The Merrill Presidential Scholars

24th Annual Convocation

Wednesday, May 23, 2012
Twelve noon
Memorial Room
Willard Straight Hall
Cornell University
PROGRAM

Introduction
Susan H. Murphy ’73, PhD ’94, Vice President for Student and Academic Services

Remarks
David J. Skorton, President

Presentation of Scholars

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences
   Kathryn J. Boor, Ronald P. Lynch Dean

College of Architecture, Art, and Planning
   Barry Perlus, Associate Dean

College of Arts and Sciences
   Walter Cohen, Senior Associate Dean

College of Engineering
   Lance Collins, Joseph Silbert Dean

School of Hotel Administration
   Michael D. Johnson, Dean and the E. M. Statler Professor of Hotel Administration

College of Human Ecology
   Alan Mathios, Rebecca Q. and James C. Morgan Dean

School of Industrial and Labor Relations
   Harry Katz, Kenneth F. Kahn Dean and Jack Sheinkman Professor of Collective Bargaining

Closing Remarks
Susan H. Murphy, Vice President for Student and Academic Services
Catherine Merrill Williams ’91
In 1988, Philip Merrill A&S ’55 generously created the Merrill Presidential Scholars Program at Cornell. Mr. Merrill, who passed away in 2006, was a devoted alumnus and an accomplished publisher, diplomat, civic leader, and philanthropist. He was known for his passion for journalism and international affairs. In 1968 he purchased Capital Gazette Newspapers and led the company through five decades while more than tripling its newspapers’ circulation. Over that same period, he maintained a vigorous commitment to public service, giving generously of his time and talents as a diplomat and financial advisor for six administrations of the federal government. He was appointed by President George W. Bush to serve as president and chair of the nation’s Export-Import Bank, a position he held from 2002 to 2005. He also served as assistant secretary-general of NATO, as special assistant to the deputy secretary of state, and as a member of the Department of Defense Policy Board. Philip Merrill served as a trustee of Cornell from 1992–1996. In 2003, he was named a Presidential Councillor, the highest honor the university can bestow. A generous benefactor, he strove to honor excellent teaching and enhance the quality of undergraduate studies. He considered his establishment and ongoing support of the Merrill Presidential Scholars Program to be among his greatest accomplishments at Cornell. He was also a dedicated sailor and supporter of the Cornell Sailing Team. In 2009, Cornell dedicated the Merrill Family Sailing Center, a spectacular facility for Cornell’s sailors made possible by gifts from Philip Merrill and his family. Cornell University is grateful to the Merrill family—Eleanor Merrill, Douglas Merrill ’89, MBA ’91, Catherine Merrill Williams ’91, and Nancy Merrill ’96—for their continued commitment to the Merrill Presidential Scholars program.
CLASS OF 2012 MERRILL PRESIDENTIAL SCHOLARS

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

John Dillon
Harrison Ishida, Jr.
Andrew Kinder
Randall Meyer
Sanjay Mohan
Claudia Pazlopez
Rachel Perlman
Jenna Tauber
Charles Weill

College of Architecture, Art, and Planning

Tansy Mak

College of Arts and Sciences

Claire Cordella
Meredith Gudesblatt
Chandler Kemp
Emily Magaziner
Phoenix Paz
Paul Picinich
Natalie Raps
James Wang

College of Engineering

Michael Dezube
Kevin Fuhr
Eva Huang
Thomas Jackson
Nipun Jasuja
Ju Khuan Pan
João Paula Machado

School of Hotel Administration

Brandon Ho
Eric Rabinowitz

College of Human Ecology

Kristen Hojnowski
Joshua Mbanusi
Kelton Minor

School of Industrial and Labor Relations

Ethan Erickson
Robert Solomon
Today’s Convocation

Since 1988, the Merrill Presidential Scholars Program has formally and publicly honored Cornell University’s most outstanding graduating seniors on the eve of their graduation while also recognizing individual teachers who have played a significant role in these students’ academic excellence.

Merrill Presidential Scholars rank among the top one percent of the Class of 2012 in their respective schools and colleges. They are chosen not only because of their outstanding scholastic accomplishments, but also because they have demonstrated a remarkable intellectual drive, energetic leadership abilities, and a propensity to contribute to the betterment of society.

