



Eight Journeys through Hope



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– Rocio Ibarra '10

Rocio Ibarra '10 at Graves Hall, where she volunteered with Upward Bound.

It is graduation Sunday, and the field at Holland Municipal Stadium is a sea of blue.

The members of the Class of 2010 are gathered together for the first time since their Opening Convocation in Dimnent Memorial Chapel four years earlier. On that busy August afternoon, they were newly minted freshmen, the possibilities of their Hope years before them. On this equally active May afternoon, they are about to become alumni, the passing of those years having helped realize—and

shape—their dreams for the future.

The 653 graduates might find the statistics heartening. For example, in the comprehensive “Alumni Attitude Survey” commissioned by the Alumni Association this spring, Hope earned “Good to Excellent” marks in preparing graduates on every measure, from employment, to furthering graduate education, to contributing to community, to deepening understanding of and commitment to personal development and continuous learning.

Hope, though, is about more than averages or aggregates. The signature essence of the Hope experience is the college’s focus on the individual. Even as the members of 2010 together fill the field with Hope’s familiar cerulean hue, they represent 653 lives in the launching—and, as the eight brief profiles which follow show—just as many ways that Hope made a difference between that inaugural Sunday in 2006 and this culminating Sunday in anno Domini 2010.

Jared Graybiel '10 began his journey to Hope with a literal journey. He was driving past Holland while visiting another college when he saw Hope listed on a highway sign. He didn’t follow up then, but the unique name stayed with him, and as a spring-semester high school senior he took action.

“I checked out the website,” he said. “Within two weeks I sent in my application. I came for a visit, and I came back for a Distinguished Artist Award audition. It just really felt right.”

Graybiel was interested in musical theatre, and Hope presented numerous opportunities to train and perform. Along the way, though, he discovered another passion, teaching, prompting him to major instead in special education. He also found that choosing a new major didn’t mean giving up his other interests.

“What I loved about Hope was that I could be just as involved as a non-major in music and theatre,” he said. “It didn’t feel like the intensity

changed just because I changed my major.”

He soloed multiple times during Hope’s Musical Showcase concerts, performed in Hope Theatre productions and won honors in the National Association of Teachers of Singing Michigan State Chapter Auditions and Great Lakes Regional Competition. Within his declared major, he was also able to participate in collaborative research.

Graybiel credits the college’s commitment to the liberal arts with making the blend possible. It’s a quality that he values more generally as well.

“It’s formed me or shaped me to be the educator that I am and the life-long student that I am,” he said. “And it’s one of the most important things that I’ve learned.”

Rocio Ibarra '10 of Holland, Mich., has had her goal in mind for years. “I’ve wanted to be a lawyer since I was in third grade—since I knew what a lawyer was,” she said.

She enrolled in Hope already familiar with the college based on her direct and positive experience as a participant in the Upward Bound program for high school students. “I felt like Hope was my home because I knew where everything was,” she said. As a Hope student, she’s been giving back to the program as a tutor herself.

Ibarra is interested in immigration law in particular, knowing from experience, even within her immediate family, the need for legal professionals who care about their clients. “I feel like it’s my calling,” she said, “to go to

school and do something and make a change.”

She received important help this year through a new internship and LSAT-assistance program established at Hope by the Smith Haughey Rice & Roegge law firm to support and encourage minorities and women in pursuing law. She attended conferences, sat in on cases and conducted research for the attorneys—and found her goals reinforced. She’s hoping to begin law school this fall.

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Sarah Mejia '10 of Highland, Mich., first looked at Hope because of a recommendation: the college was highlighted in the book *Colleges That Change Lives*. “The book drove me to here because of the small campus, the atmosphere, the liberal arts, the Christian affiliation,” she said.

She became actively involved in campus organizations and community service. She was president of Student Congress and a member of the Sybilline sorority, participated in the spring break mission trip program and charitable efforts like Dance Marathon and the Relay for Life, and was a volunteer mentor with area schools.

The co-curricular activities helped shape her academic program, leading her to major in management and minor in leadership. She has appreciated the way that her coursework related to her activities, and in turn how her experiences informed her understanding of her academic lessons.

“Hope’s become something that I never could have imagined, beyond every expectation,” Mejia said. “It just all happened

to fit together—the major and the minor, and my interests and passions.”

This spring, the college’s Center for Faithful Leadership (CFL) presented her with one of three Student Servant Leadership Awards. In addition, she was one of four Hope students recognized for commitment to service by the Michigan Campus Compact in April.

Mejia will be finishing up next year. She hopes to volunteer this summer at St. Francis De Sales Catholic Church with the LdOUT leadership mentoring program established by the CFL, and spend the fall in Spain. Beyond that, her plans are not set, although she plans to keep living the lessons she’s learned.

“The college talks about growing world Christians in the soil of Hope,” Mejia said. “They know that we’re going to be moving on, but we’re still rooted here.”

Jason Ruud '10 of Muskegon, Mich., values the benefits of internship experiences, a priority in the accounting program. He’s lined up an auditing position with Ernst & Young starting this September—following an internship with the company this past summer that had grown from an internship he had held as a sophomore and junior with Code Blue Corporation.

“Practical experience is very, very important,” he said.

Interested in accounting from day one—he declared his major in his first semester—he’s appreciated the way that the placements and his classes have worked together. “What’s nice is the academic world and the internships complement each other—and both ways,” he said. “The academic work relates closely to the internship, and vice versa.”



