

# TUFTS BSOT Notes



PROMOTING POSSIBILITY

Summer 2007

## BSOT Welcomes New Chair Linda Tickle-Degnen

Linda Tickle-Degnen, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA studies faces. The new chair of the Department of Occupational Therapy at Tufts is currently researching how individuals with Parkinson's disease are viewed by others, based on facial behavior and nonverbal expression. "As human beings, we rely on others' faces to make impressions about who people are and what they're about," Tickle-Degnen says. "But when someone has a facial disorder (like the kind caused by Parkinson's, Bell's Palsy, or other illnesses), we often make misjudgments."

In her new laboratory, the Health Quality of Life Lab, located near the Tufts Department of Occupational Therapy at 200 Boston Avenue, Tickle-Degnen is working with research fellows and students to videotape and analyze facial behavior in individuals with Parkinson's disease, with the hope of learning more about how health care practitioners,

spouses, and friends assess these individuals' illnesses, personalities, and affect. According to Tickle-Degnen, people with Parkinson's disease "tend to look sad, hostile, confused, or depressed" and can be misdiagnosed with dementia or depression, even by highly trained professionals. "It's important for practitioners and others who care for them to better understand what's really going on with these patients," she says.

Although scientists have made major advances in recent years, it could take decades before they find a cure for Parkinson's disease. That's why it is so important for occupational therapists and other caregivers to focus on improving health quality of life, which Tickle-Degnen describes as an individual's "participation in daily life tasks, activities, and roles in a manner that contributes to individual, familial, societal, and global health and well-being."

As the Health Quality of Life Lab director, Tickle-Degnen conducts her own studies, oversees other research projects, pursues funding initiatives, and encourages faculty and students from across the university to participate in the lab. The Health Quality of Life Lab is designed to emphasize a liberal arts and sciences perspective and to foster research in global and cross-cultural issues. "As an area of knowledge, health quality of life is at an early stage of development theoretically, empirically, and socially, but it has much potential for future social contributions and funding," she says.

### An Honored Career

Members of the Tufts Department of Occupational Therapy had a chance to experience health quality of life research first-hand at a lab open house on April 9th, 2007. Faculty and staff toured the laboratory, learned about facial expressions in people with Parkinson's disease, and viewed some of Tickle-Degnen's video analyses. They also got to meet the new head of BSOT, who joined Tufts as a professor in September, 2006, and became chair on June 1, 2007.

Tickle-Degnen modeled her Tufts laboratory after a similar lab at Boston University's Sargent College, where she was a professor for 18 years. There, she conducted research on a wide range of Parkinson's-related topics and became renowned in the field. She has published widely in occupational therapy, medical, and social science journals, been honored by the American Occupational Therapy Association, and received almost \$2 mil-

Tickle-Degnen *continued on page 2*



ALONSO NICHOLS

Linda Tickle-Degnen, PhD, OTR/L, FAOTA (left) assumes her new role as the chair of the Department of Occupational Therapy.

## MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR

It is with mixed emotions that I write my last message as chair of BSOT. This summer, I will return full-time to my role as professor—where I began almost 30 years ago. I joined the Tufts faculty in 1979 and became chair in 1986. While I have seen many changes at BSOT over the years, my enthusiasm for and devotion to this program—and this profes-

ROSE LINCOLN



sion—have never wavered.

I am incredibly proud of BSOT's many achievements in the past 21 years. When I started at Tufts, we had just launched the Masters program; in 1986, we admitted our last undergraduate class. Since then, our graduate program has blossomed: we have explored new areas of occupational therapy, graduated talented and committed students, and made unique contributions to the field. It has been an honor to work with such dedicated and accom-

plished faculty, students, alumni, and professionals—all of whom excel in their commitment to improving the lives of those they serve.

Our department has also become more research-based, a trend that reflects the interests of the university at large. That is one reason why Linda Tickle-Degnen, PhD, is an outstanding choice for the new chair, and I welcome her with enthusiasm.

Linda is a renowned researcher whose evidence-based work in Parkinson's disease and health quality of life is respected widely. Her impressive experience as both a scholar and educator make her the ideal match for BSOT—a program that continually strives to incorporate research and high standards of practice into the Tufts Graduate School of Arts & Sciences perspective.

