

We need to question our perceptions about the world around us.

She began to address a diverse set of questions, thanks to inspiration from her Caltech Y peers. Regarding their interests, Susan points out how, through programs like Make-A-Difference Day, Y students “lead so many projects—from cleaning up the beach, to working with students with physical disabilities, to visiting seniors

in the local nursing home, to helping the homeless.”

Having grown up in suburban New Jersey, Susan had never interacted with the homeless before.

Now through the Y, she organizes monthly visits to the Union Station Homeless Services Shelter to prepare a warm meal for residents. She is surprised by how easily she can have discussions with some of the Union Station residents who have fallen on hard times.

Along with three ExComm students—Neha Samdaria, Margaret Chiu, and Shruti Mishra—Susan also organized an Alternative Spring Break trip to the International Rescue Committee in Los Angeles. Their project included teaching job-interviewing skills as part of the organization’s effort to resettle refugees.

Reflecting on this experience, she says, “I think the media often gives us a stock image of a refugee as an African orphan in a war-torn nation. But through this trip, our group was able to see how this image does not encompass all refugees. We worked with refugees from the Middle East who were seeking religious freedom.”

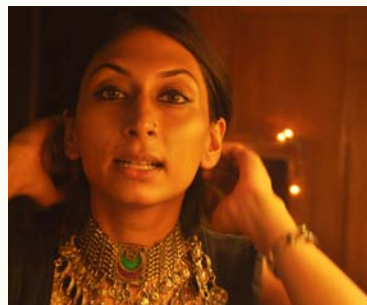
From her various experiences, she has learned that “we need to question our perceptions about the world around us—to stop and ask if our beliefs align with reality—so we can ask ourselves if the projects we work on truly have a positive impact.”

Studenski alumna Iram Parveen Bilal sees life through multicolored lenses

Iram can trace her passion for filmmaking and dance as far back as she can remember. As a young child in Nigeria, she “slept” in her parents’ bed while they pre-screened Bollywood films for their kids. During her sneak previews, Iram especially soaked up the dance scenes which, she says, “instilled the bug of dancing” in her, making it her foremost passion—above film. However, dancing is taboo in Pakistan, where Iram lived much of her life, making a dance career out of the question. After her extended family of scientists sent her off to America to attend Caltech, she confronted the challenge of balancing diverse interests. In between film festivals and filmings, Iram gives us a quick synopsis of her journey with the Y.

I started with the Caltech Y in 2001, when the Y took a group of us to Mexico for community service. We tiled a community center in Tecolote. That experience helped ground my desire to be more active in the Caltech student community. So I became more active in student government and by starting clubs. I also became more passionate about mentoring and guidance, and when I learned about the Y tutoring program, I started tutoring high-school students and am now going on eleven years of tutoring experience!

When my interests all came back to dance, I was able to delve into various Y-sponsored activities like the international week [now called World Fest], where I performed and choreographed. Years later I returned to dance, in a more



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philosophical manner, through the Watson Fellowship. For this, I travelled to India, Tanzania, and Ireland to study the motivation behind body movements in various cultures.

Meanwhile, the idea of film started entertaining me through the limited but strong film curriculum at Caltech. That too was strengthened by directing



a dance documentary as my final submission for the Watson Fellowship.

In the years between the Tecolote and Watson trips, as I got to know

the people at the Y, I heard about opportunities including the Studenski Award. I was at a huge crossroads, choosing between science and film, and it sounded like just the right grant for me, so I applied. With this award, I was able to go out and experiment in the craft of filmmaking before applying to film schools. I spent the summer between my junior and senior year at the University of Sussex at Brighton, taking a digital production course and building my resume for film school.

I am a filmmaker to tell stories and to inspire dialogue about sociopolitical issues. Having just finished shooting my first feature length film, "JOSH"—a mystery thriller set in Karachi, I'm excited to share it with my audiences and hopefully build on a career in engaging, thought-provoking media. [Learn more at www.facebook.com/thefilmjosh and www.iramparveenbilal.com.] In the midst of being a full-time filmmaker, tutoring keeps me connected to science, which is important because, in a strange way, I do miss it a lot. However the career switch was certainly right for me. There is nothing more fulfilling to me than telling stories and, in the process, inspiring change.

What's Frank Dryden's passion? The Caltech Y

I was always curious about many things besides science, and the Y provided an outlet with its exploratory discussions and an escape from science. It's not that I dislike science. I like it very much. But the world has a lot more things going on.

While planning to be an engineer, I knew I would need to give back to the public at large, and therefore I needed to know things about issues beyond technical ones. Scientists and engineers get so wrapped up in what they're doing that they're considered "nerds." I just think we need scientists and engineers who have the ability to relate to the world around them. I think the Y helped provide that for me and others.

The genius of the Y, in my opinion, is that students are responsible for carrying out the programs with guidance and support from Y staff members. I think that's a unique way of working and one of the things that make it a good leadership opportunity in addition to getting students to think about issues beyond academics—political, social and ethical issues.

My passion is my belief in the Y. It came when I was a student and has lasted more than 60 years. I still support the Y as a Friend because I do think it makes a difference.



Frank Dryden, right, talks with George Johnston.

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