Because the pursuit of scholarly excellence is largely a communal effort, it is particularly appropriate that the Merrill Presidential Scholars honored today pay tribute to the teachers most influential in their development. Cornell University also recognizes the vital effect these educators have had on the academic careers of the Merrill Presidential Scholars. The Cornell faculty members and the secondary school teachers selected by the scholars therefore participate in this celebration in a dual capacity—as witnesses to the achievements of their students and as honorees that have enriched their students’ educational experiences. All have earned the admiration and gratitude of the Cornell community.
Established in 1989, STAR (Special Teachers Are Recognized) Scholarships celebrate the influential role high school teachers play in the success of Cornell’s Merrill Presidential Scholars. Scholarships will be named in honor of the outstanding teachers recognized today by the 2012 Merrill Presidential Scholars and will be awarded to Cornell students with financial need from the scholar’s high school or hometown. The late Donald Berens ’47 and his wife, Margaret Berens ’47, conceived of and sponsored the STAR program. Additional support comes from the William Knox Holt Foundation through the assistance of George Malti ’61, JD ’63, a director of the foundation, and the Cornell Alumni Association of Central New York.
The 2012 Merrill Presidential Scholars and Their Honored Teachers and Professors

College of Agriculture and Life Sciences

John Dillon

Honoring Elva Manee of Oneonta High School and Samuel Nelson of the Department of Labor Relations, Law and History

As a Cornell Forensics Society member, John competed at the World’s Peace Invitational Debate in Malaysia and the 2012 U.S. Nationals of the World Universities Debating competition. He is a Cornell Tradition Fellow and received the CALS Academic Excellence Award. John conducted summer research at SUNY Upstate Medical University on chemotherapeutic medications. He is assistant theatrical director for Ordinary People, a student-run social justice and peer education theater troupe. John performed with the Chorale and in the The Cherry Orchard. After graduation, John will attend medical school.

Elva Manee did more than just instruct me in physics, English, economics, and anatomy, and physiology—she mentored me. I was a monumentally disorganized student, but Mrs. Manee was both patient and understanding. She inspired me to improve until I could actually keep track of my assignments and due dates. Her lessons followed me through college and any level of success I achieve will be, in part, because of her gentle prodding. She challenged me to learn for knowledge’s sake rather than for points or quartiles on an exam—a perspective that helped me through my four years of tests and quizzes at Cornell.

The first lesson of the Cornell Forensics Society is: “You don’t live in a democracy, you live in a Samocracy.” Sam spends hours organizing events, running practices, and then getting up at 4:30 a.m. on weekends to drive the team twelve hours to a tournament. Sam believed in me, even before I believed in myself. At the end of my first year of debate, Sam sent me to an international debate tournament to improve my skills and represent Cornell. “The world has seven billion people—you’re only one of them,” Sam said, all the while preparing us to become aware and engaged global citizens.
Harrison Ishida, Jr.

Honoring Matthew Oney of Punahou School and Richard Curtis of the Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management

Harrison is a member of the Big Red baseball team and the 400 Club. He won the CALS Academic Excellence Award for academic achievement in the Dyson School and received the 2011 Dyson Scholar Award. He was a teaching assistant for Oral Communication. Upon graduation, Harrison will be working as an investment banking analyst at GCA Savvian in San Francisco.

I had the privilege of being in Mr. Oney’s trigonometry and pre-calculus courses during my time at Punahou. He always knew when to push me or give me space to grow, all while challenging me to do my best. Mr. Oney is also a wrestling coach at Punahou, and while I never had the opportunity to wrestle for him, I saw that he brought the same intensity to the classroom. During a critical time in my development as a student-athlete and as a person, Mr. Oney showed me the importance of discipline, fairness, and work ethic. I am forever grateful to him for his guidance and continue to reap the benefits of his teaching and mentorship to this day.

No one has had more of an impact on my experience at Cornell than Professor Curtis. His AEM 3240 course not only sparked my interest in finance, but it laid the foundation for every class I took at Cornell. Professor Curtis was instrumental in helping me decide a specialization, be articulate during job interviews, and ultimately decide to pursue banking as a career. It is apparent to anyone who has taken AEM 3240 that he is extremely passionate about teaching. The dedication he displays towards his students is inspiring, and I hope to put as much care into my profession as he does into his.
Andrew Kinder

Honoring Leavenworth (Wortie) Ferrell of Episcopal High School and Vicki Bogan of the Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management

Andrew will join Credit Suisse’s equity research department in New York City this July. In addition to working fifteen hours per week while in school, Andrew was a member of the Financial Management Group of Cornell, the Ho-Nun-De-Kah Honor Society, and a teaching assistant. He is a Dyson Scholar, a two-time recipient of the CoBank Scholarship, and winner of the CALS Academic Excellence Award for his major.