Meeting high demands for service while maintaining excellence in practice and research have always been a challenge in the field of occupational therapy—a challenge that Tufts has embraced. With Linda at the helm, we are uniquely positioned to broaden our connections among leading researchers and practitioners, and the community. Please join me in welcoming Linda to BSOT. I look forward to collaborating with her as the department explores many new initiatives.

I also look forward to expanding my own work at Tufts. In addition to teaching, I will be pursuing interesting service and scholarship opportunities, including a new research initiative as an adjunct professor of psychiatry, Tufts School of Medicine, at Tufts-New England Medical Center's psychiatric inpatient unit. My ties to Tufts have never been stronger. I treasure my associations with BSOT and thank all of you for your dedication and contributions to this outstanding community. Please stay in touch.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sharan L. Schwartzberg".

Sharan L. Schwartzberg  
Professor of Occupational Therapy

**Tickle-Degnen** *continued from page 1*

lion in NIH funding. Tickle-Degnen earned her undergraduate degree from Stanford University and her Masters in occupational therapy from University of Southern California. She holds a Masters in psychology and a PhD in social psychology from Harvard University.

Throughout her career, Tickle-Degnen has emphasized clinical reasoning in her teaching and practice of occupational therapy, maintaining that it is critically important for therapists to “take into account clients’ personal needs, responses to interventions, socio-cultural factors, and current research when making complex decisions about patients’ care.” As a program that has conducted the seminal research in this area, BSOT takes a strong clinical reasoning perspective in its training of occupational therapists—a fact that appealed to Tickle-Degnen when she decided to come to Tufts.

### Creative Opportunities Await

Tickle-Degnen was also drawn to the university's small size and creative, interdisciplinary focus. “The opportunities for collaboration are really wonderful at Tufts,” she says. “At faculty meetings, I rub elbows with sociologists, psychologists, anthropologists, engineers, even people in the music department.”

She hopes these interactions across disciplines will evolve into collaborations in her lab. For example, she plans to talk to Tufts engineers interested in movement, adaptive technologies, and human factors. “I named my lab ‘Health Quality of Life’ so that anyone who shares a common interest in this issue, regardless of disciplinary affiliation, can participate,” she says.

In her role as chair, Tickle-Degnen hopes to pursue these and many other new teaching and research opportunities, in keeping with the university's strong interdisciplinary vision. “I think this is a wonderful time for self-reflection to explore what else we'd like to do with the department,” she says.

Yet, Tickle-Degnen also plans to maintain BSOT's myriad strengths. She is very excited to be at Tufts and feels incredibly fortunate “to be coming into a solid program that is recognized nationally and internationally for its outstanding faculty, students, and curriculum. That is wonderful!” she says.

## Looking at OT Through the Lens of Disaster Relief

For second-year Masters student Mike Ferrelli, going to New Orleans to aid in the Hurricane Katrina relief effort has been a life-altering experience. In January, 2006, Ferrelli and seven classmates in the department's Student Occupational Therapy Association (SOTA) club participated in the clean-up effort under the name OT Gulf Support. This January, OT Gulf Support returned to New Orleans—with double the number of students—to assess the city's progress one year later.

What the group found was that although victims “are moving forward, they are now thinking about the long term. It is going to take *years* for them to recover, if they ever do,” Ferrelli says.

On this trip, OT Gulf Support not only helped gut homes; they again visited five health care facilities where they talked to patients and occupational therapists. Although many occupational therapy services have resumed—and both patients and practitioners are benefiting—the strain of trying to work and live in New Orleans was evident. “You could see it in their faces and in their eyes,” Ferrelli says.

OT Gulf Support was inspired to conduct research on the role of occupational therapy in disaster relief—research that has earned the group significant recognition. Last fall, OT Gulf Support presented at the annual Massachusetts Association of Occupational Therapy conference. This spring, the group presented to occupational therapists at Massachusetts General Hospital and at the American Occupational Therapy Association's (AOTA) annual conference in St. Louis. Entitled “The Power of Occupation in Disaster Relief,” the presentation outlines the many roles occupational therapists can play in recovery efforts.

“Every occupational therapist has what I call an ‘OT toolbox’ full of all different skills—medical knowledge, activity analysis, adaptive equipment experience, etc. We are also good at translating medical knowledge from physicians to patients and have great common sense,” Ferrelli says.



