Visionary. That was Mount Holyoke in 1837. And it’s still what sets us apart.

Throughout 2012, the College is celebrating 175 years of women of influence. We’re paying tribute to intrepid alumnae who, like the institution itself, have made and continue to make history. We’re also honoring the remarkable students who choose Mount Holyoke precisely because we keep setting the standard.

Ours is a bold path—then and now.
Vista

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WOMEN OF INFLUENCE

From Mars to MHC

When NASA’s Mars Rover Curiosity touched down on the Red Planet in August, Professor of Astronomy Darby Dyar had about the closest thing to a front row seat. As part of a select team of scientists providing expertise and support, she watched from Mission Control at NASA’s Jet Propulsion Lab in Pasadena, California.

That 10:31 PM landing was just the start of Dyar’s Martian adventure. For the first 90 “sols” (Martian days), Dyar divided her time between Pasadena and South Hadley.

While at the Jet Propulsion Lab, she assisted with the daily operations of the Mars Science Lab (MSL), one of the most complex science laboratories ever built. And the next chapter was equally out of this world: data received at Mission Control from the MSL then traveled to Dyar’s lab on the Mount Holyoke campus for analysis.

Dyar: We’re a liberal arts college but we do first-class scientific research here.

from the MSL then traveled to Dyar’s lab on the Mount Holyoke campus for analysis.

“We’re a liberal arts college but we do first-class scientific research here,” Dyar said. “What’s different is that undergraduates—not Ph.D. candidates—are doing this really high-level work.”

Dyar, her lab manager Elly Breves, student Melissa Nelms ’13, and recent graduates Marie Ozanne ’12 and Michelle DeVeaux ’12 have begun developing a database of spectra and chemical analyses of Earth-based rocks and minerals. These, in turn, will be used by Dyar and other scientists to identify the composition of minerals that Curiosity encounters on Mars.

A NASA grant for fundamental research supported the purchase and installation of a laser-induced breakdown spectrometer analogous to the ChemCam instrument on MSL. This complex instrument uses a laser to melt a rock into a plasma from up to 7 meters away. Statistical routines developed by Dyar and her students use those data to identify the chemical makeup of rocks on Earth and apply those models to Martian surface materials. There are only five such Mars-atmosphere units in existence, including the one inside Curiosity.

“It’s incredibly exciting to be part of NASA’s work, but what I find most gratifying is involving my students in the research,” said Dyar. “Here they are at Mount Holyoke getting experience that even established scientists can’t access. This is an institution that always has been on the cutting edge when it comes to women and science.”
Olympic Success

Officially, the Olympic flame traveled throughout the UK for 70 days before reaching the opening ceremonies of the 2012 Summer Games. But, as Barbara Cassani '82 can explain in detail, its journey to London began nearly a decade ago.

Cassani, an American-born businesswoman, made history in her thirties as the first female CEO of a commercial airline—British Airways’ budget airline, Go—which she’d also founded. In 2003, she was chosen to lead London’s bid for the XXX Olympiad. She and her committee spent the next two years persuading the International Olympic Committee that the Summer Games belonged in London rather than Paris, Moscow, New York City, or Madrid.

“I remember when I took on the chairmanship no one thought the city could do it—first, win the bid and second, host wonderful Games. Thanks to a huge and amazing group of people, the doubters were proved wrong,” said Cassani.

“Somehow it seems fitting that these Games were the first to insist that every country send male and female athletes, and the London Organizing Committee chose a woman, ex-tennis pro Debby Jevans, to be responsible for delivering all the venues and sporting competitions. Women made a huge impact at the Games—both behind the scenes and on the playing fields.”

