



BMA PROVES FERTILE GROUND FOR PERSONAL GROWTH... EVEN FOR FACULTY

Lauren Struck concludes 12-year academy faculty tenure to enroll in Medical School

Lauren Struck's impact on the BMA community is undeniable and spans from 2004 to 2017 – time during which she taught Philosophy, Biology, Chemistry, English 8 and English 9, acted as Director of College Counselling and was Academic Director.

Born and raised in Ligonier, PA, Lauren has always been a lifelong learner, completing a B.A. at Colgate University with double major (Philosophy and Religion and Asian Studies) in 1996 and a Master's in Theological Studies at Harvard Divinity School in 2000.

In just a few months, she'll close a rich BMA chapter to enroll at the Larner College of Medicine at the University of Vermont as a member of the class of 2021.

We caught up with Lauren to reflect on her time at BMA and journey to her new professional challenge.

When and how did you first get involved with BMA?

I moved to the Northeast Kingdom following Divinity School and after meeting my husband (a Lyndon State College graduate) on a climbing trip the summer between graduate school. I entered education in 2000 as a science teacher and guidance counselor at the King George School. In 2004, after four years of intense emotional growth at that boarding school, I decided to explore other local high schools. I interviewed with Craig Kauffman, then Academic Director at BMA, along with Tom De Carlo and Kirk Dwyer. I knew I wanted to work at a place where there was trust, respect, and an ability to honor each person's path. Shortly after my interview, I attended graduation as a spectator to see what I had gotten myself into. It was the year that Shelley Glover died and although I never met her, I witnessed the outpouring of love and grief that surrounded graduation that year. That was when I knew that this was a very special place. A three-hour graduation in forty-degree weather where people celebrated each other, past and present. I was ready to earn my way into that community.

What attracted you to BMA?

The two things that confirmed my choice to become part of this community were lunch announcements and the graduation ceremony. I remember that Matt Whitcomb, former BMA Nordic coach and current USST coach, sat with me during my interview along with several students. They were interviewing me and they also acknowledged that I needed to interview them too. BMA is a vibrant, living, breathing, moving, community. It requires that people be present to it. I could tell that people took their responsibility seriously, both students and staff alike. During my first year, I still remember some of the upperclassmen grilling me (lovingly!) about my

intentions to be a part of what they fiercely guarded as theirs: Amy Dombroski, Elle Anderson, Silas Gill, Lauren McGrath, Harry Poole, Jack Reed, Jay Taylor, Kelsey Levine. I could keep going.

When did you start to think about applying to Med School? How far back does that dream of yours go?

That dream arose recently in the fall of 2014 when I was 41 years old. That spring, I started interviewing people from all walks of life, asking them what most satisfied and challenged them about their careers. I interviewed lawyers, accountants, investment bankers, entrepreneurs, nurses, CEOs. I was gathering stories so that I could direct my own. By the time the fall came around, I felt no closer to identifying what my next move was but I had reduced my hours to a part time position at BMA so I could make room for my reflections. You could say the realization hit me like a lightning bolt, but it felt more like an old companion who had been on the journey with me the whole time, nudging me in the elbow. I finally acknowledged that dream's existence and in the spring of 2015. I started taking classes (physics and genetics), got my LNA license and started exploring ways to get experience in healthcare.

What's been the application process for Med School?

Getting into medical school is much more complicated than getting into college! I thought I had experience with applications with fifteen years of college counselling experience. But it did me absolutely no good! It was a grueling process of self-analysis and reflection as I had to clarify my goals and aspirations in the application process. I do not like to sell myself but that is what was required. For two years, I took classes in upper level science in order to prove I could still hold my own in the classroom. I studied for the MCAT and I took it twice. I shadowed local physicians who welcomed me into their offices. I became a licensed nurse assistant and worked per diem at a local nursing home (St. Johnsbury Health and Rehab). I applied to five schools in 2015, interviewed at two schools and was waitlisted at one school. I applied again in 2016 to twenty schools, interviewed at five schools and was accepted to two. I made two major changes to my application: I brought my MCAT score up and used a professional educational consultant for an hour consultation providing me with feedback.

What's your goal after you complete Med School?

My goal is to become a primary care physician, ultimately ending up back in the Northeast Kingdom! I want to engage with people on a longitudinal scale, across the socioeconomic spectrum, providing practical direction and support with regards to their health and well-being.

What are you looking forward to the most in your studies and new chapter?

