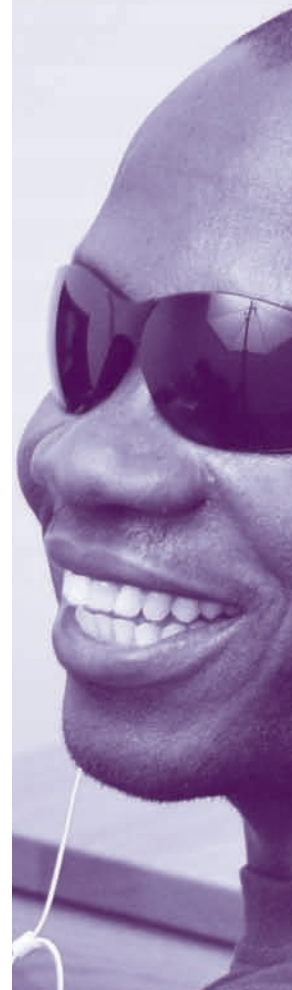




Yackel: Access and Opportunity



ACCESS and OPPORTUNITY

A pioneer in inclusive education, Syracuse University continues to advance the rights of people with disabilities

BY CHRISTINE YACKEL

AUGUST JANKOWSKI '46, L'48 was blinded in a hunting accident when he was a teenager. But that didn't stop him from earning undergraduate and law degrees from Syracuse University, serving as president of his junior class, and presiding as a city court judge for 32 years. Jankowski's success was due, in part, to SU's commitment to open access for all students, no matter what their personal circumstances or life experiences may be. "Syracuse has a tradition of seeking to bring about change one life at a time, as well as on the broadest possible spectrum," says Chancellor Nancy Cantor. "That distinctive legacy is particularly prominent in our long and proud history of public scholarship and activism in disability rights, including the recognition that people with disabilities bring with them a wealth of experiences, good and bad, that contribute to making SU a better and stronger institution."

The number of students with disabilities enrolled at SU has increased steadily since Jankowski and his guide dog Lou attended class. This year, approximately 1,150 students registered with the Office of Disability Services, and nearly 800 students receive such services as note-taking, sign language interpreting, and text-to-voice course materials. Although all universities are legally required to provide these services, SU was an advocate for inclusive education—which welcomes and values difference—long before it was mandated by federal law. From establishing a special education department in the 1940s to creating a center for inclusive higher education today, Syracuse has earned a reputation for visionary leadership in



THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS

with disabilities enrolled at SU has increased steadily since August Jankowski '46, L'48 and his guide dog Lou attended class.

IN THE DOCUMENTARY

Wretches & Jabberers, Larry Bissonnette (second from left) and Tracy Thresher (right) share their thoughts on living with autism. The film was produced by School of Education Dean Douglas Biklen G'73.



the study and promotion of education for all students. "SU's history in the field of disability is fascinating," says Wendy Harbour, the Lawrence B. Taishoff Assistant Professor of Inclusive Higher Education, "from accommodating returning World War II veterans to advocating for deinstitutionalization and inclusive K-12 education, and now leading the way in offering full and equal participation in higher education for students with a wide range of disabilities."

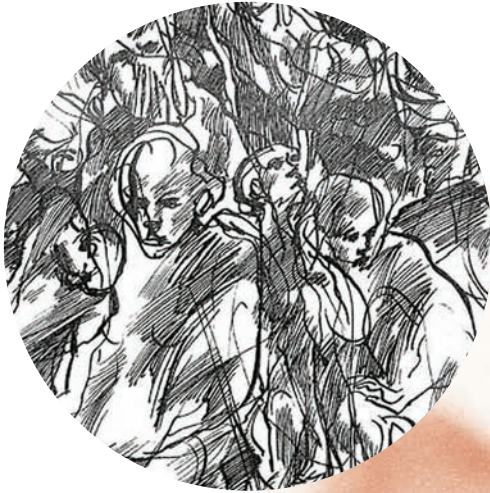
ROAD TO REFORM

Syracuse's rise to national and international prominence in the field of disability began in 1946 with the creation of the Department of Education for Exceptional Children under the direction of William Cruickshank, a pioneer in the education of children with brain injuries, learning disabilities, and cerebral palsy. In 1966, Burton Blatt, dean of the School of Education from 1976 until his death in 1985, was heralded for publishing *Christmas in Purgatory*, a groundbreaking photographic exposé of the horrendous abuses of people with mental retardation who were locked away in institutions in this country. "Burt was an extremely moral person, and he couldn't understand how human beings could

let this happen to other human beings," says Steven Taylor G'77, Centennial Professor of Disability Studies in the School of Education. "Like many reformers of his time, Burt was haunted by the Holocaust, and came to realize that we have a collective societal responsibility to provide better care for people with disabilities."

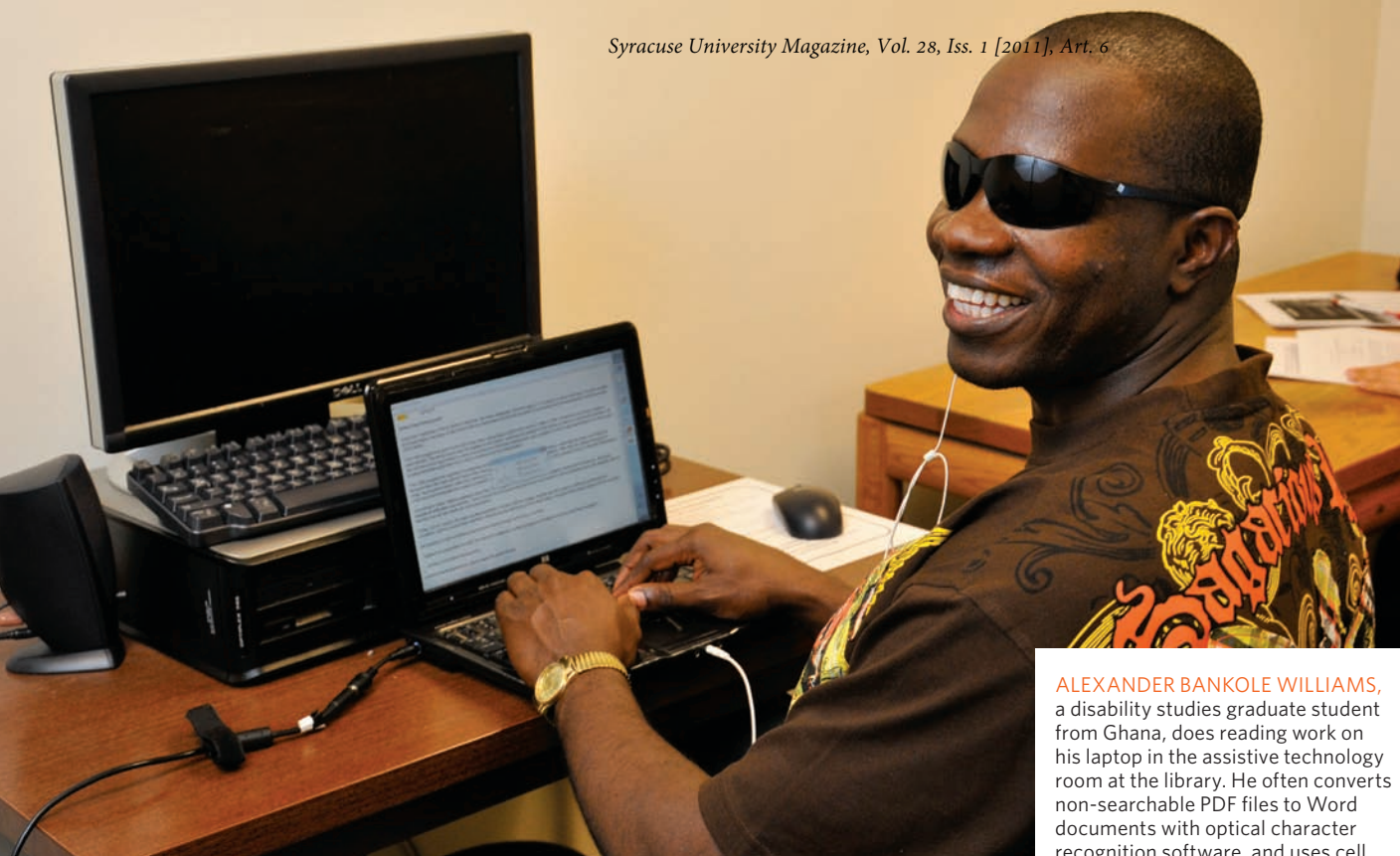
Blatt didn't think it was sufficient to only train teachers and study disability issues. He believed Syracuse University should also have a positive impact on the world by promoting progressive disability policies and advocating for change. "Burt used to say, 'When Lincoln freed the slaves he didn't command a study to see if the slaves would be better off free—he knew it was the morally right thing to do,'" Taylor says. "Acting on his vision of a fully inclusive society, Burt established the Center on Human Policy—the first institute in the nation to study and promote ways to deinstitutionalize people with disabilities and open K-12 schools to children who would otherwise be segregated in schools for the disabled."

