

Not Just Child's Play

Child Development Majors Pursue...Everything

George Scarlett, deputy chair of the Eliot-Pearson Department of Child Development (CD), wants to make one thing clear: students who major in child development can go on to any number of professions. He says, “The question many people ask is what they can do as a child development major. The answer is anything they want. Child development is one of the largest majors on campus and our students can, in fact, do everything,” Scarlett said.

Scarlett noted that although students go into professions like medicine, education, law, and social work, they are all motivated by their desire to work with and understand children. The department also houses thriving master’s and PhD programs.

Take, for example, Matt Beloff, who graduated with dual degrees in child development and psychology and is now in his first year of a two-year master’s program in the child development department. Beloff hopes to become a university professor specializing in international Deaf education—a community he is also looking to create. As a student who has a profound hearing loss himself, Beloff noted that countries have their own Deaf culture and language, but there isn’t a unifying community that links the countries together. “I originally wanted to be a child psychologist, but I realized that no one was working on creating an international Deaf community. I want to be that person,” he said.

Beloff, who reads lips, spent a summer in China studying Mandarin. “It was a language immersion program. I was very quiet at first, but I roomed with someone who only spoke Mandarin. It was extremely difficult, but I picked it up with a lot of one-to-one tutoring.” Beloff also taught English to Deaf students in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Service-based internships are also part of the tradition at Eliot-Pearson, Scarlett explained. Students have gone to Ghana to take part in an educational

NGO, developed a local maple syrup project, volunteered in New Orleans, and taught in English as a Second Language programs. “We’ve placed students in hospitals to learn about issues such as the issue of how adolescents cope with diabetes. Globalization and service is a hallmark at Tufts and we take that very seriously,” Scarlett added.

Becca Solomont, A08, spent part of her junior year in London interning at the Globe Theatre, crediting Associate Professor Kathleen Camara’s Teaching Through Drama and Improvisation course she took as a freshman for inspiring her twin pursuits of child development and drama. “I wanted to see how to implement social change through theater. For the first time, I felt the right balance working with both theater and children. It was an incredible experience,” she said.

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—JAY SINGH, A09

Camara, whose current research focuses on the role arts play in children’s development, said that the department “offers so many rich opportunities for preparation for careers related to child and youth development and education.”

Child development major Jay Singh, A09, said “opportunity” is the key to the success of the program.

“It’s the opportunity to learn, the opportunity to grow, the opportunity to discover who you are by exploring who you were. I came to Tufts knowing that I wanted to pursue a career in clinical child psychology—a goal that I still have,” he said.

Singh’s interests include emotion decoding deficiencies in child conduct disorders and the psychosocial mechanisms behind psychotherapy. Singh, who has co-authored and written chapters for textbooks, is also the recipient of several major scholarships,

including the Alpha XI Delta Scholarship, the top prize scholarship awarded to juniors; the Class of 1921 Leonard Carmichael Scholarship, scholarship for psychology majors; and was one of 32 national winners of the Frances D. Horowitz Millennium Scholarship.

Sonni Bendetson, A09, enthuses over the way her advisor Janet Zeller makes theory come alive.

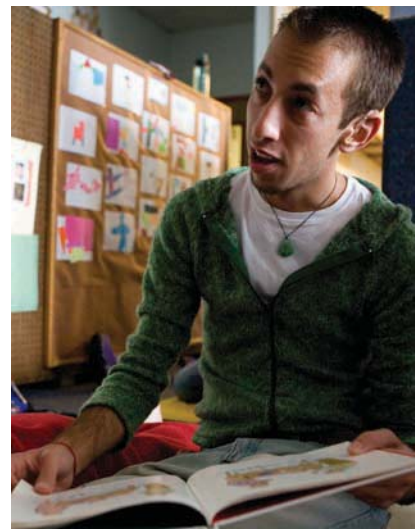
“Janet makes it really interesting because she really cares. She knows theory and history, but she actually applies it and I can see how she does it,” Bendetson said, citing her work with Zeller at Tufts Educational Day Care Center where Zeller is director.

Bendetson is exploring different career options postgraduation, but is interested in a “hands on” approach with children. “I took a class called The Exceptional Child. My brother is hard of hearing and I’ve always been interested in kids with special needs.

“I watched him grow and saw what we did at home to help him,” she said.

“I find child development relatable to almost all of my other classes,” Bendetson continued. “Child development applies to every single person.”

Jennifer Deprez, A08, has been unwavering in her commitment to study child development since she took



Matt Beloff, A07, G10, reads to children at the Eliot-Pearson School.

Introduction to Child Development with Tufts literacy professor Maryanne Wolf during her second semester of college.

“I had always loved working with children and was always interested in their development, especially lingual, cognitive, and social. Dr. Wolf’s enthusiasm, intelligence, and love of her work sealed the deal for me. I was hooked and wanted to study CD here at Tufts,” Deprez said.

“I feel that studying child development will help me in any future goals I have. Many people I’ve come across have questioned my majoring in CD, just as many people do with majoring in English, but I have never faltered from my decision. With my major, not only have I taken classes in the development of language, but I have also been introduced to American Sign Language, social development in children, and also children in the education process,” she added.

Senior Ellen Aiken took Introduction to Child Development “on a whim,” and never looked back. “I’ve been in love with the major ever since,” she said.

Aiken is double majoring in political science and child development and plans to go to law school.

“There are so many different things that I’d like to do and it was the child development department that provided me with such a strong direction. I’m interested in pursuing a career in early education policy or child advocacy. Either way, my experience as a CD major helped me discover my passion for learning about children’s issues.”

Christina Diep graduated in May 2007 with degrees in child development and clinical psychology and is attending Harvard Extension’s School post baccalaureate pre-med program in pursuit of a career in pediatric psychiatry.

“The CD department and major offer a depth of knowledge about children so rarely found at other universities, especially at the undergraduate level. The challenging courses carry an intrinsic value that often surfaces

during interactions with others about children,” she said, adding that she often meets medical students in their pediatric psychiatry residencies who feel they don’t know enough about “normal” childhood development.

“Department faculty have research projects going on in different labs,” Scarlett said, “including helping teen moms become better parents, a longitudinal study of resilience in children born under poor parenting conditions, and examining severe dyslexia.” Scarlett added that “there are many laws that are needed and need to be changed to protect children—laws that need input from those knowledgeable about children and families. Fran Jacobs, who has a joint appointment with our department and urban and environmental policy and planning, is researching policies that make a difference to families. Applied research comes from the real world—and it’s not the opposite of teaching,” he said.

Miranda Theodore, A08, came to Tufts thinking she would major in international relations. She took child development 1 because she loved working with children and wanted to try something new. “What I love most about the department is that it is so interdisciplinary. The field encompasses psychology, biology, anthropology, community health, and politics,” she said. “I have always been interested in languages and I have been able to take some great courses at Tufts on language development and bilingualism.”

Theodore’s advisor, Jayanthi Mistry said “It was a pleasure to work with highly motivated students like Miranda who are so eager to get the best from their program and experiences at Tufts.”

“We’re a happy group here,” Scarlett said. “I look at the university exit surveys and I’m pleased to report that students find a home here. It’s rare to have a true interdisciplinary community, but we’ve succeeded. It’s the goal of many major universities, but we’ve been doing it for years.”



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