*Members of OT Gulf Support in New Orleans.*

“We have so much to offer in any setting, and especially in disaster relief.”

According to Ferrelli, OT Gulf Support's Katrina efforts have given members a much broader view of their chosen profession. “When we first went to New Orleans, we were looking at disaster relief through the lens of occupational therapy. Now we are looking at occupational therapy through the lens of disaster relief,” he says. “We are asking: ‘How can occupational therapists respond in a time of crisis? What is our role?’”

Members of the group have also been transformed by their experiences in New Orleans. “We just started out as students who wanted to help. But this has turned into a journey that we will carry with us throughout our professional lives,” Ferrelli says.



LISA FERRELLI

Mike Ferrelli with his six year old son, Nicholas, who has Down's Syndrome. Ferrelli first became interested in occupational therapy after Nicholas was born. His son's challenges and successes with occupational therapy inspired Ferrelli to explore a career in this helping profession. As a founding member of OT Gulf Support, Ferrelli has traveled twice to New Orleans to help victims of Hurricane Katrina.



## CAN OT MAKE IT IN THE MEDIA? Recent films portray the healing power of occupation

When occupational therapy students at Tufts attended an on-campus screening of the independent film *Canvas*, they were moved and inspired by the healing power of “occupation” in the film. Directed by Joseph Greco and starring Joe Pantoliano and Marcia Gay Harden, *Canvas* portrays one family’s struggle with mental illness and the redemption the main characters find through engaging in meaningful activities. According to Paula Querido Kahn, who attended the screening on January 28, “occupation is seen as a healing modality—as a tool that gets the characters through a very difficult time.”

In the film, the mother, Mary, suffers from schizophrenia and paints her dreams onto canvas. Her husband, John, copes with his wife’s illness by building a sailboat, while their son, Chris, finds solace in designing custom-made T-shirts. Although occupation as therapy is not specifically mentioned, it is “threaded throughout the film,” says Jane Crimmins, president of Tufts’ Student Occupational Therapy Association (SOTA) club. “The characters get very wrapped up in the mother’s world, which is not reality-based. ‘Occupation’ is what connects them to reality.”

At a panel discussion after the screening, students got a chance to speak with director Joseph Greco, actor Joe Pantoliano, and Tufts media and mental health experts. Querido Kahn asked Greco, who loosely modeled the film after his mother’s battle with mental illness, if occupation helped him get through his own difficult childhood. “He said he loved magic. Performing magic tricks for his friends and family got him through hard times,” she said.

For many of the occupational therapy students who saw *Canvas*, the film raises the question of why OT is not widely portrayed in the media. According to Amanda Hamm (G’07), who worked in the entertainment industry before coming to Tufts, “I think either the people producing films are not aware of occupational therapy, or



RYAN WHITNEY

*Occupational therapy students participated in a bike drive in conjunction with the campus showing of award-winning film Emmanuel’s Gift. The students collected and repaired the bicycles, which were then sent throughout the world to help people with disabilities develop independence. Pictured here are (back row, left to right): Jane Crimmins, Julia Thompson, Alicia Sanchez, and Jennifer McQueeney-Penamonte (front row, left to right): Pamela Woolfrey and Deborah Semler.*

they are aware but think it won’t ‘sell.’” She cites journalist John Hockenberry’s 2006 AOTA keynote address, in which he points out that the day-to-day benefits of occupational therapy do not make for the high television drama viewers are accustomed to on shows like “ER.” “Maybe rehab isn’t a great TV show, but as a societal phenomenon, it’s gigantic,” Hockenberry says. Even in *Canvas*, which “beautifully portrays the power of occupation, the words ‘occupational therapy’ are never mentioned,” Hamm says.

Jane Crimmins would also like to see her chosen profession get more press. This spring, she helped organize a bicycle drive in connection with another film, *Emmanuel’s Gift*, produced by Tufts alumnae Lisa Lax (J’86) and Nancy Stern (J’86). Screened on campus in March, the documentary tells the story of Emmanuel Ofose Yeboah, a disabled Ghanaian man who rode his bike across Ghana to raise awareness about people with disabilities in

his country. As a result of Emmanuel’s journey—and the media attention it received—Ghana instituted disability laws that now protect its two million disabled citizens. According to Crimmins, Emmanuel’s occupation—riding a bike—“not only improved his own well-being, but also changed the face of public policy in an entire country.”

