My summer in President Obama’s White House can best be told as a series of occasions when my heart skipped more than a few beats. Last April, I was shocked to even be selected for a phone interview, much less to be accepted out of six thousand applicants. In my first half-hour on the job, I saw then-Judge Sonia Sotomayor walk past our office with David Axelrod and Robert Gibbs on her way to being nominated to the Supreme Court. Within a few days, I was shaking hands with senior members of Congress, escorting them to meetings in the Oval Office. Nearly every day featured an exciting new assignment or close brush with a top administration official. As the summer progressed, I managed to contain my nerves, though never losing the pure joy and excitement of getting to walk through the gates of the White House each day.

This summer was an incredible time to watch the President’s legislative strategy unfold. As an intern in the Office of Legislative Affairs, I had a front row seat for watching Congress and the White House work together on health care, climate change, and Justice Sotomayor’s confirmation. I was fortunate to have a good balance of research work and administrative responsibilities in all of these issue areas. In addition to standard intern duties, I monitored the news, votes, and public statements to get a sense of where senators stood on President Obama’s health reform agenda. All in all, I learned to keep my work organized, stay in constant contact with my supervisors, and take care of problems as soon as they arose.

Throughout the entire experience, I was continually struck by the humility and grace with which everyone in the Executive Office of the President operated. Every day, I was working with professionals at the top of their field. My office included some of the most respected Capitol Hill veterans, who used their wealth of knowledge and experience to guide President Obama’s legislative strategy. The talented, hardworking junior staff members had given their all during the campaign and were doing the same at the White House, often putting in twelve-hour days. Everyone I worked for or had the chance to meet was extremely passionate and dedicated, but managed to stay cool and even-tempered during the most serious of crises. They collectively taught me that finding that balance is key to performing to the best of my ability in a high-pressure environment.

My summer absolutely cemented my desire to pursue a public service career. continued on page 2
Ways to participate...

Update your profile in LINK

The Cornell Commitment completed the launch of LINK in late 2008. LINK is our in-house alumni-student networking database.

The application delivers a rich, desktop-like user interface on the web for alumni and student users. Required information, such as contact preferences, education and career information and mentoring interests, is entered by users. Once required fields are populated, then the user can access the networking features of the application. Alumni are permitted to search the alumni network only, while current students who are registered can search both alumni and other students in the network.

The success of our network is only as good as the people who choose to participate. It is our hope that a broad spectrum of alumni, across programs, careers, industries, and life experiences will register. To help facilitate this process for those of you who do not have a netID and password, please go to http://www.alumni.cornell.edu/netid/request.cfm. We are excited about the usefulness of the application for students and alumni alike. To learn more about, please contact the office at 607-225-8595.

Floris van Breugel ’07
Floris van Breugel writes, “some exciting news was recently announced, and I thought I would let you know. Three of my photographs were selected in the BBC wildlife photographer of the year competition (the most prestigious international nature photography competition). One of the images is actually from Ithaca (Sapsucker Woods). There’s more information on my website here: http://www.artinnaturephotography.com/news.php (second news entry).

continued from cover page
After graduation, I plan to return to Washington and work on some of those same substantive issues I was introduced to this summer, ideally on a Congressional committee or in a federal agency. However, before my time at Cornell runs out, I plan to write my Honors Thesis on a legislative history topic, using the insights I gained about the Executive-Legislative relationship during my summer. I will hope that this project will be one of the first of my many efforts to reforming the government, promoting transparency and oversight. Getting to work on substantive issues in the company of some of America’s most talented public servants renewed so much of my faith in how the government can truly work for the country, and I am greatly looking forward to my next opportunity to contribute.
The Cornell Commitment hires a new coordinator

Jake Sneva comes to the Commitment office as the program coordinator for The Cornell Tradition. He brings over seven years experience within the field of higher education working in the areas of program development and administration, academic program management, and student advising and programming. Most recently, Jake was the director for Cornell’s Upward Bound program and the administrative director for the University of Buffalo’s Undergraduate Academies.

In May, Jake will receive his Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration from the University of Buffalo. In addition to working at Cornell and the University of Buffalo, Jake has worked at Highline Community College and Montana State University.

In his new role, he finds the personal interaction with the talented and service-oriented students most rewarding. He especially enjoyed working with the fellows during the recent day of service at the Cornell Plantations.

Jake, who hails from the state of Washington, is one of 6 children. Outside of work, he enjoys spending time with his wife Christine; running, skiing and the outdoors. Jake and Christine will welcome their first child in March.

