Commitment Students Travel the Globe

Entering its 5th year of operation, the Cornell Commitment support account program continues to provide students the means to participate in direct engagement and research opportunities across the US and the world. The goal of this program is to allow students the opportunity to gain valuable real-world experience without increasing their total indebtedness due to insufficient or nonexistent earnings typically associated with these types of experiences. Due to support account funding, students have managed event operations at Citi Field in New York City, run horse ranches in Mozambique, and everything in between.

While engaging the world, students gain the ability to think on their feet and experience a broader worldview. RCPRS student Juhi Pur-swani ‘14 said, “I have become more independent -- throughout this experience, there were few moments where was told who to meet, what to do, or how to do it. I was in charge of creating my own tasks and developing the network of resources, faculty, and students I would need to complete these tasks. I became less reliant, and more independently motivated. At first this lack of instruction was not comfortable. Towards the end of the summer as I gained the skills and familiarity with the study, I was making valuable suggestions for how I wanted to spend my time and how I could best contribute to the overall research design.” These support account funded experiences push students to become independent leaders and come up with their own solutions when the answers are not readily apparent.

In addition to gaining independence, students on support account funded experiences gain deeper insights to the world. Meinig Scholar Jordana Gilman ‘14 said, “I have a great desire to make social changes and I feel empowered to do so. I am looking specifically for upstream intervention models so that I can create sustainable, positive impacts on my own community. If I do participate in more international experiences, I would want it to be in a capacity of training local leadership and empowering community members to create the change in their own communities by themselves. This is a new worldview for me, and it is exciting and scary!”

We are proud at the opportunity to empower students and are excited to hear about students experiences from this summer!

Support Account Facts:
*Students have traveled to over 30 countries
*Students saved an average of $2465.64 in living expenses during the 2013 summer term

www.commitment.cornell.edu
The Cornell Commitment launched a pilot leadership development program this fall. While the former Cornell Commitment Leadership Education and Development (CCLEAD) program provided students with a wealth of knowledge in leadership strengths and communication skills, the department saw a need to incorporate reflective practices and teach introspective skills. Drawing upon similar models used across campus, the yearlong pilot Cornell Commitment Leadership Program was launched in the Fall of 2013.

The pilot sought to create a foundation of leadership skills in students and serve as a gateway to more specialized leadership programs across the university. As a program with almost 900 undergraduate students spanning across all the colleges at Cornell, this approach was an attempt to build a common foundation of leadership skills that any Commitment student (regardless of background) would find useful. In communicating with leadership programs across Cornell, a common thread emerged: while students were selected to attend Cornell because they were leaders in their high schools, staff members who ran leadership programs for upper-class students found students were not advancing with collegiate level leadership skills. As a consequence, these programs were forced to spend precious early sessions teaching skills rather than doing more specialized activities. By identifying common skills and targeting the program towards sophomores, we hoped to allow other programs (and thereby students) to move more quickly in other situations so students could then move to other programs and focus on the specific topic areas (Engineering Project teams, Community Engagement, Club Management, etc.) rather than all these programs conducting similar training.

The program was designed to span an academic year with a five part educational series in the fall semester and guided reflection and leadership planning the spring semester. At the end of the program, students would hopefully gain skills in group dynamics and communication as well as intentionality around their leadership. After reviewing the end of year student reflections, the leadership program appears to acheived this goal.

Interested in getting involved with any of these initiatives? Have some ideas of your own?
Please contact BJ Siasoco, ’07
bj.siasoco@cornell.edu
607-255-8525
Tradition Alumnus Doug Rutzen ’87 is President and CEO of the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law (ICNL), which has worked in over 100 countries to develop the legal framework for civil society, public participation, and philanthropy.

Cornell Commitment: What do you love about being an alumnus?
Rutzen: The tremendous windows of opportunity that Cornell helped open for me.

What do you miss most about Cornell?
Friends (of course). In addition, I was the first student hired to work for the Cornell Tradition, and I really enjoyed being part of this “start up” and seeing how the Tradition helped so many students over the years.

What was the biggest change for you post-undergraduate-wise?
Realizing that it is possible to make a living pursuing human rights and public service. I love my job, which isn’t the case for many people who go into law.

Where do you currently work?
I run the International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, which has worked in 100 countries on the laws governing nonprofit organizations, philanthropy, and public participation. Basically, we help ensure that citizens have safe legal space to improve their societies. I also teach “Global Revolutions, Social Change, and NGOs” at Georgetown Law Center, and I spent 16 years suing Libya for blowing up Pan Am 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland.

What did you enjoy about your time as a Tradition Student?
In 1986, the Tradition had a Summer Job Network (SJN). Through the SJN, I got a job working with deaf and blind people in the Caribbean. It was exceptionally interesting and fun, and it got me hooked into working with nonprofit organizations and pursuing a career in public service.