While Crimmins and her fellow students at Tufts are pleased that films such as *Emmanuel’s Gift* and *Canvas* are gaining notoriety—and thereby publicizing the importance of occupation—they feel that much more needs to be done.

“*Canvas* does an excellent job of getting at the underpinnings of our profession,” says Paula Querido Kahn, “But as occupational therapists, we need to find more places in the media where that can happen.”

### Alumna Sue Higgins Takes a Humanitarian Trip to Mexico

On her last day working at a clinic for children with disabilities in Juarez, Mexico, occupational therapist Sue Higgins (BSOT '86, G '02) was blessed in Spanish by Jorge, a four-year-old boy with cerebral palsy and microcephaly. Higgins had simply shown Jorge's parents how to teach their son to chew properly; by the end of the session, the little boy was eating a cracker by himself. He thanked Higgins with a blessing and a big kiss.

Inspired by a colleague at the New England Institute of Technology (NEIT), where she is an assistant professor and fieldwork coordinator, Higgins went to Mexico in January to help out at Fundacion Juarez Integra, a nonprofit clinic that serves the large population of disabled citizens in Juarez. There, she and two other occupational therapists worked with 90 patients, many of them children with cerebral palsy. "Children with disabili-



ties in Mexico can't go to school or day care. Their parents face an extraordinary burden," Higgins says.

While at the clinic, Higgins and her colleagues worked with parents on simple everyday tasks—like helping Jorge to eat—and also on playing with their children. "Most of the children had never been on their stomachs," Higgins says. "We taught these moms and dads how to play with their kids."

Higgins was so moved by her experiences at the clinic that she has helped organize a group of therapists to return there this summer. The team, made up of 15 therapists with different areas of expertise, plans to create a sensory room

for autistic patients and build an adaptive playground. Higgins also hopes to one day create a training program at Fundacion Juarez Integra for NEIT students. She says her work at the clinic boosted her confidence as a practitioner and changed the way she thinks about her career. "This trip solidified for me the meaning of 'occupation' and the importance of what occupational therapists do. Now I understand that I can make a significant difference in people's lives," she says.

*\*Portions of this article have been excerpted, with permission, from The Sun Chronicle, January 30, 2007.*



## LENDING A HAND: Janet Curran Brooks leads hand and upper extremity certificate program at BSOT

Senior Lecturer Janet Curran Brooks (BSOT '82) got her inspiration to teach from long-time professor Dr. William McNary, a beloved instructor who passed away in 1991. To this day, Brooks “still uses some of the same teaching methods he did.”

From her first years as McNary's teaching assistant, Brooks has always “loved being in the classroom.” Her style has made her a popular instructor at Tufts, where she teaches classes in physical dysfunction and hand and upper extremity rehabilitation. Her interest in physical medicine comes from her athletic past; at Tufts, she played basketball and rugby and rowed on the crew team.

After graduating from BSOT in 1982, Brooks worked in private practice, then earned a Masters in Education from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. In 1994, she returned to Tufts as a full-time instructor and recently completed her doctorate in education at the University of Massachusetts-Lowell.

A few years ago, Brooks also began collaborating with Massachusetts General Hospital (MGH) to establish The Certificate of Advanced Professional Study in Hand and Upper Extremity Rehabilitation offered in the Department of Occupational Therapy at Tufts. The program consists of three hand and upper extremity classes and one research class. It is team-taught by Brooks and hand specialists from the occupational therapy department of MGH. Students who earn the certificate are then eligible to apply for a one-year fellowship in hand and upper extremity rehabilitation at MGH. So far, three Tufts students have become fellows at MGH and one has been hired full-time in the hospital's occupational therapy hand service. Many former students have gained employment in hand therapy private practices, or in the hand therapy departments in hospitals. Some practitioners participate in this program as a way to prepare for taking the yearly National Hand Therapy Certification examination. Brooks sees the certificate program as a “value-added” aspect of a Tufts occupa-



Janet Curran Brooks, EdM, OTR, FAOTA

tional therapy education. “We want our therapists to become strong generalists. The hand and upper extremity certificate is not in exclusion of that; it's in addition to it,” she says.