I LOVE the classroom and it has been so much fun being on the other end these past few years. Being a student is indulgent and stimulating and exhausting. I can't wait to learn more SCIENCE – I miss teaching biology and chemistry. In my anatomy class last year, I got back to my artistic roots and did a lot of drawing to help me learn body parts. Learning is a hugely creative process for me. I am excited to learn the manual skills involved in patient care. The beauty of medicine is that it is a trade which requires physical as well as mental problem-solving skills. I can't wait for the anatomy labs – especially at UVM, which are on the top floor of the medical school rather in the basement.

Are there any lessons you learned at BMA that will help you in this new chapter?

At BMA, we all risk failure in order to grow. That ability to take healthy risks is a mindset that I am so lucky to be immersed in. Burkies are willing to make forays into places that scare them. I see students and staff alike making that choice to commit to the fall line, day in and day out. There is a moment in many conversations where the

people I engage with are willing to go deeper. I've seen it in my English class this year, when a student jumps into the editing mode just one more time to figure out what they really want to say in their analytical paper. I feel it when the conversation takes a pause, and we can acknowledge that the terrain we are exploring is new to us but also terrain that is as old as the world itself. People here – both students and staff – are recreating themselves every day.

How does BMA also empower/inspire faculty members to grow and pursue their own dreams in parallel to those of the students?

I am inspired by my colleagues. BMA provides substantial resources for professional development, and I see coaches and teachers alike jump in and get fired up about their classes or workshops. But more importantly, my colleagues engage in self-reflection. My office is right at the top of the stairs that are next to Marcia's office. I have been the lucky recipient of regular visits from each and every teacher, and sometimes coaches, who stop in and share. They might share stories or ask advice about a dilemma. They are continually reflecting on their actions and ideas, ruminating on how to reach a student or if they could have presented a lesson in a better way or at a better time. I love being able to pop into Kirk's office, and now Jory's office, any time. We all have open doors. We engage with the world with our bodies and our minds and our souls. My colleagues are an inspiration to me, and I have remained vibrant and alive and fluid because of their active engagement and inquiry.

What's your fondest BMA memory?

So many! My daughter, McKinley, was born in the car on Interstate 89 while the whole school was running up Route 100 for the GMR in 2005. I couldn't wait to introduce her to the community and she grew up around campus. She loved Ronnie Berlack who somehow jiggled his eyes when she asked him to, Hunter Lord whose grounding presence enamored her, and Dannica Ashnault who babysat her once and made quite an impression. I remember meeting in the Common Area of Witherell for Philosophy class and writing on the windows with black dry-erase marker in lieu of a white board.

I helped lead the Senior Trip in 2011 with Darrell Gray and Sam Damon. It was a self-powered bike trip through Vermont, riding up to Craftsbury, then down to Richmond, and back home. There was one day that it was about forty degrees, raining, and we met up in Montpelier at Hunger Mountain Coop. I distinctly remember making it across town, down the alley, and to the parking lot where a van was running. I stopped my bike and immediately collapsed onto the pavement, which felt strangely warm, and just started sobbing. I had reached my limit physically and mentally and was probably slightly hypothermic. Sam shuffled me into the van and put a warm drink in my hands. That night, we all slept in the ski lodge at Cochran's and re-formulated our goals and plans and laughed and warmed up. Later that week we stayed in a community center in East Montpelier that the Stephen's had coordinated for us. It was upon returning from that trip that I got the phone call that my son Holden, who was three years old, had fallen out of his second story window and ONLY FRACTURED HIS WRIST.

What will you miss most about BMA?

I will miss the community. I also know I am part of this community, I helped shape it and it shaped me. I know there are alumni out there who are living and thriving and keep coming back. I had lunch in the dining hall yesterday, and there was a tray with Kieffer Christianson's name on it. He graduated in 2010 and was here training with the Ski Team. I don't know where the tray came from – we got rid of trays several years ago. When Kieffer was here, he did not use plates or bowls. Everything went right on that brown textured tray. Sarah (the chef) HATED it! Each Burkie carves out their particular space here, and Burke is a lumpy, clumpy, bumpy shaped

place where everyone can fall right back into their place and call it home. I will also miss my walk from Frazier to the dining hall. You can't help but look sideways at that view. I always slow my steps and breathe in awe at this magnificent backdrop.

Other comments you have or thoughts you want to share?

I definitely think that my fondest memory is a tough one – I feel like I didn't do that justice. I'm sure I left out whole epochs and there are people that have indelibly affected me and their stories aren't surfacing, right now. There are so many other people to honor, and other stories to tell. But I have appreciated the chance to share.

The entire BMA community wishes Lauren all the best on her studies at Med School. We thank her for her tremendous contributions to the BMA family.