One Cornell thing you wish you could be doing right now?
Eating pizza at the Nines with friends, as we discuss all sorts of issues.

Doug Rutzen ’87 (far right) with President Obama (far left) at a UN Panel on Civil Society.

Doug visited campus in May as a part of the Einaudi Center’s Distinguished Lecture Series. While on campus he met with current Commitment students to discuss his work and career path. If you visit campus during the academic year, with advance notice we can arrange student round tables. Please contact BJ Siasoco ’07 (bjsiasoco@cornell.edu) to become a profiled alumnus. The Commitment E-News reaches over 5000 Alumni.
The Debra Newman ‘02 Award recognizes local individuals for their dedication and service to the community. The award was originally conceived by The Cornell Tradition Student Advisory Council (SAC), a group that plans and implements service projects with community agencies throughout Tompkins County. The SAC founded the Community Recognition Award in order to recognize and honor a community member who has demonstrated a strong commitment to service and/or leadership in a community service setting.

Debra Newman, a graduate of The Cornell Tradition, was a Tradition fellow who exemplified these ideals. She firmly believed that a true appreciation of the value - indeed the necessity - of applying our best efforts in service to the community was a lesson best learned by interacting with community leaders. In the fall of 2002, Debra was killed in a tragic automobile accident while attending law school. Shortly thereafter, the SAC renamed the Community Recognition Award in her honor.

This year’s award was presented to Jeff Love. Jeff is the founding chair of the Friends of the Ithaca Youth Bureau which works to fundraise and raise awareness about the programs that are offered through the Ithaca Youth Bureau. Jeff was nominated for this award by a peer on the Friends of the Ithaca Youth Bureau Board (FIYB). His nominator describes his “ability to enrich young people’s lives with solid values, discipline, sportsmanship and healthy choices”. As a new organization, the FIYB has worked hard under Jeff’s leadership to raise funds to be able to continuing offering opportunities to the youth of Ithaca. The members of the Cornell Tradition look forward to partnering with Jeff and the FIYB to plan a service activity sometime in the next year.

Nominations for the Debra Newman Award can be directed to Suzanne Horning, sah48@cornell.edu.
This Fall, members of the Student Advisory Council (SAC) organized Hot Cocoa on Ho Plaza to support a local food bank and increase visibility of the Cornell Tradition. The event was a big success, collecting over 240lbs of food for Loaves and Fishes, a local food bank on N. Cayuga Street in Ithaca. The SAC choose a canned goods drive since the event was held a week before Thanksgiving. Members of the SAC had volunteered or donated to Loaves and Fishes before and realized how busy that time of year was for the organization. When I counted and delivered about 240lbs of goods to Loaves and Fishes and saw the smile on their face, I realized this fundraiser was beyond successful. Loaves and Fishes serves 145-165 people per meal, and this number escalates significantly for Thanksgiving- that is why the donations from Tradition Fellows were so greatly appreciated.

The Student Advisory Council realizes the importance of helping out not only on Cornell’s campus but also in the greater community of Ithaca. This Spring 2014 semester alone, the SAC organized fellows to volunteer at multiple on campus events such as Hotel Ezra Cornell, selling raffle tickets at Cornell Hockey games, participating in Relay for Life, and more. Off campus, SAC members and Tradition fellows can be found volunteering at the Sciencenter, Chili Fest, the Ithaca Youth Bureau, and many more community organizations.

Please visit the Cornell Tradition website to find biographies of the SAC members and feel free to reach out to any one of us with any questions or ideas for future events!
As the longest standing program within the Meinig Family Cornell National Scholars, the Meinig Scholars Executive Mentoring Program is running strong this year with participation from over ninety Meinig Scholars and eight executive mentors. Joining returning mentors, Dean of Students, Kent Hubbell, Vice President of Student and Academic Services, Susan Murphy, Associate Dean of Students and Director of Intercultural Programs, Renee Alexander, Vice President of Human Resources, Mary Opperman, Senior Lecturer in the Department of English and Associate Vice Provost for Academic Diversity Initiatives, A.T. Miller, and Director of Community Relations, Gary Stewart, are two new mentors this year- Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School, Barbara Knuth, and Director of Capital Budget and Integrated Planning, Mina Amundsen.

Throughout the semester, groups have engaged in various activities from dining at Aladdin’s to going pumpkin picking, visiting the new Dairy Bar, and attending a concert together. Dean Knuth commented, “Our first group activity was a dinner at Banfi’s, and provided an opportunity for us to get to know more about each other and our interests and aspirations.” Similarly, group liaisons have reported positive feedback from members who have enjoyed meeting and befriending Meinig Scholars of all class years with different backgrounds and interests.
**Meinig Family Cornell National Scholars News**

**Spotlight on New Mentors**

*by Sohee Rho ‘14*

---

**Barbara Knuth**  
*Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School*

Dean Barbara Knuth has served as Vice Provost at Cornell University since 2010, and Dean of the Graduate School since July 2010. As Vice Provost, she oversees undergraduate admissions and financial aid. Moreover, she is the author or coauthor of more than 100 scholarly publications on the human dimensions of natural resources policy and management.

