease Control and Prevention and UNICEF.
- Thanks to the charity I initially worked with for my Lang project, the mentorship program has continued annually, with more children, at additional universities around China.

Just as growing up in an immigrant family has taught me many life lessons, so has completing the Lang project during my time at Swarthmore. I learned how far passion for something can take you. It makes the possibilities limitless and the obstacles much less daunting.

Furthermore, I learned how rewarding and important it is to not abandon your previous pursuits. For me as I moved on to medical school and a medical career after Swarthmore College, abandoning the Lang project I worked so hard on would have meant abandoning the children in China I helped.

Instead, I am overjoyed each time I receive pictures in the mail of the children smiling and playing with their big brothers and big sisters as part of the annual mentorship programs and each time I receive files of memory books, medication diaries and care manuals completed by the children and their caretakers.

As I become a doctor, no matter what kind of medical career I embark on, my hope is that these children affected by HIV/AIDS in China will always be a part of my life.”

Did You Know...? (cont’d)

- Lang Scholars have tackled these issues through:
  - Advocating
  - Capacity building
  - Conference convening
  - Curriculum building
  - Film making
  - Information sharing
  - Mentoring
  - Movement building
  - Psycho-social healing
  - Storytelling
  - Teaching
  - Training
  - Tutoring

- Issues that Lang Scholars have worked on include:
  - Academic enrichment
  - Agriculture
  - Animal rights
  - Arts
  - Environment
  - Homelessness
  - Housing
  - Human rights
  - Hunger
  - Juvenile justice
  - LGBT issues
  - Media literacy
  - Microfinance
  - Poverty
  - Public health
  - Technology

- To date, 80 of the 164 Lang Scholar Alumni have joined the “Swarthmore Lang Opportunity Scholars” Facebook group.

Be sure to check the Facebook feed for news about the program, upcoming events and opportunities to connect with old friends!
Social Responsibility in the 21st Century: A Celebration of the LOS Program


Moderated by Executive Director of the Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility, Joy Charlton, panelists Vincent Jones ’98, Barbara Klock ’86, Lourdes Rosado ’85 and Jeremy Weinstein ’97 discussed the topic of social responsibility in the 21st century and shared remembrances of the impact that Mr. Lang and the LOS Program has had upon their lives. Vincent Jones suggested that strategic philanthropy—that is “thoughtful giving”—and collaboration are the keys to social responsibility in the 21st century. Jones, the Chairperson of the Board of National Teen Leadership, says it is important to invest in young leaders in whatever ways we can. And the LOS program does just that. Further, he urged that “in order to create the world we seek, we need to collaborate.” Lourdes Rosado agreed, “A lot of the good work in social justice is collaborative.” Lourdes Rosado commented that Mr. Lang has been a “constant friend and mentor.” When she attended Swarthmore, Rosado said that she was interested in journalism and social justice. For the past 12 years, Rosado has worked at the Juvenile Law Center.

Barbara Klock warmly recalled the dinners with Mr. Lang as a young Lang Scholar, talking about ideas and projects, and gathering input from others in her cohort. As a pediatrician, Klock mentioned that the “probing patience” of her mentors at Swarthmore College—including Mr. Lang—have inspired her approach to working with patients today. Klock said that she admires, “Gene’s commitment to helping others into who they have a right to be, to achieve their potential.” Jeremy Weinstein ’97 reflected that the LOS program empowered him to find his passion and to learn that large scale social change is possible. The LOS experience helped Weinstein to consider what role he could play in social change and helped him to think through what contribution to the world might be. Weinstein appreciated the tough questions of Mr. Lang and Myrt Westphal (then LOS advisor) when he was developing his project idea.

LOS Class Notes

Chris Sunami ’97 writes, “I remain committed to the Lang Scholar’s motto of ‘Change the world.’ That had always been my intention, and being selected as part of a program that believed I could actually do it represented a great deal of encouragement towards that goal.

I am currently pursuing that in two ways. The first is as a writer and public speaker. My last book “Hero For Christ” was a socially progressive Christian devotional focused around the lives of twenty two world-changing Christians...

The second way I am pursuing world change is through my position as Director of Youth Ministries for the innovative UM Church for All People...For the last five years, [I have] directed a free, all volunteer, zero-budget program that brings lessons in the performing arts to inner city youth and adults...

Receiving the LOS played the decisive role in determining where I attended college, less because of the money and more because I appreciated the faith in my potential it represented...

I have very positive memories of the LOS program, and its emphasis on taking practical action towards social ideals was quite influential on me and my subsequent life choices.”

(cont’d p 5)
Even though Weinstein’s project was not ultimately sustained, the question he learned to ask himself then – what is my role in supporting communities that are not my own? – and the knowledge of the power of people’s aspirations, still guides him today. Weinstein now serves the White House National Security Council.

Charlton asked panelists to consider how the world has changed in terms of the tools that are now available to the current generation of Lang Scholars and the context that they are operating within. Rosado responded, “There is more diversity of thought on campus now than there was and that is a good thing.” Weinstein noted that there is now an evidence base for social change oriented work that wasn’t there before, so Scholars today have a lot more reading to do now then there was then. “There was tremendous energy,” he said, “but little knowledge of how to assess impact of various social change projects.”

Mr. Lang asked, “What would be the most effective to bring about social change based upon your experience?” Jones responded, “Invest in young leaders. Create an environment of people committed to social change. Allow young leaders to try a new idea... Invest in grass roots organizing.” “Help people to see that change is possible and help them to see their part in that change. Remember that where there are challenges there are also assets. Don’t just focus on the deficits.” Klock added, “Everything comes from an idea. Take an idea and put it into action.” Rosado reflected that effective social change, “...has to grow from values instilled in you when you are very young. Respect that there are different ways to [carry out social justice work], otherwise you might miss the most creative, innovative idea.” Finally, Weinstein underscored the importance of listening. “It’s the idea and the listening to [the feedback of] others [about that idea] that gives projects the chance to bear desired impact.” He went to suggest that “the structure of the LOS program that has been built over time” contributes to the effectiveness of social action projects as well. In terms of sustaining projects, Weinstein recommended, “Build shared commitment to going forward and find ways to get into systems and structures. You pilot a project first and then find ways to transform the way we do business.”

In Gratitude

Heartfelt thanks to Mr. Eugene M. Lang ’38 for his continued support and generosity to the LOS Program!

LOS Class Notes (cont’d)

Anson Stewart ’10 (pictured on far left with greenRELAY participants) was the recipient of a 2010-11 Watson Fellowship... making him just one of just 40 college seniors in the country to receive this honor! “Many of the questions I hope to answer in my Watson year come from my LOS-supported internship with the T Riders Union and the insights of the youth participants in my LOS project, greenRELAY.”

Scholar Submissions Welcome!

If you have a “class note” or “dogfish story” of your own, please consider contributing it for a future issue of the Dogfish Stories: The Lang Scholar Newsletter. Submissions can be emailed to jimagee1@swarthmore.edu or mailed to Jennifer Magee, PhD, Lang Center for Civic and Social Responsibility, 500 College Avenue, Swarthmore PA 19081. The Dogfish Stories is e-published during spring break (March) and fall break (October) each year.