Find more Mount Holyoke College women of influence at www.mtholyoke.edu/175.
When Hilary Pollan ’12 describes MHC’s Community-Based Learning Program (CBL) as “her life,” it’s no exaggeration. Pollan, who grew up in Raleigh, North Carolina, met CBL coordinator Alan Bloomgarden at an orientation session on her first day at the College. She was just back from a trip to Cambodia and eager to do social action work. “I went up to him and said, ‘My name is Hilary and I want to do a project. Can we talk?’ ”

While majoring in sociology and completing a Nexus minor in sustainable development, Pollan took numerous courses with a CBL component. She also was appointed to highly selective CBL mentor and fellow positions that honed her leadership skills. As part of those appointments, Pollan spent three years teaching ESOL, civic education, pre-GED, and GED preparation classes in the neighboring city of Holyoke.
HILARY POLLAN CONTINUED

“I can’t exist only in the academic realm,” she said. “There is a lot of theory in sociology but it doesn’t have much value to me until I apply it. What kept me coming back to Holyoke was how much I was learning. I really do believe in the curriculum to career, engaged learning that Mount Holyoke emphasizes.”

In addition to exploring the sociology of education through CBL, Pollan spent a summer in Chile as an English teaching intern at the Universidad de Alberto Hurtado. That experience, sponsored by MHC’s McCulloch Center for Global Initiatives, formed the basis of her senior thesis about Chilean student movements. Then, as her senior year drew to a close, Pollan received a prestigious grant from the Davis Projects for Peace. Pollan’s proposal for the $10,000 grant was inspired by a wish to share something more with Holyoke before leaving western Massachusetts: “I’d been in and out of the community for three years. I wanted to find a way to dedicate myself to these students and this place.”

Toward that end, she proposed an eight-week program, the Educational Image Project (EIP). It ultimately enrolled 16 students aged 18 to 60-plus at various stages of GED preparation. Pollan’s curriculum focused on developing goal-setting and decision-making skills that would position them for opportunities beyond the GED. Though EIP emphasized the pragmatic, she also urged the students to dream. “Many of my students hadn’t dreamed anything for themselves and their future since they were kindergarten age,” she noted. “After that, they started hearing ‘You’re not a learner,’ and ‘You’re going nowhere.’ Many of them don’t really remember what dreaming feels like.”

In February, Pollan will continue her work in adult literacy and education in Brazil as a Fulbright Fellow. She’s excited about immersing herself in the principles of popular education that shape Brazil’s adult education, leadership, and technical training programs.

Pollan remembers arriving at Mount Holyoke thinking she’d focus on social justice abroad. “Mount Holyoke encouraged those goals but also taught me the importance of being involved right where I was. That expanded my world in ways I never could have imagined.”

Natasha Naidoo ‘12 (above) has a lot to say about tea, be it black, green, or white. But it’s not just the pleasure of a well-brewed cup or the aesthetics of tea culture that sparks her enthusiasm. Rather, her interest is the antioxidant profile of each type of tea; that is, which tea most effectively slows down or even stops damage triggered by oxidative stress and free radicals.

The topic for her senior thesis—titled “The Impacts of Tea on Aging”—developed unexpectedly during the summer before her senior year. She was at the University of California, San Francisco as an intern in the highly competitive program run by the biotechnology company Amgen. Throughout those ten weeks, Naidoo and the other interns attended weekly research seminars, which culminated in a national symposium at UCLA. Keynote speaker Joe Miletich, senior vice president of research and development at Amgen, told the group that to go far in science they needed to be the best, and that meant “loving their work and being truly passionate about it.”

“I thought a lot about his words,” said Naidoo. “The concept of aging has always fascinated me because it is universal. And a lecture on Darwinian evolution and aging during my first year at Mount Holyoke had taught me that it can be studied in a lab setting. I also love tea. I decided to bring them together for my senior thesis.”

With support from Amy Frary ’90, associate professor of biological sciences, Naidoo began experimenting with reactive oxygen and various types of tea. She found that while the antioxidant profiles of green and black tea are different, in vitro studies show that they are equally effective at scavenging free radicals. As for their relative protective efficacy in protecting a whole organism from oxidative damage, she says that has yet to be determined.

It may, in fact, be a question that she revisits at the University of California, Berkeley where Naidoo now is a doctoral student in molecular cell biology. As she laughingly admits, “One of the reasons I am drawn to research about aging is that I need a few lifetimes to explore everything that interests me.”