If you are in Ithaca, please take a few minutes to stop into 103 Day Hall and welcome Jake to the program.

Tradition fellows contribute to Plantations fall clean up

The day of service event at the Cornell Plantations was a very successful event again this year. Tradition staff organized a service activity that allowed new freshman and transfer Tradition fellows to work with Plantations staff on fall projects such as removing invasive plants, mulching, and restoring natural areas around Cornell’s campus. The service projects were followed by a reflection activity facilitated by upper-class student leaders.

Jim Mack, Horticulture Supervisor at the Plantations wrote, “Cornell Tradition was a fabulous partner in setting up the work day and then joining me to monitor the work sites...we had a terrific day and together, we got a lot of work done! On its surface, the Plantations may not look very large until you get out there to experience it. The Cornell Plantations manages nearly 4,000 acres!”

This is the third year students have contributed time and effort to help clean up the grounds.
Many of our students benefit greatly from our summer funding program

Each summer a number of our students embark on an internship with the goal of trying out a career path, an industry or a specific job before actually committing to that choice. For many students, completing an unpaid internship is a reality and a hardship. It is uncommon to find programs within universities or colleges that have undergraduate internship funding options available. Our program is unique and (we are told) much appreciated by students: “I am grateful that the Cornell Tradition offered an opportunity to fund my summer internship. Without this help, I would not have been able to partake in the internship.”

Like other experiential opportunities, an internship can prove critical in a student’s career decision making process. A positive experience can reinforce career plans and aspirations or it can re-direct the intern’s career focus within an industry. For example, one of our students, Kerry McCarthy ’10, worked in public relations for Vera Wang. She commented, “the internship helped me realize that public relations is not something I would want to do long term.” Another student noted that her experience inspired her to get more involved in healthy living initiatives upon graduation.

The Cornell Commitment programs have been funding summer experiences for students for more than 20 years. Below and throughout the newsletter you will find brief reflections about our students’ summer experiences. To learn how you can host a Commitment student as a summer intern, please contact Stephanie Spackman at sws36@cornell.edu.

Alma Aldrich ’10, Industrial and Labor Relations

**Summer internship with the United Nations Population Fund**

This summer I interned at Americans for the United Nations Population Fund, a nonprofit that seeks to build moral, political, and financial support for UNFPA (United Nations Population Fund) within the United States. My work in the Development Department, under the Vice President of Development, Marcela Hahn (a Cornell alum!) was incredible. Never did I imagine I would have so many incredible opportunities in a summer internship!

Most of my work involved research on small, family foundations that were donors or perspective donors for UNFPA’s Campaign to End Fistula. Obstetric fistula is a devastating child bearing injury that affects over two million women in Africa today, although it is both preventable and treatable. Working on this project has focused my interests on global women’s health.

At the beginning of July, I had the incredible opportunity of traveling to Geneva, Switzerland for the High Level Segment of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). This summer’s conference theme was global health. While assisting UNFPA and Johnson & Johnson, whose support for UNFPA has helped build fistula clinics in Eritrea and other parts of Africa, I was able to explore the field of Corporate Social Responsibility, which I find fascinating and hope to explore after graduation.

Now, back at Cornell, I have started writing my senior honors thesis on the correlation between women’s health care and women elected officials in Sub-Saharan Africa. I am currently applying to the Peace Corps, which I hope to do in conjunction with a master’s in public health.

It has been with the fantastic financial support and general encouragement from the Cornell Tradition that I have been able to have these incredible experiences. My work this summer came at a crucial time, as I prepared for senior year and different job prospects. I’m thrilled that I was able to have this amazing opportunity!
KERRY McCARTHY ’10, Human Ecology, Textiles and Apparel
Summer internship with Vera Wang

Everything about my summer internship was a stretch as far as learning new things; because there is no “public relations” major at Cornell, and because I major in fashion design as opposed to business or marketing, I had a lot to learn. There was something different to do every day; it was not like a typical office job where there is usually some type of daily routine. I really loved this because everyday I was challenged with new jobs and new ways to solve problems. Often, I would be working on a project and then another would come up that needed to be done immediately. It made work exciting and dynamic and I was never bored!

Working in public relations at Vera Wang helped me see how important it is to market yourself and it showed me a different view of the fashion industry.

The work ethic and time management skills I have learned during my time at Cornell were instrumental in helping me succeed at Vera Wang. I was also able to contribute my skills and talents as well. My proficiency in basic programs like Microsoft Excel was something I was able to share with fellow interns at Vera.