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Future teacher Jared Graybiel '10 in the classroom.

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Sarah Mejia '10 at the Center for Faithful Leadership.





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Jason Ruud ‘10 had an internship with Code Blue, which has a number of emergency-alert stations on campus.

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It’s a perception that she’s found reinforced in the years since. “Everyone is really fantastic,” she said. “Whoever you want to talk to on the faculty, you can walk right in. They’ve really wanted to help me succeed.”

A chemistry and French major, Speelman has earned multiple external honors, including a Goldwater Scholarship in 2008 and, this spring, a National Science Foundation (NSF) Graduate Research Fellowship, the latter of which she will use as she continues at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

Speelman participated in collaborative research throughout her time at Hope, experience that she noted clearly made a qualitative difference in her preparation for a career in science, but which she also appreciates in a more formative way.

“I wasn’t really sure what I wanted to do,” she noted. “Once I got here, I realized how important research is in science, and participating helped me to know that it’s what I really want to do and inspired a passion for it.”

Blair Williams ‘10 of Fenton, Mich., like Speelman, has received an NSF Graduate Research Fellowship, in his case for graduate studies in mechanical engineering at Stanford University. He is also a Goldwater Scholar, recognized in 2009.

He has conducted research in both mathematics and engineering, culminating in

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NSF graduate fellowship recipients Amy Speelman ‘10 and Blair Williams ‘10 both made presentations during the college’s annual Celebration of Undergraduate Research and Creative Performance, which filled the DeVos Fieldhouse on Friday, April 9.



Ruud had visited multiple schools as he made his college choice, but the search was over once he saw Hope. “After visiting, there was no doubt that I was going to come here,” he said. “I think it was the smaller atmosphere,” he said. “You could really see the genuine feel at Hope, the community.”

Rachel Scott ‘10 of Bay City, Mich., met Hope’s hometown first. “I actually fell in love with Holland, and didn’t even know that they had a college,” she said.

When the time came for her college search, though, her priorities included small, Christian and liberal arts. “I found out that Hope was in Holland, and that really just sealed the deal,” she said.

The college’s breadth served her well, giving her the chance to explore a variety of interests. Scott graduated with majors in international studies and religion, a blend that reflects her interest in understanding other cultures as well as the underpinnings of her own faith and others.

“I changed my major probably four or five times, and this is what I’ve ended up with,” she said. “I’m very happy with my combination. It’s enabled me to combine two different interests into something that I’m very passionate about.”

She spent a semester studying abroad, in Freiburg, Germany. She has been active in volunteer activities, including as a youth-group leader at Ebenezer Reformed Church in Holland, Habitat for Humanity and through the Dorian sorority. During the Advent season she had the opportunity to speak during Chapel.

Scott is considering seminary down the line, but first she is going to be spending a

year with the interdenominational Lutheran Volunteer Corps, serving at the Nativity House, an organization that combats homelessness in Tacoma, Wash.

“I really felt a call to serve,” she said. “I really felt that the Lutheran Volunteer Corps was what I was looking for because it promotes community and sustainability.”

Amy Speelman ‘10 of Darien, Ill., was convinced by her campus visit. “I really liked the atmosphere,” she said. “Everyone was really friendly, and I felt like there was personal

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Rachel Scott ‘10 in Dimnent Chapel



an independent project to develop a computer-control system to keep a bicycle upright without a rider.

“The experiences that I’ve had in research here at Hope are definitely going to be the building blocks in graduate school,” Williams said. “I have an advantage because I’ve had these different experiences, and they’ve all been great.”

As important as those experiences have been, he considers the rest of his time at Hope no less crucial. For example, he developed an interest in Japan that included studying abroad through the college’s exchange program with Technos University and hosting Japanese students at Hope. He plans to go back to Japan this summer, to continue learning the language and to stay engaged with the country as an engineering professional.

“That’s another reason I’m pleased with my decision ultimately to come to Hope: having all the opportunities from being at a liberal arts school,” Williams said. “Being culturally competent is going to be important. Having had these experiences at Hope is going to be an advantage.”

Nursing major **Michelle Zeitter ‘10** of Grand Rapids, Mich., is graduate-school bound as well. After finishing up at Hope a semester early, she’s been working since the start of the year in the cardiac unit at Spectrum Health. In the fall she’ll be enrolled in the accelerated BSN-to-Ph.D. program made available to Hope graduates through the department of nursing’s new relationship with Michigan State University, and will hold MSU’s highly competitive University Distinguished Fellowship.

Zeitter values the difference that participating in research as a student—including during an earlier placement with Spectrum—has made (“That’s really one of the great things that Hope does that other colleges don’t,” she noted), but appreciates ways that her experiences outside of the department have shaped her as well.

Her First-Year Seminar set a high standard for scholarship; she practiced nursing and service in the summer “Hope Blooms” program in Puerto Escondido, Mexico; she has used

her Spanish in working with patients in West Michigan. “The other classes, even though they may not have anything to do with your major *per se*, you learn other things that can help you, too,” she said.

Her coursework, her faculty mentors, and her involvement in co-curricular activities ranging from SAC to Dance Marathon, are all part of a fabric of experience that she wouldn’t trade.

“I don’t think I’d be the same person coming out of a different college,” she said. 🐦

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– Michelle Zeitter ‘10

Michelle Zeitter ‘10 in the nursing skills lab.

