

Five Syracuse University students named 2009 Engagement Fellows, will remain in Syracuse after graduation to work on community sustainable development projects

Monday, March 16, 2009

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Five Syracuse University seniors will continue pursuing [Scholarship in Action](#) in Central New York after graduation as recipients of the first-ever [SU Engagement Fellowships](#), a yearlong program supported by the Kauffman Foundation that contributes to paid employment locally and arranges remitted tuition for courses at SU and professional and faculty mentors.

The 2009 Engagement Fellows are Garland deGraffenried, a thesis student in the [School of Architecture](#); Samantha Harmon, a senior sculpture major in the [College of Visual and Performing Arts](#); Carissa Matthews, a senior public relations major in the [S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications](#); Robert Sherman, a senior triple major in information management and technology in the [School of Information Studies](#) and entrepreneurship and emerging enterprises, and finance in the [Martin J. Whitman School of Management](#); and Elizabeth Slate, a senior sociology major in The College of Arts and Sciences.

The fellows will participate in local projects that incorporate the principles of SU's *Scholarship in Action* vision, allowing them to explore innovative ways to help create sustainable development in Central New York. Projects this year include designing infill neighborhoods in downtown Syracuse to form a more cohesive downtown; developing a new not-for-profit to enhance sustainable living; expanding a marketing business that will serve small businesses; increasing access for local residents to take advantage of available resources that will help promote sustainability; and supporting young students educationally through the new Say Yes to Education initiative.

The SU Engagement Fellowships are a project of [Imagining America](#), a national consortium of more than 80 colleges and universities whose mission is to strengthen the public role and democratic purposes of the humanities, arts and design. Program partners include [Enitiative](#) (the Syracuse Campus-Community Entrepreneurship Initiative) and the [Syracuse Center of Excellence](#) (SyracuseCoE), a federation of more than 200 businesses and institutions that collaborate on sustainable innovations to improve built and urban environments.

"The Engagement Fellows are poised to make a difference in Syracuse," says SU Chancellor and President Nancy Cantor. "As energetic and enterprising new graduates who already have been cultivating connections across SU and across sectors of the community, they will be ideally situated to catalyze communities of experts focused on vitally important local issues that resonate globally."

The program is designed to support the students' projects by opening up the resources of the University and the community to fellows as they explore new ideas. An added incentive for the region is that Central New York companies, nonprofit organizations and entrepreneurs who hire an engagement fellow receive support from the Kauffman Foundation toward salary and hiring expenses.

"We see the Engagement Fellowship Program as good for all involved, as it provides newly graduating students with an incentive to stay in Central New York," says Jan Cohen-Cruz, director of Imagining America. "We also hope it will be a useful model nationally, as communities increasingly look to local institutions of higher education to contribute long term to their development."

Selection of the five fellows was based on their academic record, their history in experiential learning, an in-depth interview, a faculty or professional recommendation, and assurance that they were on track to graduate.

"These students are among the best and brightest of the Syracuse University graduates for 2009, and instead of taking a job in Boston or Los Angeles they chose to stay in Syracuse starting new technology companies, new nonprofit organizations and working on local initiatives including Say Yes, the [Near Westside Initiative](#) and the Center of Excellence," says Bruce Kingma, SU associate provost for entrepreneurship and innovation and director of the Enitiative program. "To revitalize the Central New York economy we need new ideas, new actions, new strategies. The Engagement Fellows are one of these new ideas-keeping young, educated, creative and talented graduates in Central New York will make a difference."

Following are descriptions of the projects of the first five Engagement Fellows. Additional information is available at http://imaginingamericatest.syr.edu/syrinitatives_engage.html.

Garland deGraffenried

DeGraffenried, a thesis student in the School of Architecture, will work as a designer with King & King Architects LLP on a

unique project that seeks to re-link several areas of Syracuse by seeking out developers and financiers to partner with community and University Hill entities that want to see a more cohesive downtown area. "We want to bring the city together and make it more like a mosaic of neighborhoods that interconnect, thus filling gaps that are found on the edges of the more attractive areas such as Armory and Hanover squares," deGraffenried says.

DeGraffenried will work in collaboration with his colleagues at King & King Architects and Julia Czerniak, associate professor in the School of Architecture. Czerniak is also director of UPSTATE: A Center for Design, Research and Real Estate—a design research and advocacy organization housed within the School of Architecture that engages innovative design and development practices to address critical issues of urban revitalization in the City of Syracuse and the upstate region.

The collaborative group will design and develop ideas for mixed-use, small sustainable 'mix-pods'-buildings comprising residential units, retail space and a public amenity. The mixed program will serve downtown residents and businesses, helping to architecturally blend an already diverse city.

The buildings will be marketed to a younger generation and cater to specific institutions, such as housing for SU graduate students or young medical professionals at SUNY Upstate Medical University. Mix-pods will allow many of the institutions on the east side of Interstate-81—such as SU, SUNY Upstate and the SyracuseCoE— to have a presence in downtown Syracuse, which will help re-energize and reactivate the urban fabric while encouraging a more integrated city.

"Thanks to the Chancellor's vision and Dean Mark Robbins' dedication, students at the School of Architecture get so many opportunities to connect closely with the City of Syracuse," deGraffenried says. "This fellowship is giving me an opportunity to use what I've learned in a practical way to grow both professionally and academically in a city and a community that have great potential and charm."