According to Brooks, the certificate program has become “very popular” in just a few short years. Launched in 2003 with only four students, the program currently enrolls 19. Its strength, Brooks says, is the blend of full-time graduate students and working professionals in certificate classes. “These students develop relationships and learn from one another. The full-time students are strong in anatomy and the basic sciences, while the working occupational therapists provide a window into what it's really like ‘out there,’” she says.

Training therapists in the complex anatomy and treatment of the hand and upper extremities is critically important, Brooks says, “because if you don't have the use of your hands, it affects everything you do—from mundane tasks to those things that have the most meaning in your life.” Students who graduate from the certificate program “are uniquely positioned to address the day-to-day consequences for patients. And they know the anatomy ‘like the back of their hand,’” she quips.

## FROM INTERDISCIPLINARY TO INTERNATIONAL: Groups work

In conference presentations this year, Sharan Schwartzberg and Mary Barnes affirmed the importance of occupational therapy's unique understanding of group work. At a workshop at the Massachusetts Association of Occupational Therapy conference last fall, a dedicated group of practitioners reflected on their group leadership in both managerial and clinical roles.

This spring, at the American Group Psychotherapy Association and at the Northeastern Society for Group Psychotherapy, Schwartzberg and Barnes led workshops with interdisciplinary groups of participants who shared insights about leadership strategies and clinical reasoning. Schwartzberg and Barnes then attended the June, 2007 College of Occupational Therapists Conference in England where, with recent alumna, Jenni Guest, MS, OT, they led a discussion on theory and practice and exchanged ideas with participants from around the UK. Schwartzberg, Barnes, and Guest also had a poster presentation at the COT entitled: *Justification for your group work programme: an evidence based practice approach*. Former Oxford Brooks Elizabeth Casson Trust scholar and Tufts alumna Kate Cross also presented the outcomes of her pilot study on vocational rehabilitation for clients in a secure mental health setting.

Barnes and Schwartzberg both appreciated the opportunities for networking with occupational therapy colleagues from a number of programs, including Oxford-Brookes University, Coventry University, and the University of Chester. “Despite the differences in healthcare systems, the dynamics and work stress issues are similar for many occupational therapists,” Barnes said.

“It was wonderfully affirming and rewarding to be able to have this time with colleagues in the UK,” said Schwartzberg. “The national agenda in the UK health care system is on social participation. What better time could there be for group work?”



# NEWS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## Faculty Accomplishments

In April, 2007, **Gary Bedell, PhD, OTR** was recognized for being an "Expert in Pediatric Occupational Therapy, Researcher and Scholar," receiving a Roster of Fellows Award (FAOTA) from the American Occupational Therapy Association at the annual AOTA conference in St. Louis. Bedell is also a co-principal investigator on a three-year field initiated research project funded by the US Department of Education, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research entitled: "Development of measures of participation and environment for children with disabilities." The research will commence in October, 2007, in collaboration with Dr. Wendy Coster (Boston University), who is the principal investigator and Dr. Mary Law, (McMaster University) who is the other co-principal investigator.

**Mary Evenson, MPH, OTR** gave several professional presentations this year. At the Department of Occupational Therapy, she lectured at a Supervisors Seminar and at a Faculty Seminar, talking about using technology to enhance reflection and the teaching process. She also spoke at Tufts University's Information Technology Forum on goals, explorations, and future directions of electronic portfolios. Last summer, she presented a poster and paper on this topic at the World Federation of Occupational Therapy Congress in Sydney, Australia.

In October, 2006, **Deborah Slater** published an article on "The Ethics of Productivity in OT Practice." She also presented a workshop called "Ten Easy Ways to Lose your License and Violate the Code of Ethics" at the Massachusetts Association of Occupational Therapy annual conference in Westford, MA in October, 2006, and at the South Dakota OT Association in April, 2007. With Chuck Willmarth, she presented an AOTA continuing education Audio-insight on "Understanding and Asserting the Occupational Therapy Scope of Practice" in November, 2006, which was also presented at the AOTA annual conference in April, 2007.