I met Mr. Ferrell on my first day at Episcopal High School. He introduced himself as my faculty advisor, but over the course of my life, Mr. Ferrell has also been my U.S. history teacher, my wrestling coach, and Dean of Students. However, it was outside the classroom and off of the wrestling mat that he taught me the most significant lesson. Mr. Ferrell has demonstrated to me how to live my life with personal integrity. While it’s a lesson I continue to learn, I’ve developed a golden rule as an ethical framework: what would Mr. Ferrell do? I honor Mr. Ferrell today as my lifelong mentor.

Dr. Vicki Bogan is one of the most remarkable teachers I have ever met. She is kind and deeply sympathetic. She is exceptionally knowledgeable and can explain even the most esoteric principles. While I’ve had the pleasure of learning from instructors who exhibit these qualities to some degree, seldom has a professor displayed both of these teaching qualities as seamlessly. I particularly benefitted from a project on annual fixed income portfolio management, which involved a final presentation to distinguished financial industry leaders. If there is one thing I took away from my experience as her student and advisee, it is Professor Bogan’s intense devotion to perfecting her ability to inspire and teach students that will make her one of Cornell’s greatest assets for years to come.
Randall Meyer

Honoring Catherine Merryman of Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic High School and James Casey of the Department of Microbiology and Immunology

Randall, a biological engineering major, has been a Cornell Presidential Research Scholar for four years, conducting extensive research in the College of Veterinary Medicine. He received the Goldwater Scholarship for excellence in the sciences as well as the Outstanding Undergraduate Teaching Assistant Award in Biochemistry. He has been a member of Phi Sigma Pi National Honors Fraternity, Tau Beta Pi Engineering Honors Fraternity, Alpha Epsilon Honors Fraternity, and Golden Key International, assuming leadership roles in these organizations. Randall will attend Johns Hopkins University Medical School next year to pursue a Ph.D. in biomedical engineering.

Entering high school, unsure of my abilities and anxious about the tasks ahead of me, there was one person who turned things around. Mrs. Merryman was my English teacher freshman year and she was my most enthusiastic educator, making Shakespeare more exciting than Six Flags! She noticed my insecurities and would routinely encourage me to “break out of my shell.” Mrs. Merryman was the director of the drama club and helped me find my voice (literally). During my time in her class I found the confidence to pursue my dreams and fearlessly give only the best in everything I do.

I knew as I came to Cornell that I wanted to conduct academic research, but had no experience in the world of science. When I met Dr. Casey, I knew that I had found a mentor who could give me the true guidance I needed. During my time in his lab, I was not only exposed to professional academia, but inspired to embrace it in my career. Through independent research and thought provoking questions, Dr. Casey pushed me to achieve my full potential in scientific inquiry. As such, I am fully prepared to take the next step in my education.
Sanjay Mohan

Honoring Kristen Stritzl of Division Avenue High School and Jane Walcott of the Department of Chemistry

Sanjay will attend the New York University School of Medicine next fall. While on campus, he was vice-president of the Alpha Epsilon Delta Pre-Medical Honor Society, worked as a teaching assistant for biochemistry and nutrition courses, and tutored general and organic chemistry. He taught in the Cornell Prison Education Program and mentored freshmen as a biology student advisor. Sanjay was published in the British Journal of Urology International and spent his summers conducting clinical outcomes research at Weill Cornell Medical College and interning at Churches United for Fair Housing, an organization that battles urban gentrification.

Ms. Stritzl’s influence beyond the English literature curriculum is something that will forever impact my perspective on life; it wasn’t so much about the various pieces that we read in class, but the manner in which she taught them and the themes about character and integrity that we derived. I very quickly realized that I wanted to be just as passionate about my profession as Ms. Stritzl was for her own craft. As her student, I learned that as in literature, life is about finding beauty wherever possible and is a constant process of growth and personal edification.