THOMAS HUDSON ’11, Agriculture and Life Sciences, Developmental Sociology
Summer internship with US Department of Justice International Criminal Police Organization

An international police agency and an arm of the Department of Justice, INTERPOL houses agents from dozens of federal police agencies, including the FBI, Marshals Service, Customs and Border Patrol, Secret Service, DEA and Postal Inspectors to name a few. My experience with INTERPOL stretched me to be more outgoing, which I had previously considered to be a strong attribute of mine. I was encouraged to reach out to the agencies’ detailees and to learn about their agencies, their careers, how they arrived at their positions, and what it took to get there. My co-workers, supervisors, and internship coordinator constantly encouraged me to build networks, and to be outgoing; I have new friends and mentors as a result. Working for INTERPOL was a uniquely valuable experience, because it allowed me to gain insight into not one, but many of the Justice Department’s agencies. I understand now how critical networking and building personal relationships can be to career advancement.

Living in Washington D.C. was incredible. The living expense grant from CornellCommitment covered my rent at George Washington University. I was able to live only five blocks from the White House and as many from the Potomac River and Lincoln and Vietnam Memorials. Often times after work and certainly on weekends, I would walk to the National Mall or the water front to read or to write in my journal, which I took on as a new hobby. I read Homer, Aeschylus, Plutarch, and Dante Alighieri among other authors and to be able to do so at the feet of national landmarks was very inspiring. I feel as though I grew very much as an individual this summer. The environment could not have been better.

I learned that everyone is human; co-workers, supervisors, and directors of federal agencies included. Working for the Justice Department seemed to me a bold prospect. I expected my work environment to be demanding and high paced, the people to be firm—I was not disappointed—but I also learned that security clearances and metal detectors do not screen for cordiality and kindness.

My experience with INTERPOL has reinforced my desire for higher education and work experience. I cannot remember talking to a single agent or representative this summer who failed to stress the value of higher education, and most importantly, work experience, in being hired to work for the federal government. When competing with graduate students, professionals, and military men and women (who have hiring preference) for entry level positions I will need the best education and work experience to set me apart.
Research in Progress

Rawlings Cornell Presidential Research Scholars are selected for their expressed interest in or past experience with research and discovery, across all fields. At Cornell, they have the unique opportunity as undergraduates to partner with faculty and graduate students to conduct research, publish papers and present at conferences. Each year, we attempt to capture some of what our students are focused on. Here are a few highlights from this year.

Dorian Bandy ’10 College Scholar AS, Music
The Romantic Lied: Text and Music with faculty mentor Neal Zaslaw
At the height of Germany’s so-called Sturm und Drang movement in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, composers became fascinated with the expressive possibilities of poetry set to music, and the Lied, both as individual songs and as semi narrative cycles, became a form central to the development of music over the next 75 years. My research and analysis focuses on the works of three poets and three composers, and examines both the linguistic content of the poetry (metrical issues, syntax, and poetic form) as well as musical construction (harmonic arcs, through-composition the cycles as cyclical.) At the heart of my analytic interest are the songs of “As die ferne Geliebet (poetry by Willhelm Muller, music by Franz Schubert), and “Dichterliebe (poetry by Henrich Heine, music by Robert Schumann).

Grace Chen’10 AS, English & Biology
Efficacy Of a Prompted-Pointing Therapy in Improving Learning Behavior in Non Speaking Children with Autism with faculty mentor Matthew Belmonte
Non-speaking people with autism are not typically included in neuro scientific studies. Analysis of DVD-recorded sessions of non-speaking children with autism undergoing a communication therapy provides insight into the specific interactions between autistic behaviors and learning-related behaviors over time. Exploring learning-related behavior in children with autism will help to clarify the cognitive processes involved in how non-speaking individuals with autism learn. The effect of communication therapy on learning-related behaviors and behaviors inhibiting the learning process in non-speaking children with autism were examined through a longitudinal analysis of video recordings.

Leaving aside the question of whether prompted pointing reliably evokes valid and independent communications, analysis of video-recorded sessions of non-speaking children with autism undergoing this therapy suggests that exposure to the therapy has a positive effect on joint attention and decreases time off task. These data can provide valuable insight into the specific relationships between autistic behaviors and learning-related behaviors over time.