Looking forward, Naidoo can see herself working at a biotechnology company for five to ten years after earning a Ph.D. After that, she might use the skills she’s acquired to start her own company or attend law school to become a patent lawyer.

She credits Mount Holyoke with stoking her ambitions, providing intensive research experiences, and connecting her to female role models in all the scientific disciplines. “During my four years at the College, I became a scientist. One who happens to be a woman. It’s a small point but a big distinction.”

Naidoo: During my four years . . . I became a scientist. One who happens to be a woman. It’s a small point but a big distinction.
Hometown: Paris, France

Likely major: I think I would really enjoy psychology, but I’m not sure yet.

About “La Revue,” a 100-year-old community tradition in Etretat, Normandy: I’ve performed in “La Revue” [a three-hour show with about 70 performers] every summer since I was five. Unfortunately, this year it was on August 25 and I was already on my way to Mount Holyoke. But I could not leave Etretat without bringing a little of myself to “La Revue!” So I made a video. I also helped manage the broadcasting—which meant being at every rehearsal, managing microphones and lighting, and often staying from 9 AM to midnight.

On being a dancer: I have been doing ballet for 12 years and this year I got my “diploma of end of study” with honors. Classical dance brings grace and lightness. It’s a lot of work but I always do it with pleasure.

MHC dance dreams: I’m taking a dance course in the first semester. My dream is to be a part of the MHC dance company!

Lessons learned as a math tutor: Tutoring has helped me improve myself because I had to find the right words and the right direction for my student. I learned how to explain things clearly and how to listen carefully.

Favorite bands: I love discovering new music, new artists. My current favorite bands are Electric Guest and Metronomy.

Hometown: New Haven, Connecticut

Likely major: Possibly chemistry or math. I’m excited to explore everything, especially philosophy and gender studies.

Track lessons: Track taught me that you can make friends by cheering for 14 seconds. The 100m dash lasted about that long, but the pleased looks in my teammates’ eyes lasted the whole meet, after they crossed the line to frenzied calls of, “You got it, push through!”

Circus dreams: I used to perform basic trapeze acts in a community circus. I’d love to learn more aerials, like silks. Aerials, especially in partner acts, make me feel strong and wildly free.

Best camp counselor moment: This was my sixth summer at Common Ground Ecology Camp. A gang of campers and I made a completely waterproof shelter out of sticks, dead leaves, and bark. We finished it in the pouring rain—then hid inside while I told stories.

Favorite quote: “Gonna do my dreaming with my eyes wide open / I’ll do my looking back with my eyes closed.”
—Clay Walker

Jazz band favorites: “Black Diamond” by the Rippingtons and “It’s for You” by Pat Metheny.
On being a triplet: My entire life, I have always been “one of the triplets.” That was my identity. I am really excited about heading to college on my own. Who is Varuna Nangia without her brother and sister?

Personal philosophy: Never stop wondering. The moment you stop asking questions is the moment you stop evolving.

Favorite good cause: My favorite project as president of F.O.S.A.R. (Finding Our South Asian Roots) was the Multicultural Cabaret, a fundraiser/talent show. With a multitude of acts—a dance performed to k-pop, Indian classical dances, a Russian soloist—it gives you a sense that no matter what your race, culture, heritage, or ethnicity is, you belong.

The value of failing: Rock climbing has taught me to keep trying and working whether or not I succeed. You fail 90 percent of the time, so you keep trying, training, and getting stronger.

21ST CENTURY SCHOLAR

Hometown: Sharon, Massachusetts

Likely major: Psychology. I’ve always been good at reading people’s emotions and sensing if something is bothering them. However, my major is something that can easily change. Every day I find something new that I could pursue.

Reading now: Myths to Live By, by Joseph Campbell

Reading now: The Ground Beneath Her Feet, by Salman Rushdie

Volunteer experience: I spent my summer volunteering at a literacy center in Mozambique called Livro Aberto. I helped update their library system and traveled into rural communities to teach Portuguese to the children. The children’s eagerness to learn, their ability to help each other, and their kindness despite their hard lives was inspiring.

