

# All We Want Is To Be Able to Learn More

Vanisha Gandhi '10 (Human Biology),  
Teaching in Kadod, India



**Vanisha Gandhi '10** (Human Biology) was a Haas Summer Fellow in 2008 with the Nanubhai Education Foundation in Kadod, India, teaching spoken English to children. Since 2004, the Nanubhai Education Foundation has helped vulnerable students in rural India attain skills so that they can participate in India's economic opportunities. Her fellowship was so successful that, with the support of the Foundation, she returned to Kadod this May to continue implementing her English and technology curriculum. This fall, Vanisha will join the Public Service Scholars Program to write her honors thesis on the effects of the summer program on the academic and psychosocial development of adolescent students in Kadod. To learn more about her experiences, please visit <http://vanisha-adventuresinindiapart2.blogspot.com>.

**June 25, 2008:** I have finally captured a glimpse of the monsoon rain a week after my arrival in Kadod. I'm interning with the Nanubhai Education Foundation in Kadod, a rural town in Gujarat, India. My ultimate goal for this fellowship is to implement an integrated English and technology summer enrichment program, which has never been done before in this region. Over the next ten weeks, students will develop creativity and critical thinking skills that academics in the Gujarat education system often deemphasize.

I've only been teaching for a week and I've already fallen in love with all of my students! Kalpesh, a small boy who pronounces all his f's as p's, is my favorite. The students in his morning class are motivated and extremely eager, but many are also shy and have limited knowledge of English. Not Yashpal, who walks into class with his Barbie backpack every morning singing Hindu prayers. He is the first to raise his hand to respond to every question in class, yelling "Teacher! Teacher!" to get my attention. We recently started an autobiography assignment on the computer and Yashpal wrote the most heartfelt sentences in the past, present, and future tenses. This class has mostly phenomenal writers; however, there are a few difficult ones that I hope will start feeling more comfortable with class material. I have most difficulty with innocent-looking Hitesh—he won't speak a word of English and wants me to translate everything in Gujarati for him. But I won't give in.

The days go by so fast. For the past week, I and the three other American teachers in Kadod have been caught up in a media frenzy—journalists have been interviewing and filming us for stories for the local newspapers and news stations. It's quite a foreign concept to have Americans teaching at a school in rural India. Ironically, because I look Indian and speak Gujarati, the reporters often do not realize that I am American!

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**May 16, 2009 :** I'm back teaching at Kadod High School after almost a year. My efforts last summer created the impetus for the development of an intensive integrated English and technology curriculum, which was also piloted by the Nanubhai Education Foundation at Kadod High School. I started the summer program last Monday and classes are off to a great start!

I commute by bus from Bardoli, a town about 18 kilometers away, and the journey every morning has been so rewarding. I've gotten a feel for what life is like for the locals, and it's fascinating as a researcher to fit into my surroundings without seeming like an outsider. As I walk to school, the townspeople greet me with "Good morning, Teacher," "Hello, Ma'am," and "Madam, how are you?," which is a favorite among the little kids around town, who shout it out and then scurry off without waiting for the answer.

In my classes, I integrate English and technology through storybook projects, in which we code our written and illustrated stories into HTML to create a finished product. All of my students are so eager to learn; some have even started saying "yeah" and "ummmm," and although a lot of the time it's to make fun of me, I can tell that they really want to learn to speak English.

As we head into our second week of the program, I leave you with something that one of my students told me as he and his fellow classmates engaged in their daily ritual of escorting me to the Kadod bus stop: "All we want is to be able to learn more. And learn to speak English and use computers so we can do something good for our family...and for our country!"

<http://haas.stanford.edu>





David L. Jaffe, MS, teaches ENGR110/210: Perspectives in Assistive Technology, a winter quarter course that explores the broad spectrum of issues surrounding the design, development, and use of technology that benefits people with disabilities. This three-unit course consists of twice-weekly one-hour lectures by notable professionals, clinicians, and individuals with disabilities, as well as student participation in a team-based project that addresses a need of an individual with a disability. Students brainstorm the problem, submit a design proposal, fabricate and test a prototype, and present their team's functional solution at the end of the course. Lectures are open to all students and community members.

**1 Assistive Technology (AT) sounds very broad. How do you define it?**  
I would define assistive technology to include not only the devices that allow people to overcome their limitations, but also the broader issues of providing these devices, namely research, design/development, policy concerns, education, outcomes measurement, etc.

