

Ted Levin '99

Postdoctoral Research Fellow in Linguistics

For Ted Levin '99, attending school as a young child was a frustrating experience. "I had some pretty significant learning differences," Ted said. "I struggled to stay focused in the classroom and was not really receptive to learning. I also struggled with reading which only compounded these issues." So if you had asked him 22 years ago if he would someday be happily working in the world of academia—and studying language—he would have scoffed at the idea. And yet, that is precisely where he is today.

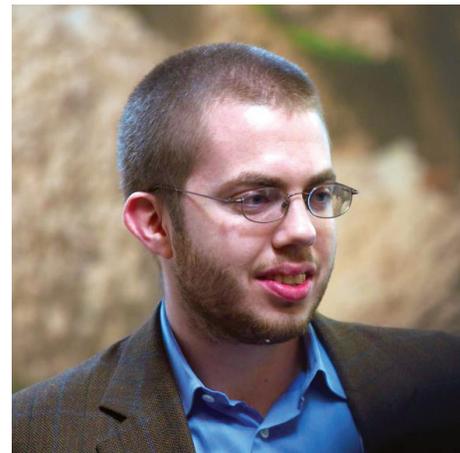
Having recently earned a Ph.D. in Linguistics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Ted is now enjoying his new role as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow in the University of Maryland's Department of Linguistics. Ted recalls that his interest in linguistics (the scientific study of language and its structure) first sparked during his high school years at Harrisburg Academy and further flourished at Brandeis University. However, he credits the skills he learned at Benchmark for helping him to pursue his passion. "I would be lying if I said that I've totally overcome my learning differences," he said. "I think I have always had a bit of a short attention span, and Benchmark helped me learn to cope with an ever-present desire to always be doing something different. It takes an active effort on my part to sit through a three-hour lecture or a day of conference presentations, and even to sit

down to write a paper. But Benchmark taught me skills to help me stay focused that I still find helpful."

In addition to improving his reading skills and building his self-confidence, Ted attributes his time at Benchmark for helping him discover his love for learning. "Before going to Benchmark [in 1994], I really didn't like school," he said. "I was embarrassed that I was falling behind my classmates... [but] Benchmark really changed my mind about school and helped me discover just how much I liked learning. I'm pretty sure I wouldn't be doing what I'm doing today if I had not gone to Benchmark."

With days filled with research, working with native speakers of languages, theorizing about the data that's been collected, and attending lectures, Ted is thrilled to be working in a field that really motivates him. "The Linguistics Department at the University of Maryland is excellent... I am incredibly lucky to be surrounded by so many smart students and faculty members," he commented. "They are all doing really interesting work and are willing to share their time and knowledge with me. I think that makes my own work much better."

For someone so young (Ted is just 28), he already has an impressive number of professional presentations and papers to his name. His current research is focused on the syntax (the arrangement of words that make up



sentences) of Austronesian languages. "The Austronesian languages make up a large language family spoken in Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Madagascar, and throughout Oceania," he noted. "They are very different from familiar languages like English and other European languages, and even well-known non-European languages like Chinese, Japanese, or Arabic."

"The hope of researching languages is to understand how they are the same and how they are different," he continued. "Understanding the range of possibilities has the potential to reveal deep insights about the nature of the brain."

For the future, Ted is setting his sights on obtaining a tenure-track position in linguistics at a research university and making contributions to his field of study, including figuring out how to better understand how language is biologically encoded in the brain. Besides his work, Ted enjoys spending time with friends, and, because he is a bit of a "foodie," finding new restaurants and trying out new recipes at home.

His advice to Benchmark students is to develop good learning habits as early as possible. "Benchmark will provide opportunities for you to acquire these skills, but you need to take them seriously. Developing good habits early is essential for success at higher levels of education and the work place." 

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