To this day, I don’t quite grasp how Professor Walcott demystified organic chemistry in a way that made it seem incredibly straightforward. I marveled at the passion that she exuded on a daily basis in a subject that often frightens so many. When I eventually began to tutor students under her guidance, she treated me as an intellectual colleague and challenged me to not only mature as a student but as an individual. She recognized the person behind the undergraduate and taught me that the best way to overcome one’s fears and problems is to tackle them head on.
Claudia Pazlopez

Honoring Florence McAuliffe of Montgomery Township High School and Alicia Orta-Ramirez of the Department of Food Science

Claudia completed a research project under Dr. Dennis Miller on anti-nutritional factors in beans and presented at the 2012 National Conference on Undergraduate Research. She was chair of community service with the Food Science Club, co-chair of the Association of Peruvians at Cornell, and a member of two national-finalist product development teams. During a stint in Europe, she studied international food legislation in Barcelona and interned at Unilever’s U.K. research-development center. Claudia was awarded the SUNY Chancellor’s Award for Student Excellence and will begin graduate work in August at the NYS Agricultural Experiment Station.

As a junior in high school, I was still questioning whether a path in the scientific field was for me. Dr. McAuliffe helped me conquer those doubts by being a role model for women in science. During our biology class, she would incorporate recent research findings and often challenged us with ethical questions on advances in technology. Her stories of working on her Ph.D. fascinated me, and her enthusiasm for sharing knowledge with students was infectious. That year, I gained not only a strong foundation in biology but also the confidence that I could succeed as a female scientist.

I first met Alicia as a prospective student when she gave me a tour of the Department of Food Science. Alicia’s passion for food science and engaging the interest of students inspired me, and I immediately told her when I was accepted into the program. Over the past four years, Alicia has been an incredible advisor, mentor, and professor, encouraging me to exceed my expectations and helping me balance schoolwork with life. With Alicia’s guidance, I was able to participate in unique study-abroad opportunities and internships. I cannot imagine my time at Cornell without Alicia and her continuous support.
Rachel Perlman

Honoring Peggy Dyro of Lexington High School and Tomás Beviá of the Department of Romance Studies

In 2011, Rachel received the Goldwater Scholarship for excellence in science and the Udall Scholar Honorable Mention. She conducted water quality research as a Cornell Presidential Research Scholar, and she has two pending publications—the first on urban stormwater detention basins and the second on the potential of perennial grains for agriculture. Rachel also founded and was president of CU Compost and she sang in Hearsay. She plans to pursue a Ph.D. in Industrial Ecology.

I feel very fortunate that I was in Peggy Dyro’s class just before she retired. Because of her instruction and college-level expectations, my analytical writing and writing style improved vastly, which thoroughly prepared me for college. I feel very thankful that I had such an inspirational mentor who pushed me to my limits; when she saw a good draft, she would challenge me to make it even better, for she had faith in my ability to think and write at a sophisticated level. Most of all, I will remember that Ms. Dyro opened my mind to the complex world of how humans communicate. She taught by deconstructing everyday aspects of life that I had never before questioned.

Señor Tomás Beviá would always come into the classroom with excited energy to teach. He began class by asking students how they were doing, and what was new with them. His passion for Spanish literature and film livened up class, put smiles on students’ faces, and roused plenty of discussion. In his course, my command of the Spanish language greatly improved, giving me confidence to study abroad in Costa Rica, and it even inspired me to delve into the engaging domain of Spanish-language films. What is truly special about Señor Beviá is that he reaches out to students as individuals, offering true accessibility to a candid, friendly, easy-to-talk-to professor.
Jenna Tauber

Honoring Michel Pasquier of Herricks High School and Sahara Byrne of the Department of Communication

Jenna has been a research assistant in the Department of Communication’s Media Effects Lab for three years and is published in Infection Control Today’s May 2012 issue on the topic of healthcare workers’ low influenza vaccination rates. Jenna has been on the dean’s list every semester and graduated one semester early summa cum laude. She is a member of Lambda Pi Eta, Ho-Nun-De-Kah, Phi Delta Epsilon, and held leadership roles in Sigma Delta Tau. After graduation, Jenna plans to attend a post-baccalaureate pre-medical program.

Monsieur Pasquier’s methods of teaching French have singularly changed my take on education. His hands-on assignments forced me to reach beyond the walls of our classroom. Learning French through songs and literature had a way of instilling elements of the culture and language into me in a way that rote memorization never could. Inspired by him, I spent a semester studying in Paris last year. Monsieur Pasquier’s influence has stayed with me for several years and, I am sure, will be there for a long time to come.