From its beginning in 1971, the Center on Human Policy put scholarship in action, starting the first group homes for people with mental retardation in Syracuse and advocating for school inclusion long before the term even existed. In fact, Blatt and his colleagues,



IN HIS GROUNDBREAKING BOOK *Christmas in Purgatory* (cover image, above), former School of Education Dean Burton Blatt exposed the horrific conditions faced by people who were institutionalized. Blatt advocated for a fully inclusive society.





ALEXANDER BANKOLE WILLIAMS, a disability studies graduate student from Ghana, does reading work on his laptop in the assistive technology room at the library. He often converts non-searchable PDF files to Word documents with optical character recognition software, and uses cell phone technology to read pages. In Ghana, Williams oversaw a computer learning program for the blind. He came to SU as a Ford Foundation International Fellow.

Wolf Wolfensberger and Gunnar Dybwadare, are credited with popularizing such concepts as *open settings*, *mainstreaming*, *normalization*, and *least restrictive environments* in their efforts to describe a vision of society where people with disabilities are fully included—not merely accepted. “A lot of university centers define their mission as research, but we have never seen a contradiction between doing rigorous research and advocating for a fully inclusive society,” says Taylor, who joined the center as a graduate student and now serves as its director. Following the center’s successful efforts to close the Syracuse Developmental Center in 1998 and move its residents into the community, a *Syracuse Herald-American* editorial stated: “For decades, Syracuse University has been a source of enlightenment and energy in forging new paths to integrate people with disabilities into the mainstream. Its Center on Human Policy is a laboratory for progressive policies and practices that continues to have a national and international impact.”

Professor Douglas Biklen G’73, now dean of the School of Education, established the Facilitated Communication Institute in 1992 to research and promote a new method by which non-speaking children and adults with autism and other developmental disabilities can learn to communicate by typing on a computer keyboard, with the ultimate goal of communicating unassisted. In 2004, the Institute on Communication

and Inclusion, as the institute is now known, produced *Autism is a World*, an Academy Award-nominated film about a young woman whom everyone thought was severely retarded. But once she had a way to type on a keyboard without any help, people realized she was very competent, and she is now completing a bachelor’s degree in history. “It’s impossible to know what another person thinks or feels unless they have a way to express it,” Biklen says. “I’ve come to realize it’s important for us to presume a person is competent and then look for ways to help them overcome obstacles. That puts the burden on us as educators to come up with effective strategies.”

Around the time Biklen was researching new communication strategies for people with autism, the School of Education created the nation’s first inclusive teacher training program and a graduate program in disability studies. An undergraduate degree in special education, which concentrates on teaching methods and curriculum, is still offered, but the school has shifted toward inclusive teacher training, which focuses on finding ways for students with disabilities to be educated with their nondisabled peers. On the graduate level, the disability studies program brings together the social sciences and humanities to look at the cultural, political, economic, and social meaning of disability, social policy, and popular culture’s representation of disability as a form of difference. “We also have an

undergraduate minor in disability studies, and there's great interest in creating an undergraduate major as well," Biklen says. "It's a good foundation for many professions, especially medicine and law."

FULL PARTICIPATION

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a landmark piece of civil rights legislation that requires all colleges and

universities to provide architectural, academic, and programmatic access to students with disabilities. SU established the Office of Disability Services (ODS) to address the daily challenges faced by students with a broad spectrum of physical, sensory, mental health, and learning disabilities. According to Stephen H. Simon G'71, director of ODS, so far this year, the office has administered 5,000 exams; produced nearly

RESEARCH: EXAMINING BARRIERS TO MEDICAL SERVICES

RESEARCHER: Professor Nancy Mudrick, School of Social Work, College of Human Ecology

PROJECT: Determining the physical accessibility of medical providers' offices.

ISSUE: Despite sufficient documentation that the quality of health care for people with disabilities is negatively affected by physical and programmatic barriers in doctors' offices, estimates that accurately depict the proportion of providers that offer full access to persons with disabilities don't exist.

BACKGROUND: This finding was one of several lessons learned by Mudrick and a team of colleagues led by the Berkeley, California-based Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF) in preparing the 2009 report, "The Current State of Health Care for People with Disabilities," for the National Council on Disability. The absence of this information is significant because the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act requires doctors' offices to provide equal access to medical services. The 2010 Affordable Care Act (a.k.a. health care reform) requires the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the federal Architectural and Transportation Barriers Compliance Board to develop standards for accessible medical exam equipment, and the Department of Health and Human Services must collect data on the number of providers with accessible facilities and equipment.

ACCESS DATA: To address this information gap, Mudrick and DREDF colleagues—senior policy advisor Mary Lou

Breslin, attorney Silvia Yee, and School of Social Work graduate research assistant Mengke Liang G'10—created what is perhaps the largest single dataset nationally on provider office access, with information on 2,389 provider sites serving more than one million Medicaid-insured patients in California. With support from a grant from the California Health Care Foundation, they obtained the data from five California-based Medicaid managed care plans that serve the elderly and people with disabilities and have voluntarily assessed the physical access of providers' offices since 2006. Among their most disturbing findings: Only 8.4 percent of providers' offices have height-adjustable examination tables, and only 3.6 percent have accessible scales. Consequently, many patients are examined seated in wheelchairs or lifted onto exam tables by inadequately trained nursing staff. Many others are never weighed. "Additionally, many patients with disabilities don't seek treatment because of the access barriers, which is costly to the individual and to the health care system," Mudrick says.

