

by Jaret Basden

HCDE's PhD Program Grows

In 2002, the metaphorical red ribbon that strung across HCDE doors was cut honoring the brand new PhD program. Four years later, the first student of the young PhD program graduated, and today, 25 PhD students study in the growing department.



Gian Bruno

Director of Student Services

The rapid expansion of the PhD program occurred for a few reasons, HCDE Director of Student Services, Gian Bruno explains. A few years ago, the Washington State Legislature removed the cap on graduate students for the department, which allowed room for growth. Bruno is the PhD student administrative advisor and assists students with various administrative processes such as the general exam and dissertation defense. Furthermore, he explains, the merging of HCDE's two Masters programs has provided more space in the PhD program.

HCDE Graduate Program Coordinator Mark Zachry points out, the program is also growing "to ramp up the research profile of the department and to support the research work that some of the new faculty are doing." Zachry is the initial contact point for new PhD students and helps these students decide the faculty member with whom they will work.

Zachry relates that the program's national recruitment has grown, seeing applications from Asia and South America, and from departments such as human computer interaction and informatics. He explains that the national recruitment effort has been a reciprocal relationship, meaning that University of Washington PhD graduates with promising skills are then being introduced to other departments across the country.

Zachry describes admission to the department as "very competitive," but explains that aspiring PhD students can strengthen their application by participating in research groups, publically presenting their work locally, or better yet, presenting on a national stage. He also says that reading research papers and thinking early on about relevant research questions helps.

Highlighting the growth of the PhD program, Bruno estimates last year's 16 students, now at 25, could grow to 34 students by next year. ❖

Part-Time Faculty

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Kurt Teal, and Skip Walter—are also affiliate faculty with the department.

Other part-time lecturers who have taught with HCDE several times include: Sabina Alteras-Honig (HCDE 517), Suzanne Boyd (HCDE 537), Ulrike Irmeler (HCDE 513), Pamela Johnson (HCDE 427), James Kramer (HCDE 424), Karen Kurt Teal (HCDE 423, HCDE 509), Miyako McDavid (HCDE 561, 562), Mary-Colleen Jenkins (HCDE 422), and Kelly Page (HCDE 412). The department welcomed two new lecturers to HCDE this year: George Amaya (HCDE 516) and David Evans (HCDE 516). Both George and David have unique industry perspectives that give additional nuance to research methods and hypothesis testing.

Part-time lecturers are essential in offering the growing HCDE student population high quality instruction. In addition to helping HCDE faculty carry the teaching load across seven programs, part-time lecturers bring a professional dedication to their field and a desire to actively share their expertise and industry perspective in the classroom. ❖

Jerrod Larson, PhD, Continues with Boeing

Jerrod Larson graduated with his PhD in December 2009. He worked full time at Boeing while earning his PhD, and he continued on with the company after graduation. Soon after graduating, he took on a new role at Boeing after being elected an Associate Technical Fellow for usability/user experience.

Until recently, Jerrod Larson has been leading research and design projects for Boeing internal productivity software and, on the external-facing side, aircraft maintenance software. He describes the Associate Technical Fellowship program as a technical leadership path for engineers and scientists at the company; the role of the people in the Fellowship is to help Boeing set technical direction as it creates new products or tries to improve existing products or processes.

Recently, he has been helping formulate Boeing's general strategy regarding software usability and user experience. In a sense, he describes this as a more complex problem space than designing individual systems, because it deals not only with the discipline of usability and user experience, but also with aspects of organizational psychology and culture change.

In his job, Larson applies his PhD studies by looking at problems in the workspace, formulating research plans to investigate them, and designing interventions to remediate them. His PhD studies also helped him see the big picture of design and

research more clearly, and this in turn helped him add rigor to his previously ad hoc process. As he sees it, that's one essential thing a PhD program is meant to do: train people to investigate the world in a methodical, rigorous fashion.

Larson's PhD advisor, Professor David Farkas, describes his experience in working with Larson: "Working with Jerrod was great. Jerrod had a broad range of pertinent design and research skills from the outset of the project, and everything moved smoothly." Larson is also keeping busy with LabelPatterns.org, a pattern library for creators of point-of-purchase consumer decision labels. Leading the effort to build the website is Professor Farkas, while Larson is aiding him along with undergraduate student Steven Naranjo. They recently wrote a journal article about the project, and an early version of the site has been deployed, although



Jerrod Larson
HCDE Alumnus

the team is refining and expanding the site as it nears its official launch. The team's hope is that LabelPatterns.org becomes an authoritative source of design guidance for those people creating or managing labelin programs—most especially

environmental labels for consumer products.

Larson also runs an interesting and informative blog, "On User Experience: Random Thoughts." Larson is also keeping busy with fatherhood, as he and his wife had a baby girl this past January, their first child. Both are hoping there's room for Ella Wren Larson in the HCDE class of 2019.