Samantha Harmon

Harmon will work for Say Yes to Education and SU during her fellowship. She will serve as an after-school art teacher in the Syracuse City School District and also work on an interdisciplinary, collaborative design-build project on Syracuse's Near Westside with her faculty advisor-Marion Wilson, director of community initiatives in visual arts at SU—as well as Syracuse area high school students and SU students. The collaborative group will design, construct and run a center in the Near Westside neighborhood to establish community entrepreneurship as well as harbor artistic expression.

Participants from SU and the city will work together within the frame work of an SU "Social Sculpture" course taught by Wilson.

"What's really exciting about my year as an Engagement Fellow is the multifaceted nature of my work," Harmon says.

In this synergistic exchange, high school students will contribute to design-build processes, as well as acquire an understanding of entrepreneurial practices in the context of the creation of a viable enterprise in their own neighborhood.

And as part of her fellowship, Harmon plans to take courses in minority/women entrepreneurs at the Whitman School and an introduction to architecture course in the School of Architecture.

Carissa Matthews

Matthews' passion for the Syracuse community led to her decision to stay after graduation. During her fellowship, she will work in communications and public relations at the SyracuseCoE. Her communication duties will include bridging the gap between the Syracuse community and the SyracuseCoE through educational and outreach programs.

Her goal is for Syracuse residents to learn about leading-edge innovations being developed in Central New York by SyracuseCoE partners and to begin incorporating some of these available and emerging techniques to "green" their lives and homes to help the environment as well as their budgets.

"The Chancellor's *Scholarship in Action* message really hit home when I realized I was about to graduate and yet felt that I wanted to continue being a part of all the exciting innovative changes taking place in Syracuse," Matthews says. "Being named an Engagement Fellow was therefore an incredible gift to me—I feel really blessed to be living in a community that allows me to make a difference during an important time in Syracuse's history."

Matthews says the fellowship will allow her to live downtown in the Hawley Green district, which was important to her as it's within walking distance of work and on the edge of the University Hill. "It's a neighborhood that's coming to life, and I love that I can be really 'green' and walk to work, which is really important to me," she says.

Matthews plans to take an energy, environment and resource policy course as she soon as she starts her fellowship.

Robert Sherman

Having already launched Brand-Yourself.com LLC with fellow SU students, Sherman was quick to jump at the opportunity to stay in Syracuse after graduation to develop and expand his business.

Sherman is co-founder of Brand-Yourself.com, an Internet-based enterprise developed to transform job seekers from "net nobodies" to visible, credible, proactive job applicants having a polished Web presence. Sherman co-owns Brand-Yourself.com with Pete Kistler, a junior in the School of Information Studies, and Trace Cohen, a junior in the Whitman School.

"The fellowship gives me a great opportunity to stay in Syracuse, where we have a well-connected source of resources to grow our enterprise-from students to entrepreneurs, to faculty experts, and small businesses in the community who provide us a natural customer base, to the support framework available at the Syracuse Tech Garden," Sherman says.

Sherman says the entrepreneurial bug bit him at age 16, when he started his first successful venture. He now hopes to expand the principles of Brand-Yourself to help start-ups and small businesses. The spin-off company will be called Bootstrapbrand.com. With this spin-off, small businesses and entrepreneurs can utilize tools already in use at Brand-Yourself to create a solid Web presence to "brand" and showcase their business at a reasonable cost.

Sherman will use his fellowship year to strengthen and expand Brand-Yourself to reach out to more people, as well as create a stand-alone platform for BootStrapBrand by conducting market research, including focus groups and system development, in order to get a better understanding of the needs of small businesses in Syracuse's South Side and West Side neighborhoods.

Craig Watters, assistant professor of entrepreneurial practice in the Whitman School, will serve as Sherman's faculty advisor.

Elizabeth Slate

Thanks to the Engagement Fellowship program, Slate will continue developing The Alchemical Nursery Project Inc., a registered 501c3 nonprofit organization that she started organizing in January 2008. The Alchemical Nursery Project seeks to promote sustainable and regenerative urban lifestyles and landscapes through organizing in the community, hosting educational events and workshops, and developing programs such as urban-community supported agriculture for people with market gardens who may not have enough money to have their own stall at local farmers' markets.

As an Engagement Fellow, Slate will be transitioning from board president to executive director of the nonprofit organization. She will work with her partners- Frank Cetera, a SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry alumnus and a green business advisor with the Small Business Development Center at Onondaga Community College, and former SU student Adrienne Allen, a local artist who works with the YMCA after-school art program at Syracuse's Delaware Elementary School-as well as the organization's student lawyer from the Syracuse University Law Clinic to complete the transition process.

The Alchemical Nursery Project is setting up headquarters at 717 Otisco St. and is developing strategies for several long-term projects. Among these are the Alchemical Nursery Project's newly developed Quinta Essential Fiscal Sponsorship, a program available to groups of people or organizations that want to promote sustainable development but may not have nonprofit status. Current clients include Syracuse Grows and Xoomba, an organization promoting sustainable clothing production in South Africa.

"I saw that there were a lot of alternatives out there and that we can do more than just talking about the need for change," Slate says. "I realized from watching other regular people creating solutions to problems that we can be the change. So I'm trying to do my best because I want to leave a legacy for my daughter, to have something to live for when she grows up-a community that she can enjoy because we will have done something to help our environment survive the impact of our lifestyles."

As part of her fellowship, Slate will do an independent study with the Whitman School's Watters and will receive guidance from Steven Brechin, professor of sociology in the [Maxwell School](#), in developing plans for the Alchemical Nursery Project's long-term sustainability.