IMPACT: Mudrick, who has worked with DREDF for 14 years on evaluation and policy, and DREDF

colleagues are using these findings to educate and enact policy. The state of California has decided that all Medicaid managed care plans will conduct on-site accessibility surveys of providers. The study's findings influenced the structure of the new state instrument. Their findings also have been shared with the FDA. "We want to move national policy so that people with disabilities have equal access to quality health care," Mudrick says.

—Michele J. Barrett



School of Social Work professor Nancy Mudrick (left) and colleague Mary Lou Breslin of the Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund demonstrate how an accessible scale works. Too few medical offices have such scales and other equipment that accommodate people with disabilities.



GRADUATE STUDENT

Amanda Fallon talks with another student at the Goldberg Couple and Family Therapy Clinic, where she works with clients.

one-half million pages of electronic and alternate formats of text for students who have difficulty accessing standard printed materials; provided note-taking assistance in more than 800 classes; and hundreds of hours of sign language interpreting and computer assisted real-time translation known as CART. “We also provide advocacy and counseling services that focus on the specific, disability-related needs of students,” Simon says. “Our goal is to promote inclusion of students within all aspects of university life.”

ODS frequently collaborates with departments and offices across the campus to work on issues related to architectural and technological accessibility, housing and residence life, career services, student activities, libraries, international study, legal mandates, and access to University events. “We encourage a ‘decentralized’ approach whereby University departments incorporate meeting the needs of people with disabilities into the services they provide on a daily basis,” Simon says. “Certainly there’s a learning curve involved, but as departments become more effective at providing accommodations universally, then the need for an office like ODS will diminish. That should be our goal.”

College of Human Ecology graduate student Amanda Fallon says she looked into what disability services were available before deciding to come to SU and found ODS very accommodating. Now in her second year of study in the Marriage and Family Therapy program, Fallon, who has cerebral palsy and uses a wheelchair, is granted double time to take exams; a reader to help read exams; a scribe to write down exam answers; someone to take notes during classes; and all of her books on CD. “Syracuse is one of the most inclusive schools I looked at,” says Fallon,

a member of the SU chapter of the Phi Kappa Phi honorary society. “Some of the other colleges don’t have note takers, and many of them told me to just bring a recorder to class. That would be difficult because then I have to listen to the entire lecture over again.” And when Fallon pointed out a problem with access, she was pleased with the University’s response. “I asked that automatic door openers be installed on the women’s restrooms in Lyman and Sims halls, where most of my classes are held,” she says. “They were put in really fast, so I was beyond thrilled.”

Not all disabilities are easily discernible. P.J. Alampi ’14, like many students, struggles with a hidden disability that needs to be addressed. “I’m reading disabled,” says Alampi, who is pursuing a double major in policy studies and broadcast journalism.

“I read slower than the average student, so my first priority was to find a school with the academic program I wanted that could accommodate my learning disability. I knew Syracuse had good disability services, but I had no idea they were so extensive.” Alampi, who requires extra time on tests and uses books on tape, meets weekly with his ODS advisor to put together a plan that will enable him to achieve academic success. He is also learning how to advocate for himself. “At first I was nervous about reaching out to my professors because I didn’t think they would react well,” Alampi says. “But every professor I talked to was very supportive, and I realized it’s not just ODS that deals with disabilities—the entire campus is aware that students need help and are really

“I knew Syracuse had good disability services, but I had no idea they were so extensive.”

— P.J. Alampi '14

open to it. I'm grateful I have so much support."

The Americans with Disabilities Act, signed into law in 1990, is another legal milestone mandating an end to discrimination against individuals with disabilities, and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, originally passed in 1975, was reauthorized in 2004 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to provide educational services to the more than 6.5 million children with disabilities nationwide. However, laws do not automatically ensure compliance or educate the public. In 1980, the College of Law created the Public Interest Law Firm to offer free representation to people with disabilities who face discrimination. The firm, now known as the Disability Rights Clinic, offers law students opportunities to work with people with disabilities who have pressing legal problems that are not being adequately addressed.

Law professor Michael Schwartz G'06, director of the Disability Rights Clinic, says he and law students Renee Yaworsky L'12 and Joseph Juhn L'12 are particularly proud of a recent case. An elderly deaf woman, who was a resident of a local nursing home for the last seven years, retained the clinic to contest the facility's failure to provide her with effective communication access under state and federal law. "The nursing home failed to provide our 80-year-old client with meaningful access to social events, games, lectures, and outings," says Schwartz, who is deaf. "We tried to convince them to do the right thing, but it was turning into a battle royale. So instead of suing the local nursing home, we were able to get our client into a facility in Columbus, Ohio, where the residents are all deaf and the staff can sign. My students and I feel absolutely wonderful that our client has a new life in a facility where she can communicate and make new friends. We feel blessed to have been a part of such a positive transformation in a person's life."

FORWARD MOMENTUM

Burton Blatt's legacy continues to grow and evolve through the efforts of dedicated students, faculty, and staff who advocate tirelessly for a more inclusive world. For example, School of Education professors George Theoharis and Julie Causton-Theoharis created the Schools of Promise initiative, which works with teaching and administrative teams in two Syracuse schools—Salem Hyde Elementary and Roberts K-8—to rearrange the resources

at hand so all children have an inclusive education in a general classroom setting with their peers. As a testament to the success of the Schools of Promise philosophy, the New York State Education Department Office of Special Education named Salem Hyde a model school for inclusive special education delivery that will now mentor other schools in need of assistance or intervention with implementing inclusive practices. The local chapter of Say Yes to Education, which offers comprehensive support services to increase graduation rates for Syracuse city school students, has shown interest in the Schools of Promise success and has discussed how to take the initiative district wide.

"Schools of Promise offer a philosophical lens for making decisions about staffing and class placement," Theoharis says. "Some think it is counterintuitive, but we've found that if you include the students with the most challenging disabilities in the general classroom, behavior problems improve and class achievement goes up."

“
We've found that if you include the students with the most challenging disabilities in the general classroom, behavior problems improve and class achievement goes up.”

— Professor George Theoharis
Schools of Promise

As an expansion of the work of the Center on Human Policy, the School of Education, the College of Law, and the College of Human Ecology created the Center on Human Policy, Law, and Disability Studies in 2004. Co-directed by Taylor and law professor Arlene Kanter, the center brings together a network of student organiza-



COLLEGE OF LAW PROFESSOR Michael Schwartz G'06 meets with students participating in the Disability Rights Clinic.

RESEARCH: MOBILE ADVOCACY

RESEARCHER: Professor Alan Foley, Department of Instructional Design, Development, and Evaluation, School of Education

PROJECT: Developing iAdvocate, a free iPhone application (app) that serves as an information resource for parents of school-age children with disabilities.

FOCUS: Foley is an expert on assistive technologies, instructional and learning space design, and web accessibility/usability, with an expanding interest in mobile apps. iAdvocate is designed to provide readily accessible information that will help parents build advocacy skills, enhancing interactions with school professionals.

information on inclusive education; and, *responses*, which features simulated interactions, such as replies to common statements made by school professionals regarding services and accommodations for children.