Model UN: I’ve been a delegate at multiple Iberian Model United Nations and at the Hague. Every time I attend a Model UN conference, I leave with an indescribable excitement for our future. It’s the feeling of optimism towards a more just world and meeting people with a similar passion that I love most.

Passion for cello: I love playing the cello. A few years ago, after a literally last-minute release of a ticket, I got the chance to see Yo-Yo Ma perform. I will always remember the sight of him swaying passionately to his encore piece, Elgar’s Salut d’Amour. (His wife, Jill Hornor ’74, is a Mount Holyoke alumna!)

Favorite quote: “Rivers know this: there is no hurry. We shall get there some day.” —Winnie the Pooh

Gap year: I traveled to Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, South Africa, India, China, and Cambodia with Thinking Beyond Borders. My group had some extended stays with host families and supported communities in a specific service project. It’s true that the only way to really understand what is happening somewhere else is to go there and be a friend.

Discovering robotics: My dad encouraged me to attend a meeting of an all-girls robotics team one Saturday. I was completely reluctant to even get out of the car, but I’m glad that I did. I spent five years with the team, which we named Einstein’s Daughters. We formed long-lasting friendships, and the experience opened our eyes to career possibilities, as well as gender disparities in the field.

On my iPhone: I am still jamming to some foreign tunes, but I have also been excited about a new band for me: Imagine Dragons. I’m up for any suggestions, though!

Destiny Senegal: I went on a service trip with my school to work with impoverished children known in Senegal as talibé. We helped renovate some homes, and taught math and language skills. Although that work was deeply rewarding, it was the language immersion that I most appreciated. I encourage everyone to do a language immersion trip if possible.

Making music: I began playing piano at the age of nine. I like playing in jazz ensembles because it forces you to listen and communicate with the musicians around you. It has also opened the door to music competitions which, although stressful, are rewarding in the end.

Book recommendation: One of my all-time favorites is Beautiful Boy by David Sheff, which chronicles how a father coped with his son’s drug addiction. It’s a beautiful story, and heart-wrenching as well. Then I would encourage reading the son’s memoir—Tw eak by Nic Sheff.

Choosing MHC: When I arrived on campus for the accepted students program, Mount Holyoke made me feel special. Everyone I met seemed to care that I felt welcome, and there were some current MoHo students who I could thoroughly identify with.
Biological sciences professor Amy Camp has been awarded a $1.5 million grant from the National Institutes of Health for “exceptionally creative new investigators who propose highly innovative projects.”

Journalist Shannon Service ’97 gained the support of NPR to launch an intensive investigation into the practice of human trafficking in the Thai fishing industry.

The College pennant appeared prominently in an advertisement for Target during the opening ceremonies of the summer Olympics. The ad depicted happy high school students opening acceptance notices from their college of choice.

In a letter to the editor of the New York Times, MHC President Lynn Pasquerella addresses honesty in politics and whether politicians should ever lie.

MHC history professor Daniel Czitrom has attracted both national and local media attention for his work as the historical consultant on the new BBC America drama, Copper.

While interning for Reuters this summer, Anam Zehra ’14 reported on young Pakistanis who are pushing social boundaries through the underground party scene.

Five MHC students attended Rio+20 in June, seeing firsthand the struggle of world leaders to find a balance between economic growth and environmental protection.

The Chronicle of Higher Ed and ABC News note MHC is among the first colleges to support the Department of Education effort to help students better understand financial aid packages.

Michelle Brooks-Thompson ’06 passed the blind auditions on The Voice and advanced to the next round. She selected Maroon 5’s Adam Levine to coach her throughout season three of the popular NBC television show.

Jenni Lee ’15, who came to MHC by way of Berkeley, California, is a subject in the documentary Somewhere Between, which follows four young women who were adopted from China.

Hanna Pylväinen ’07 is generating a great buzz with her first novel, We Sinners. She talked with NPR’s Linda Wertheimer about the book and its parallels to her own life.