



## ‘Citizen-Scholars’ taking action in aftermath of Sept. 11

by Richard Chervitz, Thomas Darwin, and Laura Grund

Since September 11, the public has heard continuously from politicians, policy experts, and the media regarding how best to deal with and think about the terrorist attacks. More than ever, what society needs are “citizen-scholars,” academic professionals who use their expertise to promote political, cultural, social, and economic change. Universities have an obligation to try to make sense of what transpired on September 11, and graduate students are meeting this challenge.

At UT, graduate students are passionate about their research and eager to put their knowledge to work. They believe their scholarly work is incomplete unless it is connected to something larger. As one student says, “We have to begin to think as we have to begin to live — without a net — and focus our professional attention on things that are important and meaningful to us, not only as academics, but as human beings.”

This has been the theme of the Graduate School’s Intellectual Entrepreneurship (IE) Program — that graduate students are more than scholars: They are “citizen-scholars” whose knowledge allows and perhaps obligates them to contribute to numerous venues. The objective of the IE Program is to empower graduate students to discover their disciplinary identity and decide where and how to contribute their expertise. Through interdisciplinary, credit-bearing courses and synergy groups, students get hands-on introduction to complex public problems within a very immediate context — the city in which they live.

The projects undertaken by UT citizen-scholars may well lead to new policies and ways of thinking. Alexis Chamow, a master’s student in theater, is demonstrating how performance art can help us cope with tragedy. She and her colleagues have created workshops to explore themes and ideas from September 11 in an open, artistic forum. “Artists have tremendous opportunities to be ‘useful’ in their communities, especially during crises,” says Chamow. “Performers can facilitate dialogue, enabling audiences and performers together to build a forum, a safe space for exploration of ideas and emotion. People then can live, for a few hours, in a communal and ritualis-



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tic setting that allows us to cry, reminds us to laugh, and challenges our beliefs by asking us to consider views that differ from our own.”

Anthropology student Tim Schneider, who specializes in archaeology, recounts two of the most prominent archaeological points associated with the September events: the erasure of the Buddhist statuary by the Taliban in Afghanistan and FBI calls to archaeologists, asking them for their expertise in excavating the World Trade Center. “The fact that a politico-religious movement is willing to erase its past for its future is unsettling, in that most Americans are brought up looking to the past for help in dealing with the present. The call for archaeologists has revealed to me that the monstrous events of that Tuesday will be treated by all, without hesitation,” he says.

These graduate students and many others embody the idea of graduate

education as intellectual entrepreneurship — where “being moved” propels action. Lori Stone, a doctoral student in social psychology, is a case in point. After she and a Pakistani friend were treated with hostility at a local Austin restaurant, Stone began what she calls “action research.” “Our approach associates the ability to successfully process emotional events with shifting perspectives — we’re asking students to write about their thoughts and feelings concerning September 11, once from their own personal perspective, and once from a larger perspective, and then we explore the stories together,” says Stone.

The events of September 11 have many dimensions and implications.

Therefore, now more than ever, the country could benefit

Department of Theatre and Dance MFA actors Tommy Schoffler and Kimberly Dilts mirror one another, responding to words read every few seconds by master’s student Alexis Chamow (on stool). Chamow has designed workshops to explore, among other topics, notions of freedom: “Performers can facilitate dialogue, enabling audiences and performers together to build a forum, a safe space for exploration of ideas and emotion.”



from the diverse intellectual perspectives that a university provides to promote change at a time when change may be needed most. Doing so gives us the best chance to solve the varied and complex problems we face.

To learn more, visit [www.utexas.edu/ogs/development.html](http://www.utexas.edu/ogs/development.html).

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