PARTNERS: Foley received support from and collaborated with the School of Education, the Center on Human Policy, Law, and Disability Studies (CHPLDS), and the SU Parent Advocacy Center (SUPAC), an affiliate of CHPLDS that promotes parental involvement in the inclusive education of their children with disabilities. Foley incorporated the project into his classes last spring and fall and, working with a team of School of Education graduate students, conducted focus group studies with SUPAC parents, developed content, designed a prototype, and used feedback to improve the final product.

IMPACT: The idea behind iAdvocate, Foley says, is to empower and engage parents, making them aware of their rights and a variety of resources. By expanding their knowledge, they are better prepared to partner with school professionals and work collaboratively to achieve positive outcomes for their children's education. The app also connects parents to the SUPAC web site, allowing for more exchanges in information and ideas. Foley plans to create updates for the app and explore and develop other apps and models for cross-platform use. "We hope it can improve access and services for children with disabilities and provide help and support for their parents," he says.

—Jay Cox



Professor Alan Foley and instructional technology graduate student Angela Cuda '10 display information from Foley's iAdvocate iPhone application in the Digital Video Analysis Lab at the School of Education. Foley built the lab with a grant from the National Science Foundation.

ISSUE: Parents of children with disabilities can be overwhelmed in interactions with teachers and other school professionals, especially if they are not familiar with their rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, a federal law that ensures services to children with disabilities, and with appropriate resources.

FEATURES: The app, which was released this spring, contains three sections: *strategies*, a compilation of approaches that parents can pursue as advocates; *resources*, which lists and, where possible, links to such references as laws, books, articles, web sites, video presentations, and organizations that provide

tions, centers, academic programs, and research initiatives that seek to promote the rights of people with disabilities. "Disability issues have always had a strong presence in the School of Education, but we needed to create a cross-college collaboration to increase our visibility throughout the University," Taylor says. "Our mission is to promote training programs, public education, and advocacy efforts on behalf of, and with, people with disabilities." Taylor and Kanter also developed a unique joint degree program that enables a student to earn a law degree and a master's degree in disability

studies at the same time.

Founded in 2005, the Burton Blatt Institute (BBI) was another leap forward in bringing visibility and new perspectives to disability issues locally, nationally, and internationally (see page 26). Under the direction of University Professor Peter Blanck, BBI has assembled a multidisciplinary team to identify problems, test solutions, contribute to law and public policy, and engage the community to develop public and private partnerships that advance the social and economic inclusion of people with disabilities. BBI is creating new models



HIGHER EXPECTATIONS

The Lawrence B. Taishoff Center for Inclusive Higher Education Works to Involve All Students with Disabilities in the College Experience

WENDY HARBOUR BELIEVES PEOPLE WITH SO-called “intellectual disabilities” can do much more than expected, if given the opportunity. And as executive director of the Lawrence B. Taishoff Center for Inclusive Higher Education, she is putting that belief into practice. “Our work at the Taishoff Center is exciting because most students with Down syndrome, Rett syndrome, autism, or some other type of disability that may affect abstract reasoning, just haven’t had the right set of services or supports to show us what they know,” says Harbour, the Lawrence B. Taishoff Assistant Professor for Inclusive Higher Education. “Access to higher education is like getting a second chance.”

Inspired by their daughter, Jackie, who has Down syndrome, Laurie Bean Taishoff ’84 and Robert P. Taishoff ’86 made a \$1 million commitment in 2009 to establish the center in the School of Education. Named in honor of Jackie’s grandfather, Lawrence Taishoff, who formed a special bond with her from the day she was born, the center follows two teaching and research tracks: one relates to students with intellectual disabilities who in the past were not even considered for higher education; the other is geared toward helping students deal with dyslexia and other learning disabilities. “We are very proud of Syracuse University and the innovative leadership role it has taken to support opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities,” says Robert Taishoff, a member of SU’s Board of Trustees.

Most parents of students with intellectual disabilities aren’t aware that college is an option. Harbour is collaborating with the coordinators of two SU programs that allow students

with intellectual disabilities to audit courses and participate in campus activities: OnCampus, offered through the Syracuse City School District, is for students ages 18 to 21 who are still in high school; Access, under the auspices of the Onondaga Community Living agency, is for students 21 years and older who register for courses through University College. “It’s kind of cool because participants meet with their advisors, receive accommodations from the Office of Disability Services, and choose their courses, just like a typical college student,” Harbour says. “I’d like to create a formal certificate program for students who audit classes to show they’ve had some college experience, even though they don’t have a college degree.”

Another important focus of Harbour’s work at the Taishoff Center is to promote the adoption of universal design in learning strategies among instructors and administrators to provide for the maximum diversity of students. In universal design, courses are structured so that students have options to demonstrate

what they’ve learned in different ways. “If you’re not particularly good at taking tests, but it has nothing to do with a disability, it would be great to be in a class where you could choose to do a presentation or to write an essay instead,” says Harbour, who is deaf. “With universal design in learning, flexibility is built into the planning of the curriculum, so no one falls behind in their coursework.”

Harbour says the field of disability rights has lost many prominent leaders in the last few years, and it helps her to know there is a new generation coming up. To ensure a smooth transition from one generation to the next, she is busy organizing a national leadership conference for undergraduates with disabilities to be held at SU in August. Harbour sees the conference, *Disabled & Proud: A Call to Lead*, as a way to instill activism in the next group of leaders—on campus and beyond—who will take the disability rights movement to the next level. “If they’ve figured out a way to get to Syracuse for the conference, they’re probably already leaders,” she says. “I want them to come here, feel a sense of community, and add some new tools to their toolbox as change agents. And then I want them to go back to their campuses and shake things up a bit.”

Historically, college is a time when many students—with or without disabilities—come to realize what needs to be done to create a more inclusive world. Undergraduates in Harbour’s disability studies classes grumble that now they can’t help but see disability everywhere they go. “I just laugh because making students more sensitive to disability is exactly what we’re trying to do,” she says. “I don’t care if they go into anything related to disability, but college is the gatekeeper of the professions, so when these students become teachers or corporate executives, they will be more comfortable with disability. I know our work at the Taishoff Center is going to have a nice ripple effect, and that really gets me excited.”

—Christine Yackel

Professor Wendy Harbour (left), executive director of the Taishoff Center, discusses an issue with students.



of inclusive entrepreneurship in collaboration with county government, community groups, and the Whitman School of Management. BBI, for instance, partnered with Whitman professor Mike Haynie, who established the Entrepreneurial Bootcamp for Veterans with Disabilities (EBV) to provide wounded U.S. soldiers with the skills and knowledge to start their own businesses. Launched in 2007, Whitman's EBV has ex-

cluding intellectual disabilities—at the college level in a more general sense.”