MIKE FERRELLI

**Katie Carda ('07)** gathers with children at a book fair at Barnes & Noble. Proceeds from the fair were used to purchase educational supplies for the Melmark School in Andover, Massachusetts.

**Mary Barnes, OTR** presented at several conferences this year. In October, 2006, she co-led a full-day workshop on group theory and process with Sharan Schwartzberg, at the Massachusetts Association of Occupational Therapy annual conference in Westford, MA, and in March 2007, they co-led a workshop at the AGPA annual meeting in Austin, Texas on group work with individuals with cognitive impairments. She and Sharon Ray also presented "Reflective Practice: Supporting Students with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders in School-Based Practice" at the April, 2007, annual AOTA conference in St. Louis. Currently, Barnes and Schwartzberg have a textbook entitled *Groups: Applying the Functional Group Model* in press with FA Davis.

In November, 2006, **Sharan Schwartzberg, EdD, OTR, FAOTA** received a Tufts Arts & Sciences Faculty Research Award for her project "Outcome-Based Evaluation of Occupational Therapy Groups." She was also appointed adjunct professor at the Tufts School of Medicine Department of Psychiatry. In addition to presenting and publishing with Mary Barnes, Schwartzberg published "Envy, Competition, and Gender: Theory, Clinical Applications and Group Work" with Leyla Navaro.

**Diana Bailey, EdD, OTR, FAOTA** co-authored "A Case Report of Evidence-Based Practice: From Academia to Clinic," with alumna Jodi Bornstein and Sarah Ryan. The paper was published in the Jan/Feb. 2007 issue of the *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*. In November, 2006, Bailey was the keynote speaker at the 4th FOTO Outcomes Excellence celebration at the New England Sinai Hospital, speaking on *Practical Applications of Evidence-Based Practice for Clinicians in Occupational Therapy*.

**Sharon Ray, ScD, OTR/L** and alumna June Bunch, MS, OTR/L, MHA and Jan Hollenbeck, MS, OTR/L are teaching a Summer Institute entitled: "Current Issues in School-based Occupational Therapy." This program, funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education is being offered through the Partnership for the Advancement of School Service Providers in collaboration with Tufts Department of Occupational Therapy and the Massachusetts Elementary School Principals Association (MESPA). Program response was highly positive, resulting in an immediate full enrollment for this year's offering.

## Student Accomplishments

On June 2-3, 2007 **Katie Carda ('07)** held a book fair at Barnes & Noble to increase educational resources at Melmark New

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**Stay connected!** Join the Tufts-BSOT listserv! By sending your e-mail address to Mary Barnes at [mary.barnes@tufts.edu](mailto:mary.barnes@tufts.edu) or by calling 617-627-5960, you can find out what's happening at Tufts-BSOT, what your fellow graduates are up to, what events are planned, and much more.

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England, a private, not-for-profit school in Andover, Massachusetts. Melmark serves children and adolescents with autism spectrum disorders, acquired brain injuries, neurological diseases, and severe challenging behaviors. The book fair was Katie's idea for her final project as she completed her Level II fieldwork at Melmark with Tufts alumna, Kerri McKenna, fieldwork supervisor. Customers donated more than \$300 worth of new books, CDs, and DVDs to Melmark and earned staff and teachers an additional \$300 in Barnes & Noble gift cards for future purchases.

**Amanda Hamm** ('07) received the Tufts Department of Occupational Therapy-GSAS *Marjorie B. Greene Award in Occupational Therapy*. This award recognizes a graduate occupational therapy student who has demonstrated outstanding achievement in the areas of leadership and involvement in student and professional activities.



Amanda Hamm, Mike Ferrelli, Paula Querido Kahn, Rob Hollister, Lindsay Malarky, Amy Urquhart ('07) were awarded the Rob Hollister Award for Community Service and Citizenship for their work helping victims of Hurricane Katrina (see story page 3). This award recognizes graduate students who have contributed their time and effort to the community outside of Tufts.

## TUFTS-BSOT Notes

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### We'd like to hear from you.

If there are comments you would like to make, issues you would like to see covered, an article you would like to contribute, or if there is a fellow alumnus/a you would like to see interviewed for a future article, please contact us at the address above or e-mail [BSOTNotes@tufts.edu](mailto:BSOTNotes@tufts.edu).



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