Jerrod Larson's blog can be found online at: <http://www.jerrod Larson.com>.

LabelPatterns.org can be found online at: <http://www.labelpatterns.org>. ❖

Mike Berg: Connecting HCDE with Microsoft

Mike Berg is an alumnus with a Master's degree and certificates in User-Centered Design (UCD) and Technical Writing and Editing (TWE) from HCDE. He has also been a great ambassador for the department by connecting HCDE with Microsoft where he works today as a Program Manager.

Department Chair Jan Spyridakis spoke about Berg's generous contributions: "He hosted our faculty and Microsoft alumni for a Microsoft alumni night last fall. He invited an HCDE usability class to tour Microsoft usability labs. He sponsored Microsoft's membership in the HCDE Corporate Affiliates Program and he donated software to the HCDE student association for door prizes." Recently he donated an Xbox and Kinect to the student association.

Berg was in Spyridakis' Style in Technical Writing class in 2005, and she remembers that "his quiet way of making himself stand above the crowd revealed itself back then," and that "the department is honored to have Mike as one of its stellar alumni."

Berg started working at Microsoft in 2002 in a contract position as a Play Test Moderator where he supported game research as part of the Xbox hardware team. During this time,



Mike Berg
HCDE Alumnus

one of his coworkers spoke about a certificate program that he was completing, a "great new program that he loved," as Berg remembers him saying. That was the UCD certificate program and Berg signed up for the first of his three HCDE programs.

In his current position, Berg works as part of the User Experience Central Team with a team of eight where he supports survey research. Berg uses internal software called proprietary software like the Usability Database (UDB). It's the team's central site—"our baby" he calls it—and he refers to his team as the "custodians" of the database. When Berg does usability studies, he works to improve proprietary tools like the UDB that are

used to support the entire research community.

When researchers want to run a study, Berg uses the UDB to handle tasks like screening and scheduling test participants, finding folks with profiles that the researchers are looking for, booking and arranging research labs, making sure research won't be divulged, and making sure participants are compensated for their feedback.

He also works in the Usability Partner Program, which is about one year old. In this role, he builds relationships with other companies. With these relationships built, Microsoft may come on site and conduct usability studies when a study fits a particular company's profile.

Berg believes in staying well connected with academia and HCDE. He states enthusiastically, "It's a real win-win for Microsoft... having the HCDE connection keeps us current, and gives a great source of future researchers here at Microsoft." ❖

Cynthia Putnam, PhD, Takes Faculty Position at DePaul

Cynthia Putnam enjoys living in big cities. Upon earning her PhD, Putnam and her husband packed their bags and cat, and headed to Chicago, home of DePaul University. Prior to entering the UW for the PhD program, Putnam worked as a designer in industry for several years. Early in her PhD studies,



Cynthia Putnam

HCDE Alumna

Putnam saw herself re-entering private industry after graduation. However, the idea of staying in academia became more and more appealing to her, and she sent out applications to universities including DePaul.

During the selection process at DePaul, Putnam was impressed by the enthusiasm and passion the DePaul faculty demonstrated in her interview. Thus, she was thrilled to hear the good news when she was welcomed as part of the faculty.

As part of her PhD studies, she investigated designing for diverse user groups. Putnam worked as a research assistant for Professor Beth Kolko as part of the “Central Asian Information and Communication Technology” (CAICT) team. She helped investigate technology adoption and diffusion in Central Asia. The team used multiple data collection methods. Putnam distilled some of the data using personas and scenarios that represented mobile users in Kyrgyzstan.

Kolko reflected on Putnam’s talents: “Cynthia established herself early on in her graduate studies as an extraordinarily committed, energetic, and intelligent researcher. Cynthia’s passion for research and data analysis energized the whole Design for Digital Inclusion research lab; she was a mentor and a model for undergraduate and graduate students alike. I miss her intelligence, good humor, and collegiality, and I am certain she will make some terrific contributions to the field.”

Putnam also studied children impacted by autism during her PhD studies.

Additionally, Putnam applied her design experience when she worked with the committee to design artwork associated with the HCDE name change.

In her position at DePaul, Putnam is Assistant Professor in the College of Computer and Digital Media, where she teaches graduate level courses in human computer interaction (HCI). She has taught several courses, including Inquiry Methods and Use Analysis, a course that teaches students how to learn to collect data from (and about) users as well as ways to present findings including personas and high level scenarios. She also teaches a class focused on diverse users. The course focuses on how to consider users with physical and cognitive limitations, and those from a wide age group, i.e., children and the elderly. She is currently teaching an Interaction Design Course and a Capstone course.

Putnam volunteers once a week at the Anixter Center, working with people who are rehabilitating from brain injuries. She finds that, by volunteering there, she is able to better formulate more relevant research questions for understanding how technology might be leveraged to support rehabilitation.

To those interested in staying in academia after earning a PhD, Putnam recommends getting experience in both teaching and research, and of course, try to publish as much as you can. ❖