THE INCLUSIVE CAMPUS

Working toward a more inclusive society is the right thing—and practical thing—to do. Based on current estimates, approximately 24 percent of SU alumni have a family member with a disability; 18 percent of students on campus will become temporarily disabled during their four-year college careers; Baby Boomers will experience a variety of late-life disabilities in unprecedented numbers; and the Department of Veterans Affairs and Department of Defense project that 30 percent of veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq—2.5 million to date—will have enduring physical and/or psychological disabilities. Implementing universal design principles, which refer to barrier free buildings, products, environments, and curricula that are inherently accessible to everyone, is the best way to avoid costly retrofitting and creates a beneficial environment for all people during all stages of life (see page 29). Examples of universal design are curb cuts and sidewalk ramps, which are essential for wheelchair users, but are also convenient for individuals pushing baby strollers, making deliveries, and riding bicycles. And with an unemployment rate of 65 percent among Americans with disabilities, ensuring that postsecondary education is universally accessible is cost effective as well.

Brian McLane '69 was born with cerebral palsy at a time when most children with disabilities were institutionalized. His parents struggled to raise him at home and fought for his right to attend public high school. He continued his education at Syracuse University, where he earned a bachelor's degree in speech and dramatic art. He recalls asking his counselor why the vocational rehabilitation program was willing to pay for his education. “My counselor said that without a degree the likelihood of my ever going to work was nil, so at least by giving me an education, they were giving me an opportunity to have a career,” says McLane, founder and president of Paradigm Solutions, a company that works with clients, including SU, to move beyond compliance. “The disabled child becomes the disabled adult who won't be able to depend on mom and dad forever. SU is poised to play a critical role in helping that child gain independence in the most effective and humane way.”

Higher education is a proven pathway to independence and success—particularly for someone with a



BURTON BLATT
Institute senior advisor
Brian McLane '69
(left) and School of
Information Studies
professor Derrick
Cogburn listen to a
presentation at BBI.

panded to include six universities nationwide, offering training in entrepreneurship and small business management. EBV is recognized as a national model for economically empowering veterans who have served in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The most recent advancement in the disability rights movement at SU is the creation of the Lawrence B. Taishoff Center for Inclusive Higher Education, established in 2009 (see page 22). The center conducts research and provides support to college students with intellectual disabilities who traditionally were not considered for higher education, as well as students with learning disabilities, such as dyslexia. “Other centers in higher education are focusing just on students with specific types of disabilities because there is such a need,” says Professor Wendy Harbour, executive director of the Taishoff Center. “We're the only center in the country looking at students with disabilities—in-

CELEBRATING DISABILITY

The Beyond Compliance Coordinating Committee Enhances Campus Culture

STUDENTS ENROLLED IN SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY TODAY HAVE never known a world without legislation that protects the rights of individuals with disabilities. But for members of the Beyond Compliance Coordinating Committee (BCCC), laws are only a starting point. “The mission of our group is to advocate for a campus culture that doesn’t view disability as a deficit, but sees it as part of the diversity on campus,” says Juliann Anesi, a doctoral student in the Teaching and Leadership program in the School of Education. “There are many differences among the student population as well as faculty and staff, and all of their needs should be accommodated without resorting to lawsuits to make change. If we start to make small changes along the way with ideas and cultural values, everyone benefits.”

BCCC was formed in 2001 when a group of graduate

disability. The group brings in guest speakers, artists, comedians, circus performers, and poets; gives presentations on universal design in learning; and holds an annual film festival to promote a culture of disability on campus. BCCC hosted Disability in an Intersectional Lens: a Conference of Emerging Scholars in Disability Studies last fall, and sponsored a wheelchair basketball tournament in March. Committee members have been working with Liat Ben-Moshe G’11 on the disability cultural center initiative, and with Professor Wendy Harbour of the Taishoff Center on a national leadership conference for undergraduates with disabilities to be held at SU in August. And Alex Umstead, a first-year doctoral student in the Cultural Foundations of Education program, is heading up a project to hold an event this fall about the neurodiversity movement, which advocates for societal acceptance of individuals on the autism spectrum as normal, rather than having a condition needing to be cured.

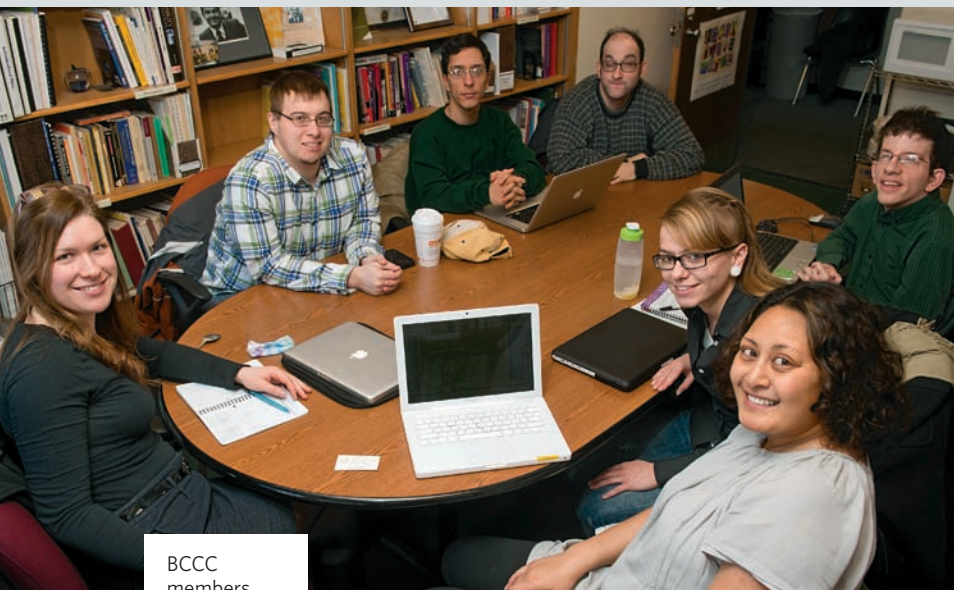
BCCC is a strong and recognizable presence on campus for promoting a culture of inclusion, but the group doesn’t represent all students. Although open to everyone, BCCC membership is drawn mainly from graduate students in the School of Education. Kiel Moses, a first-year doctoral student in the Cultural Foundations in Education program, thinks that is because undergraduates have a lot of fear and apprehension about connecting with their disability. Bennett says many American teenagers just want to fit in with their peers, so the last thing a first-year college student may want to do is self identify as disabled because it’s just not cool. “I can attest to this,” Umstead says. “Some students who are on the mild end of the autism spectrum can feel pressured to overcome social skill obstacles. It took me a while to fit in, and I think it would have been nice to have a group like BCCC to go to as a freshman.”

In addition to BCCC, other student groups—including the Disability Law Society, the Students United for Visual Access Today, and the American Institute of Architecture Students Freedom By Design initiative—work together and share ideas that will bring about systemic change. “Hopefully, more groups that meet the needs of undergraduate students will form in the future,” says Ashley Taylor, BCCC president. “As a freshman you may be just starting to realize that the label you’ve been given in high school isn’t who you really are. It can be very powerful for a student to come to Syracuse and see that our campus celebrates disability.”

—Christine Yackel

students realized a visually impaired student in their class was having trouble getting course materials in a format he could use to complete assignments on time. The students saw this as a much bigger issue, so they started campaigning for more accessibility campus-wide. “It’s important to realize that not all laws meet everybody’s needs,” says Andrew Bennett, who is studying for a Ph.D. in Cultural Foundations of Education. “Just because we have legislation doesn’t mean we immediately have equality—it’s something we have to work at all the time.”