She served on the Ocean Studies Board of the National Academies, and was President of the American Fisheries Society, Vice President of the Executive Board of the World Council of Fisheries Societies, and a member of the Council of Environmental Deans and Directors of the National Council for Science and the Environment. She holds a bachelor of philosophy degree in Interdisciplinary Studies, a bachelor’s in Zoology, and a master’s in Environmental Science from Miami University (where she graduated Phi Beta Kappa), and a Ph.D. in Fisheries and Wildlife Sciences from Virginia Tech.

---

**Mina Amundsen**  
*Director of Capital Budget and Integrated Planning*

Mina Amundsen, former University Planner and recently appointed Director of Capital Budget and Integrated Planning, oversees master planning for the Ithaca campus, as well as planning associated with specific areas, projects, landscape, transportation, or utilities issues. She is also the staff lead for all land related sustainability initiatives on the Cornell campus.

She is actively engaged in campus-community initiatives on regional development, transportation, housing, and land conservation with Cornell colleagues, local municipal planning directors, and other agencies. She has a Master’s degrees in city planning and architectural and urban studies from MIT and has worked as a planner with the MIT Planning Office and with Harvard University’s Planning and Real Estate Office. Mina has a diploma in Architecture from the CEPT University School of Architecture in Ahmedabad, India.
Cornell President Emeritus Hunter Rawlings applauded the work of current and former undergraduate research scholars at the first event for alumni of the Hunter R. Rawlings III Cornell Presidential Research Scholars (RCPRS) program at the Cornell Club in New York on Oct. 7, 2013.

Each year, RCPRS admits 50 students interested in pursuing research early in their undergraduate careers. The program offers each student an $8,000, four-year research grant, and aid-eligible students receive a scholarship of up to $4,000 per year. RCPRS students also receive guidance and support throughout their research, including a freshman colloquium and summer research opportunities.

“They really are empowered to be serious researchers,” Rawlings told 35 alumni gathered for the occasion.

The program, created in 1996, was renamed in Rawlings’ honor in 2006 because of his commitment to increasing significant interaction between undergraduate students and top faculty members. This was his first opportunity to reconnect with current students and RCPRS alumni since he left Cornell two years ago to become president of the Association of American Universities.

“Our hope for all of our students is that they’re going to find research they are passionate about, a mentor with whom they click, and they have a sense of purpose in what they do,” said Kristin Ramsay ’88, program coordinator of RCPRS and associate director of The Cornell Commitment, which administers RCPRS, The Cornell Tradition and the Meinig Family Cornell National Scholars programs.

For Mallory Stellato ’15, a student in the College of Human Ecology, the program was one of the reasons she chose to enroll at Cornell.

“I thought, ‘How could I pass this up?’” she said.

Stellato, whose research took her to the Mysore, India, [last] summer, called her
experience as a Rawlings scholar “incredible.” “It really pushes you. It pushes you to explore and explore deeply. Not just to go through an undergraduate career, but to delve into something that really interests you,” she said.

For Alyson Favilla ’16, a College of Agriculture and Life Sciences student majoring in environmental science and sustainability, the program offered the flexibility to define her own course of study: She is fusing her interest in the natural world with a passion for James Joyce. To explore the space between these two disciplines, Favilla works with two advisers: Jim Tantillo, Ph.D. ’02, a lecturer in the Department of Natural Resources, and Kevin Attell, assistant professor of English.

“I really thought I was going to be in the [science, technology, engineering, math] fields. I was going to stick in animal behavior. I think I would have enjoyed doing that, but now I don't have to compromise,” she said.

Rawlings scholars Dennis Chua ’14 and Spenser Reed ’14, who are pursuing research in the life sciences, joined Stellato and Favilla at the event.

Chua, a chemical engineering student, is working in the lab of Jan Lammerding, assistant professor of biomedical engineering, investigating mechanical damage in cells affected by muscular dystrophy.

Reed, a nutritional sciences major, is working with Elad Tako at the Cornell office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture-Agriculture Research Service on research to eradicate global micronutrient deficiency by improving dietary and physiological factors, as well as explaining novel biochemical markers of mineral status in humans. In addition to being a Rawlings scholar, Reed is a National Science Foundation scholar.

For those in attendance, the four students left quite an impression. “As one who is an administrator, not a scholar, it is always … inspiring to hear from them,” said Susan Murphy ’73, Ph.D. ’94, Vice president for student and academic services.

“This was a wonderful opportunity to hear from President Rawlings and the current students, as well as a chance for our alumni to connect with each other and possibly foster collaborations,” Ramsay said.

This article was originally published in the Cornell Chronicle on October 11, 2013.