Karl Gluck ’10 EN, Electrical Engineering
Developing a Soft Robot with faculty mentor Hod Lipson
The research project in which professor Hod Lipson and I are engaged explores a novel kind of robot with soft body parts. We aim to create an autonomous machine that can use tentacle-like appendages to maneuver under water and control objects. Our robot will be an important step toward a device which exhibits abilities like those of octopi; specifically, precise and forceful manipulation of irregular items, efficient locomotion, and changing size to squeeze into confined spaces.

Most common robots are rigid because the design is intuitive and straightforward to simulate. While construction of useful machine from flexible material is extremely challenging, the potential
benefits merit further investigation. In the future, a robotic octopus could not only exhibit the amazing qualities of its living counterpart, but also be able to weather heavy blunt impact and even tolerate massive damage to its limbs without being immobilized. Our research takes useful steps toward bringing about a device with these capabilities.

Michael Grundler ’10 Goldwater Scholar
AS, Biological Sciences, Ecology & Evolutionary Biology
Population and Conservation Genetics of Brazilian Frogs and North American Snakes with faculty mentor Kelly Zamudio

I use molecular DNA markers to infer patterns of gene flow and relatedness among populations of amphibians and reptiles. I have been working on a Brazilian species of frog trying to understand the consequences of habitat specialization for structuring genetic diversity across the landscape. Additionally, I am developing a molecular phylogeny of Eastern Northern American Pinesnake populations in an effort to identify potential areas and populations for use in conservation relocation strategies. The Eastern Pinesnake is threatened or endangered throughout much of its range making this work particularly relevant. Finally, I have also been working with collaborations in the Zamundio Lab on understanding the amphibian disease chytridiomycosis and how interactions between host ecology and environment affect disease prevalence in natural communities.

Stephen Linderman ’10 Goldwater Scholar  AG, Biological Engineering
Examining and Engineering Protein-Protein Interactions In the Bacterial Periplasm with faculty mentor Matthew DeLisa

My main project works with detecting and engineering protein-protein interactions in the periplasm of Escherichia coli. Protein-protein interactions are crucial to many cellular and industrial processes, including enzymatic pathways, molecule secretion, glycosylation, therapeutic production and function, and antibody function. Currently, many methods characterize protein interaction affinities in vitro and in vivo in the cytoplasm of various organisms, but to my knowledge, no such systems report folding and interaction of proteins in the periplasm. The periplasm of gram-negative bacteria offers an environment with different, beneficial characteristics for the production of heterologous (e.g. therapeutic) proteins. Thus, a means to easily and accurately detect and engineer protein interactions in the periplasm would be transformative for the development of novel antibodies and protein therapeutics. We have used a split β-lactamase protein complementation assay to successfully report interactions of several known interacting domains in the periplasm of E. coli. The system essentially detects when proteins interact by restoring functionality to β-Lactamase only when the proteins interact. β-lactamase allows the E. coli cells to grow on the antibiotic ampicillin. Therefore, interacting protein pairs confer an antibiotic resistant phenotype. Currently we have tested this reporter system on several pairs of antigens with single chain variable fragments of antibodies (scFvs). The system accurately detects relative affinity of the two proteins of interest for each other, correlating greater interaction affinity to improved cell growth on media with ampicillin. Currently, we are using this technique to select for novel interactions in vivo from naïve directed evolution libraries. This powerful methodology allows for a broad expansion of the protein engineer’s toolbox for periplasmic expression and works towards a novel, efficient way to engineer new protein interactions in E. coli.
Jordan Perlman ’10 AG, Entomology and Biology
The Effects of Invasive Ladybeetle Species on Human Health with faculty mentor John Losey

When I enrolled in “Insect Biology” as a freshman, I never dreamed that I would be fortunate enough to be involved in the re-discovery of a “vanished” species of ladybeetle. The insect that I identified was the “9-Spotted Ladybeetle” and, despite its designation as New York State’s “official” insect, it hadn’t been captured in the northeast region for more than a decade. The identification led to the implementation of several “citizen science programs” aimed at the collection of data regarding the whereabouts of the “missing” species. Entomologists hypothesize that Coccinella novemnotata (the 9-Spotted Ladybeetle) was driven from this geographic range by the invasion of an aggressive, Asian competitor, referred to as Harmonia axyridis. It is this Asian species which is responsible for the autumnal infestation of many older homes in Ithaca, New York. The ladybeetles colonize and then aggregate (presumably for warmth) by the hundreds, and homeowners report finding the insects amongst the flakes of their breakfast cereals. My research is intended to explore the consequences of home invasion on both physical and mental health.