Throughout the academic year, BCCC provides campus-wide educational programming that supports a positive climate for



BCCC members gather for a meeting at the School of Education.



SAMUEL ATTARD
'13, an interior design major who is deaf, sketches a design in his studio space at The Warehouse.

disability who may have fewer career options. With that in mind, SU has redoubled its commitment to attract students with a wide range of physical and intellectual disabilities by providing the supportive and nurturing environment they need to thrive once they get here. "Like everyone else, students with disabilities are looking for a good educational experience," says Eric Spina, vice chancellor and provost. "We hope they will choose to come to Syracuse because we offer outstanding academic programs and a welcoming campus community. Increased enrollment of students with disabilities will happen naturally if we lower all barriers and work to make our campus more inclusive and accessible."

In 2005, Chancellor Cantor set up a task force to identify ways the University can bring the vision of what a truly inclusive campus should be into reality. The task force recommended promoting the University's commitment to disability as an integral aspect of

diversity; creating a culture of inclusion by recruiting, hiring, and retaining more faculty and staff with disabilities; making a long-term financial commitment—as part of the current \$1 billion capital campaign and beyond—to ensure a fully inclusive and accessible campus; and establishing a disability cultural center that would function as an umbrella under which social, cultural, and educational programming related to disability could take place.

Thomas Wolfe G'02, senior vice president and dean of student affairs, says he was intrigued by the idea of the center—which would be housed within the Division of Student Affairs—because it builds on existing resources to provide a place for students to hang out and share ideas and experiences. "Ideally, the center would be situated in a highly visible central location on campus with full-time staffing," Wolfe says. "I'm of the philosophy that if you can't describe it, you can't fund it. So let's get busy describing it."

To move the proposed disability cultural center forward, the Division of Student Affairs, the School of Education, and the Taishoff Center engaged Liat Ben-Moshe G'11, a doctoral candidate and instructor in sociology, disability studies, and women's studies, to coordinate planning for the center and create momentum for its implementation. Ben-Moshe looked at other resource center models, collaborated with a variety of campus constituencies, put together a board of directors to advise on programming and logistics, and will have a budget and implementation plan in place by the end of the academic year. "The cultural center is a way of making SU more responsive to not just the needs of students with disabilities, but also the need for a disability-friendly culture," Ben-Moshe says. "Our vision is that the center will be a hub of activity surrounding disabilities in a proactive way, and that it will help reduce the stigma around disability—it's all about social change."

The disability cultural center is an important step toward creating a campus environment that is comfortable with disability. "So often disability evokes feelings of pity and great sympathy, and we think about people overcoming their disability rather than society changing the impediments that it has imposed on them through public policy or other kinds of practices," Biklen says. "A family who has a child with a disability figures out ways for that child to be included in all aspects of family life—the disability is just seen as part of what is normal. We want to create a similar environment at SU where students with disabilities feel like they are fully participating members of a caring campus community." «

SU alumni and friends are invited to help shape and support a new comprehensive campaign to keep Syracuse at the vanguard of disability rights and inclusion. For more information, contact David Murray at 315-443-5178 or drmurray@syr.edu.

COLLEGE OF VISUAL
and Performing Arts
student Nathaniel Stein
'11 (left) and Sujeet
Desai perform at the
premiere of *People Like
Me* at Syracuse Stage.



INCLUSIVE IMPACT

THE BURTON BLATT INSTITUTE
reaches from campus to around
the globe in its efforts to
advance the civic, economic,
and social participation of
people with disabilities

BY ANTHONY ADORNATO

COMPOSER AND MUSICIAN Nathaniel Stein '11, a College of Visual and Performing Arts student, has had his share of thrilling performances since embarking on a music career as a child. But none has been quite as moving or gratifying as Stein's musical collaboration last year with Sujeet Desai, a musician with Down syndrome. Working in perfect harmony, Stein and Desai hit a high note producing and performing music for the documentary *People Like Me*, which premiered at the 2010 Orange Central celebration. "There were no barriers to Sujeet's musical abilities," says Stein, who partnered with him for seven months to create the film's

soundtrack. "It was like playing with any other musician. His *ability* was most striking and changed the way I think about people with disabilities."

People Like Me, created by three Newhouse School professors, chronicles the history of the Young Actors Workshop at SU for young people with Down syndrome, autism, or physical disability (see page 30). The Burton Blatt Institute (BBI) at Syracuse University provided financial support for the project, one of BBI's many initiatives aimed at infusing awareness about disabilities across disciplines. "BBI is working to make sure inclusion is a way of thinking and a component of the dialogue, education, and change across campus," says University Professor Peter Blanck, BBI chairman. "BBI is shedding light on the issues facing people with

disabilities and helping students, among others, see connections to their own lives."

Stein's experience—and the lasting impression it made—is a case in point. Elvis Avdic '11 and other students also recognize those "connections." When Avdic signed up for Inclusive Entrepreneurship Consulting, a course developed by BBI that has enrolled 140 students in the past two years, he never imagined it would provide an indelible moment of his college career. As part of the course, Avdic served as a consultant for a semester, using his entrepreneurial know-how to help a Central New York resident with a disability launch his own business. "You get caught up in your own life, not realizing the challenges people with disabilities face," says Avdic, a marketing management major. "As I enter the business world after graduation, I will definitely think more consciously about disability issues—hiring people with disabilities, for example. This wouldn't be a priority, if I hadn't taken the class."

Officially launched in 2005 at SU, BBI builds on the legacy of Burton Blatt, former dean of the School of Education and a pioneering disability rights scholar, to challenge thinking and attitudes to better the lives of people with disabilities. "In only five years, BBI has become perhaps the premier disability institute globally focusing on advancing the civic, economic, and social participation of people with disabilities," says Blanck, who joined the SU community in 2005 at the invitation of Chancellor Nancy Cantor to oversee BBI. "Along with Chancellor Cantor's commitment to advancing the participation of people with disabilities, BBI was founded from the generosity of the Hammerman family and their vision to continue the legacy of their beloved family member, Dr. Burton Blatt."



ues to expand its reach across myriad disciplines, including communications, architecture, engineering, and science and technology, putting ideas and research into action. For instance, through the Inclusive Entrepreneurship curriculum, a joint effort with the Whitman School of Management, people with disabilities have launched dozens of new businesses (see page 28). At the same time, the course's innovative service-learning component provides invaluable lessons for students, such as Avdic. In 2010, BBI received a Chancellor's Award for Public Engagement and Scholarship in recognition of its development of the curriculum and commitment to engagement with the community. "We seize on the notion of Scholarship in Action very seriously," Blanck says. "We take knowledge out of the classroom and apply it to build understanding and create positive change."

This summer, school librarians will learn firsthand about this "positive change" and what it means for their communities. In partnership with the Center for Digital Literacy at the School of Information Studies (iSchool), BBI is launching a program that will enable pre-K-12 librarians across New York State to better serve students with disabilities. Through Project ENABLE, teams of school librarians, and special and general educators will attend intensive workshops, co-taught by BBI's William Myhill, on awareness, inclusive program development, and accessible technology selection. The workshops will help librarians meet the library and information needs of students with disabilities, developing inclusive lesson plans and learning materials for their respective libraries. "BBI brings a unique perspective to this important issue and project," says iSchool professor Ruth Small '64, G'77, G'85, who manages Project ENABLE. "I can tell you it is a pleasure to work with the institute."