**2 The course consists of lectures by medical professionals, scientists, lawyers, engineers, product designers, individuals with disabilities, and others. What led you to structure the class in this format?**

When I worked as a research engineer for the Palo Alto VA for many years, I was exposed to a diverse team of people including engineers, therapists, and physicians who all worked to improve the health and independence of people with disabilities. I wanted students to be exposed to this broader realm of disability, rehabilitation, and assistive technology. While I didn't have the expertise across all areas, I knew people who did, so it was natural to invite them to be a part of the course. I present the initial lecture, an introduction to AT, and let my colleagues take it from there.

This format does not have the same kind of flow that comes from teaching sequentially from a textbook; rather, it is a series of diverse topics. In one class, I might have a researcher talk about her work, and then invite a person with a disability to speak about his life experiences in the next class. I find this interesting, and so do the students. This year, the class was given a tour of the VA's spinal cord injury unit, which took students out of the classroom and into a clinic where the rehabilitation work actually happens. They were able to interact with professionals as well as veterans with disabilities.

**3 What is your favorite lecture?**

I often ask the students, "Who is disabled?" For example, what about a wheelchair user who is only able to use his thumb? He can only use his thumb, but he is able to get around independently in his powered wheelchair. And he can use a device to choose words that will be spoken by a speech output system. This happens to be Stephen Hawking, who many consider to be the world's smartest person. Is he disabled? What about superman? Or superman sitting next to kryptonite? Or an amputee with carbon-fiber artificial legs who can run faster than an able-bodied athlete? I sometimes mention an episode of "Outer Limits" in which a person's head is completely covered in surgical bandages. When they are removed, we see a beautiful woman. But she lives in a closed society of disfigured people. Is she disabled?

What I try to do here is to put a human frame around disability. It is all too easy to talk about body parts and function—arms, legs, walking, etc.—but you lose the concept of the person. I have a photograph of a colleague who is of short stature and I ask the class how they should refer to him. As a midget? A dwarf? A scooter guy, since he rides one? When I click to the next slide, it says "Bob"—we call him Bob, because that's his name. You want to refer to the person, rather than use labels.

## 4 Students are tasked with the design of a product to address the needs of individuals with disabilities. What is the process?

The main requirements are that the students address a real need and involve a person with a disability or a health care professional who works with individuals with disabilities. Students work with these individuals as equal members of a team during the definition, design, fabrication, and product-testing phases.

This is where the service-learning component comes into play: a connection is made between students and an individual with a disability or health care professional. I often come up with project ideas for students after asking people in the community for suggestions. There is a group of wheelchair users at the VA who are working with students to develop a device to help them open doors, for example.

## 5 How do you see this class fitting into the concept of public service?

I think that ENGR110/210 is an ideal public service/service-learning course. It exposes students to the concept of assistive technology as they work to solve problems faced by individuals with disabilities in the community. The course lectures are open to the community, so students are able to interact with non-students, including those with disabilities. Community members, in turn, are able to take advantage of the local expertise of the presenters and become involved in projects with the students. Everybody benefits. I believe that all students have a desire to do something socially responsible and that this course provides them with an opportunity to do that.

To listen to lectures, learn about projects developed in the class, or contact David Jaffe, please visit: [www.stanford.edu/class/engr110](http://www.stanford.edu/class/engr110).

## Projects from ENGR 110/210

### 2009

- iPhone Dialer for Users with Visual Impairments
- Handi-Cart
- Sonification of Movement
- Opening Doors