Data collection for my project consists of surveys, participant journal entry, and personalized interviews. Subject recruitment is based on local reports of Harmonia axyridis home invasion solicited by a graduate student in Cornell’s Entomology Department. My research explores a potential connection between degree of home infestation and human mood, relative scholastic achievement, and physical health. Participants are asked to qualify and convey any observed changes in behavior, routine, attitude, accomplishment, and physical health that they believe associated with insect presence in their homes. Findings which suggest the presence of an unfavorable and harmful relationship will hopefully add fuel to the conservationalist fire and encourage better control of invasive insect species.

Aman Prasad ’10 Goldwater Scholar AS, Chemistry & Chemical Biology
Novel Sulfated Nucleosides from Spider Venoms with faculty mentor Frank Schroeder

Natural products from terrestrial animals are generally underrepresented in screening collections. Our own research on the chemical ecology of arthropods has resulted in the identification of structurally unique compounds like sulfated nucleosides, most of which have not yet been subjected to broad biological screening because the amounts available from the respective arthropod sources are very limited. The goal of this project is to synthesize four small libraries of 20-30 compounds each, based upon four arthropod-derived lead structures. For the initial stages of this project, two groups of arthropod compounds have been selected, for which limited testing has indicated interesting activities: the sulfated nucleosides, which show specific affinity to kainate receptors, and the azamacrolides, which bind to imidazoline-1 receptors. The arthropod-inspired libraries will be formatted for broad biological screening at the NIH and the Investigator-Initiated Screening Program at the Broad Institute, Cambridge, MA.

Lucas Fuess ’11 AG, Agricultural Science Education
The Role of FFA Participation in Students’ Futures with faculty mentor Travis Park

The national FFA organization is a high school level co-curricular organization that promotes premier leadership, personal growth, and career success through agricultural education. As a past FFA member I was interested in how well the FFA organization carries out its mission statement, specifically
the part about career success. Over the past year I have read several studies to determine where high school students go after high school and what affects their decisions. I’ve also conducted fieldwork in an agricultural classroom in Ithaca, New York to supervise a current agricultural education curriculum. Currently I’m developing a survey to distribute to high school seniors regarding their plans for the future, including both FFA and non-FFA members. In future years, I plan on keeping in touch with the students who filled out the survey this year while also incorporating new students into the study. I’ve also read several articles about current events and initiatives within agricultural education and the national FFA organization so see what CTE organizations are doing to promote students to enter into agricultural careers. There is a lack of students entering agricultural careers and something needs to be done to promote these careers and make them a viable option for graduating high school students. With a combined use of past studies, my future survey results, and a review of current FFA initiatives, I should be able to determine whether current FFA initiatives are effective and what might need to be done differently.

Allen Miller ’11 AS, College Scholar
The Fading Newspaper (An Analysis of Newspapers: Past, Present, and Future) with faculty mentor Deborah Streeter

Throughout our nation’s history, newspapers have always been a staple of American media. From the Early Colonial Days to the civil war to the progressive era, newspapers have always impacted society as a whole. Yet in recent decades new technological advances have enabled news to be presented to the public in many different shapes and forms. As a result many major print publications, such as the New York Times, are struggling to remain profitable. This financial problem poses a significant problem for the newspaper industry.

This semester my research focused on a number of interesting areas related to this topic. I began with an examination of the evolution of the modern newspaper. I then studied the rising sources of media—sources that appear to be replacing the Newspapers. I then studied the growing trends in modern journalism, of particular importance were the revenue problems newspapers are facing. Ultimately, I strove to develop enough knowledge to provide insight on the future of newspapers. This project culminated with a research paper that was submitted for review with the Visible Hand.

Did you know...

...Jake Sneva is the 9th director of The Cornell Tradition; Kris DeLuca is the 1st full-time director of MFCNS and Kristin Ramsay is the 2nd director of RCPRS
...the office has not had to hire a new staff member for nearly 5 years. In 2009, we lost Kirsten, who moved with her family to Wisconsin, and Grace who retired after 15 years with The Commitment/The Tradition
...members of The Cornell Tradition completed more than 59,000 service hours from August 2008 - May 2009

The Cornell Commitment Staff
Kristine M. DeLuca, Director
Director, Meinig Family Cornell National Scholars
Kristin M. Ramsay, Associate Director
Program Coordinator, Rawlings CPRS
Jacob N. Sneva, Associate Director
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