The impact of BBI's work extends beyond campus and the region. Across the country and around the world, BBI has gained a reputation as a problem solver and advocate for the full community participation of people with disabilities. Last year, through a partnership with the National Disability Institute's Real Economic Impact Tour, BBI assisted more than 360,000 low-income citizens with disabilities nationwide in receiving more than \$350 million owed them in tax refunds. This is just one step toward advancing their economic self sufficiency, according to BBI executive director Michael Morris. In addition, with the emergence of new technologies, BBI is spearheading educational and legal advocacy efforts to change the practices of major companies to ensure their web sites and such devices as e-book readers are fully accessible. The visibility BBI brought to accessibility issues with e-readers gained significant media attention, influ-



BBI CHAIRMAN PETER Blanck (center) and College of Law visiting professor William Snyder (right) listen as BBI senior advisor Brian McLane '69 asks a question during a BBI seminar.

The first multidisciplinary institute of its kind located in and affiliated with a major university, BBI has experienced tremendous growth, both in its staff—which includes alumni from Newhouse, Maxwell, Education, Information Studies, and Law—and in the scope and impact of its work. The institute now has a team of more than 60 staff members and offices in Syracuse, New York City, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, and Tel Aviv, as well as activities in Los Angeles. BBI has also hosted several international postdoctoral fellows, three of whom have gone on to faculty positions in Israel at the University of Haifa and Ben-Gurion University of the Negev.

A remarkable variety of projects has already been completed under BBI's auspices. On campus, BBI collaborates with students and faculty and contin-

encing many universities, including SU, to purchase accessible Kindles that are useable by people who are blind.

BBI's impact extends into corporate culture and the employment of people with disabilities as well. The institute has conducted research on the business practices of such Fortune 500 corporations as Procter & Gamble (P&G), Sears, Manpower, Microsoft, and Ernst & Young to understand strategies for an inclusive workforce. According to Blanck, the results help companies develop and assess policies, hiring practices, and training programs that benefit all people. "Ensuring that we have a culture at P&G where *everyone* has the opportunity to perform at their peak is critical," says Ann Andreosatos, P&G North America human resources leader for people with disabilities initiatives. "Our ongoing collaboration with BBI has been pivotal to validating and initiating our People with Disabilities strategies."

In New York State, BBI has taken a leadership position to dramatically improve employment rates and acceptance of people with disabilities in the workforce. With a goal of closing the employment gap faced by more than a million state residents with disabilities, BBI was selected as a partner in the \$16 million New York Makes Work Pay program, funded through a U.S. Department of Health and Human Services grant to the New

York State Office of Mental Health. BBI staff, working with key partners, developed a five-year plan to create pathways and remove obstacles to employment for New Yorkers with disabilities, allowing them to enter the economic mainstream. "The first question we ask ourselves is, 'How will our work benefit individuals with disabilities and their families?'" says Blanck, as he reflects on BBI's accomplishments and looks to build on its momentum going forward. "Whether in the invention of new technology, advancement of universal design standards, or the reinventing of government and the private sector, BBI epitomizes Scholarship in Action."

As BBI builds on Syracuse University's longstanding achievements in the struggle for an inclusive society for all, Blanck credits the enthusiasm and support of the SU community—including University trustees Joshua H. Heintz L'69 and Lawrence Bashe '66 G'68, who serve on BBI's Board of Advisors—for the institute's progress. "As Burton Blatt once said, 'We now understand that each person has value. And, our world is a better place—more diverse, more interesting—when all people are included,'" Blanck says. «

BBI on THE WEB

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THROUGH THE START-UP NY PROGRAM, Barbara Janice established Max's Barkery, offering all-natural, homemade dog treats.



Achieving Entrepreneurial Dreams

FROM A DOG GROOMING AND DAY CARE service to a car repair garage, entrepreneurs with disabilities are making their mark in the Central New York business community, thanks to Start-Up NY, an innovative, first-of-its-kind program developed by the Burton Blatt

life," she says.

Brown isn't alone in achieving a dream. Since 2007, Start-Up NY—a partnership of BBI, the Whitman School of Management, and Onondaga County—has assisted 204 individuals with diverse disabilities in the creation of

Institute (BBI). "Starting my own eatery would not have been possible if it were not for the program," says restaurateur Della Brown, who recently opened Tacolicious in Syracuse. Armed with knowledge and skills acquired through Start-Up NY and a range of resources provided by the University's Inclusive Entrepreneurship initiative, Brown transformed her business ideas into reality. "It has not only given me invaluable skills, but also the opportunity to improve the quality of my

48 new businesses. "Start-Up NY has become a model strategy for assisting people, including veterans, with diverse disabilities to become entrepreneurs," says James Schmeling, BBI chief operating officer.

BBI managed the design and implementation of Start-Up NY on behalf of Onondaga County, which received a three-year, \$3 million grant from the U.S. Department of Labor Office of Disability Employment Policy to create the program. "The work accomplished by the Burton Blatt Institute reinforces our belief that, with the correct supports, all citizens can find their rightful place in our county's economic fabric," says County Executive Joanne M. Mahoney '87, L'90.

BBI is now working with community partners to launch programs in other locations. "SU and its partners are replicating the Start-Up NY/ Inclusive Entrepreneurship model in Manhattan, and it is being used as a model for similar initiatives throughout New York State and internationally," says Gary Shaheen G'86, BBI senior vice president. **—Anthony Adornato**



Emergency Preparation in Israel

AT A BBI SEMINAR, Shirley Avrami, head of the Research and Information Center of the Israeli parliament, discusses disability-related research conducted by the parliament.

IN ISRAEL, THERE ARE DAILY concerns about safety and contingency planning for rapid response to emergencies. But for years, the emergency planning had a missing link: no evacuation protocols for people with disabilities. In what turned out to be a lifesaving endeavor, the Burton Blatt Institute (BBI), in conjunction with the Israel Ministry of Social Affairs and Services, led efforts for emergency preparedness for Israelis with disabilities. “The project materials were used during a conflict to evacuate individuals with intellectual disabilities from a disability service provider hours before it was struck by a rocket,” says University Professor Peter Blanck, BBI chairman. “The

evacuation saved lives.”

To assist in the protection and safety of Israelis with disabilities, BBI applied lessons from its involvement in U.S. emergency planning and response after Hurricane Katrina. A team of BBI and Israeli researchers developed a system of alerts and resource mapping. The partnership was facilitated by Professor Arie Rimmerman, the Richard Crossman Chair for Social Welfare & Planning at the School of Social Work, Social Welfare, and Health Studies at the University of Haifa in Israel. “As a major step in building global relationships, in 2006 BBI and the Israel Ministry of Social Affairs and Services signed an historic agreement to collaborate to

expand the scope and reach of disability rights,” Rimmerman says.

Along with the emergency preparedness guidelines, the partnership paved the way for expanded policy and services for people with disabilities in Israel. To conduct ongoing activities, an Israeli nonprofit organization, The Center of Innovation and Advancement of Quality of Life of People with Disabilities, was established, composed of leaders from BBI and others from SU, as well as Israelis. “BBI is collaborating globally to share and develop ideas for improving the quality of life for people with disabilities,” says Michael Morris, BBI executive director.

