MacArthur “Genius” Award Recipients

Lynsey Marie Addario (BA ’95, international relations and Italian), a New York-based international photojournalist, has been honored with a 2009 MacArthur Fellowship (also called the “genius grant”). Her photographs expose the tragic consequences of human conflict, and have been published on the front pages of newspapers throughout the world. Addario, 35, is one of 24 grant recipients this year, and will receive $500,000 over five years. The MacArthur Fellows Program awards unrestricted fellowships to “talented individuals who have shown extraordinary originality and dedication in their creative pursuits and a marked capacity for self-direction.” She joins the following members of the Letters & Science community who have been so honored in the past.

Enrol Morris (BA ’69, history), Filmmaker
Mari Jo Buhle (PhD ’74, history), American Historian
William Cronon (BA ’76, English and history), Environmental Historian
Ramón Gutiérrez (MA ’76, PhD ’80, history), Historian
Jacqueline Jones (MA ’72, PhD ’76, history), Historian
Thomas G. Palaima (MA ’74, PhD ’80, classics), Classicist
Philip D. Curtin, Professor of African History
Margaret W. Rossiter (MS ’67, history of science), Historian of Science
Thomas L. Daniel (BS ’76, anthropology, MS ’78, zoology), Biologist
Laura L. Kiessling, Professor of Chemistry and Biochemistry
Ullman Ranfield, Professor of Geology
Matthew Rabin (BA ’84, economics), Economist
Joel Rogers, Professor of Sociology, Law, and Political Science

Giving Meaning to Giving

The end of the year brings reflections on the past and future, family gatherings, and lots of mail. Holiday greeting cards are part of the tradition of greeting each other on the dawn of the New Year. So are end-of-the-year appeals for money to support one cause or another.

While the arrival of holiday cards can bring smiles and fond memories, the appeals for contributions can be perplexing. The numerous causes can be hard to evaluate, and the volume of need is staggering even when obvious frauds are found out and discarded.

In times of scarcity, the level of need has become more urgent at a time when many people have fewer resources to share with others.

People who may want to make a difference but feel overwhelmed by the range and volume of need, might find it helpful to take a deep breath and consider the insights that Paul Schervish (PhD ’80, sociology) has to offer.

With his colleagues at the Center on Wealth and Philanthropy at Boston College, Schervish studies the relationship between wealth and philanthropy, and philanthropic behavior ranging from formal grants awarded by family foundations to informal compassionate acts to meet the needs of another. His most recent project is the Study on Wealth, Values, and Philanthropy, a survey of households with a net worth of $2.5 million or more.

Using social science survey and statistical methods to learn about the dynamics of giving seems cold or detached from the human relationships at the heart of philanthropy at first. For Schervish, however, philanthropy is a much deeper concept that embodies psychological, social and spiritual elements of daily life. “It’s my great joy to bring the statistical sophistication that was pounded into me during my PhD studies at Wisconsin, with my spiritual training, to produce a psycho-social analysis of how people carry out their lives,” Schervish says.

He has used his training as a sociologist to challenge the more philosophical focus, such as “The Sense and Sensibility of Philanthropy as a Moral Citizenship of Care.” At the heart of Schervish’s work is the idea of “philanthropy” as something much deeper than tax-deductible donations or structured volunteer work for formal organizations, and other activities that we usually associate with the word. He notes that typical studies of giving and volunteering miss informal but significant personal philanthropy, such as providing family care for a child or elderly person, or sharing a home with adult children during hard economic times.

Taking a larger view of philanthropy, Schervish and his colleagues have given us intriguing insights into the hows and whys of giving in the 21st century:

• People who feel that their material needs have been satisfied tend to give more than people of the same socio-economic status who do not feel financially secure.

• Resource sharing, as opposed to financial gifts, becomes an increasingly important form of philanthropy during hard times.

• Giving circles are becoming much more common as donors pool resources to achieve a big-continued on next page
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Please address all correspondence and suggestions to:
Editor, Letters & Science Today
109 South Hall
1180 Park Mall Madison, WI 53706-1394
608–265–8287
608–265–6565 fax
e-mail: mail@lsc.admin.wisc.edu
www.lsc.wisc.edu/alumniletters.htm
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Mary Clare Freeman (BA ’51, political science and religious studies) Founder, Kay Koplovitz & Co., New York, NY
Heather Lever Watson (BS ’42, history) Vice Chancellor Emeritus, University of Wisconsin–Madison. As a member of the Letters & Science Board of Visitors since 2002, Mary Claire gave generously of her time and insight to help shape up! And this message is compounded by moments when people work to trump each other’s generosity with statements that convey that “my cause is important but not.” All of this comes together when, as donors, we tear ourselves apart with guilt over whether we are doing enough, or our efforts are good enough. The scolding model is not the only one out there. It’s just the model with which we are most familiar, and it is the model that produces despair when we face a pile of compelling, conflicting, pleas for support from organizations and individuals.

Mary Claire Phipps was a mentor and role model who inspired me to do more now or in the future, that enables you to meet the true needs of others.

This process is not reserved for the wealthy or the elite; it is extended to financial giving. Regardless of the resources, the process can help each person to find their philanthropic vocation by identifying what acts of caring will—and will not—nourish and enrich their soul. “Needs are infinite,” says Schervish, “and all acts of care are important. But for us as individuals, the key is to discover that golden point where the needs to be met is something that we can do well and feel good about doing so.”

It’s not about the wealth you’ve accumulated, but how you live your life. True philanthropy is part of the person, and the person who gives receives nourishment as happiness, effectiveness, and significance. The most satisfying thing we can do is to meet the true needs of others, not because they can pay us to provide them. The most satisfying relationship, and therefore one we are inclined to continue, is one where you want to do, that you are able to do now or in the future, that enables you to meet the true needs of others.

In Memoriam
Mary Claire Phipps Chapped her Communities
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