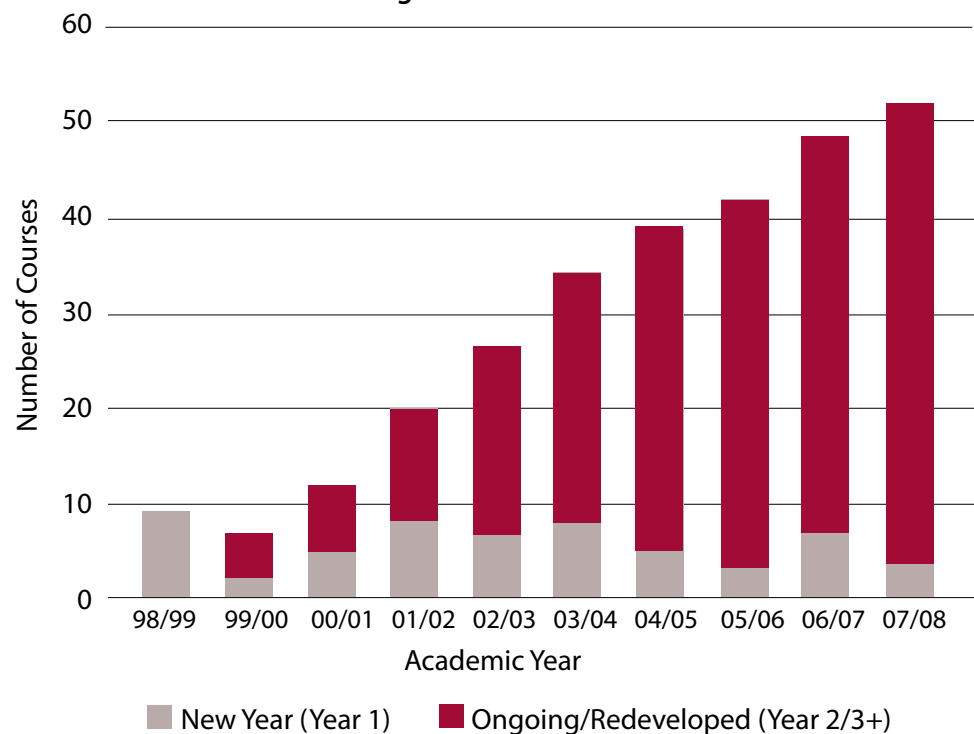
### 2008

- LiquidMetal: Redesign of the White Cane
- Let's Get Physical: Pediatric Gait Project
- ElevAid

### 2007

- Aid for Donning an Artificial Leg
- Accessible Fishing Rod
- Aid for Improving Mobility around the Home for the Elderly
- Rain Protection Device for Wheel Chair Users

Service Learning Initiative Courses 1998–2007



Since 1984, the development of service-learning courses has been part of the Haas Center's strategy for institutionalizing service and connecting to Stanford's academic mission. In 2008, we began compiling quantitative and qualitative data on the history of service-learning at Stanford. Stay tuned for more information. We will present an in-depth analysis for our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2010.

# Mauritanian Timeline

Reflection from Noel Foster '08  
(Political Science; MA '08 Sociology),  
International Postgraduate Fellow



## July 2008

I arrive in Mauritania's capital, Nouakchott. I learn that a piece of butter is referred to as a "Kennedy," after Washington sent food aid to newly-independent Mauritania in the early 1960s. Until then, Maure nomads' sole knowledge of America came from shipwrecked sailors and other curiosities that washed up on their shores.

## August 6

I realize something is amiss when I hear that the generals have been sacked, then hear complete silence on the radio. In the wake of a bloodless palace coup, President Abdallahi, the first democratically-elected president, is overthrown.

## Late August

The ICC conducts a poll of the 100 most influential Mauritians. We find a surprising level of agreement between members of opposite ends of the political spectrum, who agree to the need for new elections and constitutional reform.

## September 15

I have broken the fast every Ramadan evening with my adoptive Maure family. Going all day without water in the late summer heat defeated me. If Mauritians fast throughout the day, they compensate throughout the night with feasts and revelry.

## October 7

At the request of ICC, I have contacted dozens of foundations for support, with little success. Almost daily electricity outages hinder office work. A surprise birthday party lightens the mood. In the meantime, grilled daily over the latest developments stateside, I am stunned by how many locals I meet are following the U.S. elections more attentively than I.

## November 28

Within my adoptive family, Mauritania's independence day passes quietly, a rather somber occasion given how much of the country is now divided into three camps: those supporting the junta, those opposed to the junta on the side of the toppled president, and a third group opposed to both positions and both men, quickly dubbed the "neither, nor" faction.

## December 25

Just a year earlier, I had spent an atypical, tranquil Christmas in Mauritania while researching my thesis. Upon returning to America this year, the brutal shift from the picturesque landscape of undulating dunes in a never-ending summer to a Northeast blizzard jarred me. What I had grown accustomed to, such as the call to prayer by the muezzin, struck me by its absence.