—Anthony Adornato

Universalizing Universal Design

JUST AS PROPONENTS OF “GREEN” BUILDING concepts have seen their construction standards become commonplace, the Burton Blatt Institute (BBI) and key partners are leading an unprecedented effort to build support for the voluntary adoption of universal design (UD). The UD approach advocates that all built environments and products be useable by all people.

In 2008, BBI chairman Peter Blanck, University Trustee Joshua H. Heintz L’69, and his law partner, William J. Gilberti Jr., founded the Global Universal Design Commission (GUDC) to create UD standards, consensus-based, innovative performance guidelines that go beyond minimal compliance with law and provide ease of use to all. The GUDC standards are modeled on the green standards for the built environment, designating a level of accreditation for a project based on its usability, safety, health, and inclusiveness.

GUDC (www.globaluniversaldesign.org/) brings together some of the most knowledgeable and influential leaders in UD, including four current and former presidential appointees, architects, and faculty from the University of Buffalo’s Center for Inclusive Design and Environmental Access. Commission members—including honorary chairman Luis Benigno Gallegos Chiriboga, Ecuador’s ambassador to the United States—are leading efforts to accelerate the adoption of the standards worldwide. “At the ambassador’s initiation, Professor Blanck and I met with Ecuador’s vice president, Lenín Moreno Garcés, and Ecuador became an early GUDC adopter,” Heintz says.

BBI and GUDC are collaborating with many university, corporate, and government leaders to promote adoption of the standards. For instance, Procter & Gamble is partnering with GUDC to focus on implementing the standards in its built environment and workforce policies.

The SU College of Law’s new building committee is considering using the GUDC standards. Destiny USA

has adopted the standards for its tenants, and the Seneca Nation, located in Western New York, has agreed to adopt the standards for new construction, according to Blanck. Last fall, at a global conference on technology and innovation for people with disabilities in Sao Paulo, Brazil, Heintz gave the keynote address on “Universalizing Universal Design.” Brazil is considering adoption of the standards to guide development for its 2014 World Cup facilities and its 2016 Olympics and Paralympics. “Brazil’s interest is a very exciting development,” Blanck says, “and we hope it will bring international attention to the importance of GUDC standards.”

—Anthony Adornato



Faculty Filmmakers Put Spotlight on Disability Issues

ARTIE ABRAMS, A CHARACTER ON THE hit television series *Glee*, uses a wheelchair. Kevin McHale, the actor who plays him, does not. When *Glee*'s producers were criticized for not casting a paraplegic in the role, they responded by adding a new character, Betty Jackson, a cheerleader who has Down syndrome, and casting Lauren Potter,

Biklen's most recent film, *Wretches & Jabberers*, was released in April. It follows two men with autism, Tracy Thresher, a political activist, and Larry Bissonnette, an artist, as they travel around the world advocating the rights of people with disabilities (wretchesandjabberers.org).

Drama professor Elizabeth Ingram is

community and should be involved in the community. Somebody out of the ordinary, by nature, has something out of the ordinary to say, expanding everyone's knowledge and sensitivity." Evidence of this is abundant in *People Like Me*, a new documentary film that explores the workshop's weekly sessions at Syracuse Stage. Filmmakers Larry Elin '73, Steve Davis, and Douglas Quin, members of the Newhouse School faculty, provide glimpses of extraordinary moments of personal expression and communication between workshop members and SU students as they prepare for the group's annual stage production. "Over time, we saw people who had been quietly standing in corners become effusive and dramatic and very much part of the group," Elin says. "You could see them coming out of their shells and joining the drama students, whose love of performing is reflected in their every movement."

The Young Actors Workshop has sparked inquiries from a fair number of universities and organizations, and *People Like Me* may help make the Syracuse program a national model. "Of course it's wonderful to see people expressing themselves and to see the reactions of family members who may not have thought it possible," Ingram says. "The benefits to students are less obvious. They become better students by teaching what they learn. Some of our graduates make teaching or drama therapy part of their professional careers."

People Like Me and *Wretches & Jabberers* are characterized by explicit images of people with disabilities asserting themselves, politically, artistically, and socially. In *Losing It* (2000), faculty filmmaker Sharon Greytak (see page 11) shifts emphasis to neglect and isolation. Greytak, who uses a wheelchair, sets out on a trip around the world to interview people with disabilities. She encounters disturbing results before reaching her first destination. Detained for no apparent reason while clearing customs in Moscow, she offers this in her voiceover



Actors Mark Santangelo and Kayla McKeon of the Young Actors Workshop stroll down the red carpet at the premiere of *People Like Me* at Syracuse Stage.

an actor with Down syndrome, in the role. School of Education Dean Douglas Biklen G'73, a documentary producer whose 2004 film, *Autism is a World*, was nominated for an Academy Award, recalls that not long ago there were almost no characters with disabilities in popular drama, and the few who came along rarely strayed from predictable stereotype. "People with disabilities only appeared to highlight the good qualities of the story's main character, who was not a disabled person," he says. "The effect of seeing a character with a disability can be positive or negative depending on how it is done, but certainly there have been some excellent portrayals in recent years."

encouraged to see people with disabilities emerging from the shadows to take their turns at center stage, although she was personally way ahead of the curve on this. Since its founding in 1992, Ingram has been faculty advisor to the Young Actors Workshop, a pioneering community theater group where people with disabilities learn acting and other theatrical skills from undergraduates in the College of Visual and Performing Arts (VPA). "Seeing these actors helps the public understand that you don't have to be frightened of people or conditions you're not familiar with," she says. "No human being should be hidden. People with disabilities are part of our



narration: "I knew immediately that none of them had ever spoken to a disabled person before.... There was that pure sense in the voices of only seeing my exterior. I was an invalid to them. Special baggage—that was my identity." Each of the people she interviews has a special tale of struggle, but while conditions may vary among countries, a constant emerges: The dignity of people with disabilities is not a priority on the agenda of contemporary society.

Biklen believes media representations play a role in creating a more inclusive society. "It's hard for many people to imagine that someone like Tracy or Larry could have a sense of humor or personal feelings," he says. "Letting people see them on screen is the most effective way I know of showing what they're capable of." KC Duggan, managing director of the Syracuse International Film Festival, agrees, and is proud *Wretches & Jabberers* was screened at the festival's annual Disabilities in Cinema program last year. "Film is one of the greatest educational tools, and films on disability and disability rights help people understand the issues," Duggan says. "We all struggle with our differences, and films allow us to see the struggles of others in human terms."

—David Marc



In scenes from *People Like Me*, drama major Amy Shapiro '09 works with actor Chris Peck (top left), and students and actors perform a song together (top right). In *Wretches & Jabberers*, Tracy Thresher (center photo, left) and Larry Bissonnette stand in front of a billboard in Japan. At Orange Central last fall, drama professor Elizabeth Ingram (bottom photo, right) makes a point during a panel discussion on the role of arts in inclusive education.

People Like Me photos courtesy of Larry Elin; *Wretches & Jabberers* photo courtesy of School of Education; Orange Central photo by Susan Kahn