I wandered into Professor Sahara Byrne’s office during my freshman year with a vague idea of what I found interesting and a desire to try research in the social sciences. I did not know what to expect from this meeting, but Sahara did more than I could have asked for: she took me seriously, listened to what I wanted and figured out a way to get me involved on my terms. Three years later, Sahara has been a mentor and endlessly supportive of all of my endeavors. I was fortunate to find such a professor, so open to new ideas and so capable of really listening to her students, to work with these past years.
Charles Weill

Honoring Philippe Pavis of Lycée Français de New York and Debbie Cherney of the Department of Animal Science

Charles, who majored in animal science and minored in business, spent much of his free time either in the wilderness or programming. Fascinated by wildlife conservation, he took a gap year to hold leadership positions at the wolf sanctuary Mission: Wolf in Colorado. During his stay he developed a database for the nonprofit to track donations and supporter information. He spent his following summer in South Africa shadowing wildlife veterinarians and volunteering at wildlife sanctuaries. At Cornell he performed research in the Department of Molecular Medicine under Dr. Carolyn Sevier. He was a member of the Cornell Gymnastics Club and the Association for Computer Science Undergraduates. He will be pursuing a master’s degree in computer science next year.

I wasn’t exactly exceptional at math until I took my first class with Monsieur Pavis. He was a friendly professor, but in class he pushed us as if we were training for the Olympics. I still recall spending my entire Sundays trying to finish his extremely challenging mathematical proofs and derivations. Despite his rigorous teaching methods, he became my favorite professor. Math class felt like Jeopardy! and I always tried to be the first to answer his questions. Monsieur Pavis showed me how to enjoy studying, which was originally a foreign concept to me. His advice helped me succeed in every area I have studied.

Dr. Cherney was one of my first professors at Cornell and later became my mentor. Her kindness proved invaluable. Whether it be answering a question about animal nutrition (still my favorite class at Cornell) or helping me take steps towards reaching my dream career, she was always available. She helped ignite a spark of curiosity and supported me. Without her help, I would have never won many of the scholarships and awards I now hold.
Tansy Mak

Honoring Goranka Poljak-Hoy of Lick-Wilmerding High School and Yehre Suh of the Department of Architecture

Tansy recently completed her thesis on the subject of reconstructing the urban pedestrian experience in San Francisco. She was a Cornell Tradition Fellow and was selected to be on the program’s leadership board, the Student Advisory Council. She also received the Paul Dickinson Prize in 2008 for highest scholastic achievement in her architecture class. She has interned at multiple architecture firms in New York, San Francisco, and Shanghai, and will pursue a career in architecture and development.

My fondest memories from high school always begin with sitting in Goranka’s office sipping tea and nibbling on chocolate. Beyond inspiring me and countless other students to pursue their interests in architecture, Goranka has acted as a pillar of support, guidance, and encouragement. Even in moments when I may not have believed in myself, her wisdom and strength gave me the confidence to follow my passions. Her teaching is only surpassed by her compassion for her students. I am most happy to be able to honor Goranka for all that she has done for me and the students at Lick-Wilmerding.

I worked with Yehre during my fourth year in her studio on a project titled “Parallel Utopias: Strategies of Normalcy and Exception,” during which we traveled to the demilitarized zone between North and South Korea. While we were investigating a subject that she had been studying for some time, she led our studio with a sense of curiosity and openness, encouraging all us to critically engage with the research and to reimagine the scope and role of architecture. As a woman in the architecture field, she is an inspiring role model who consistently encourages us to pursue higher ambitions than we thought possible.
Claire Cordella

Honoring Tom Murphy of Bishop Guertin High School and Barbara Lust of the Department of Human Development

Claire has done research for three years for Professor Barbara Lust in the Cornell Language Acquisition Lab. She has presented results from this and other research at several undergraduate linguistics colloquia. She studied numerous languages, including Arabic, Dutch and Croatian, is a member of Phi Beta Kappa, and was on the dean’s list every semester. After graduation, she will work for one year as project manager of the Alzheimer’s and Healthy Aging project in Professor Lust’s lab, while applying to Ph.D. programs in linguistics.

Mr. Murphy’s sophomore English class was casual and yet one of the most intellectually rigorous high school courses I could have ever taken. I wrote papers knowing that all would be returned to me with dozens of red ink comments and that none would receive higher than an A-, his grade for “barely excellent.” But in those red ink comments were insights and suggestions that only a smart and dedicated teacher could have managed. Mr. Murphy taught me much more than English; he helped me to develop the analytical skills that have made success possible.

I was fortunate to do research under Professor Lust. With her incredible ability to bring people together, coordinate projects, and integrate ideas, she has been my model for what a great researcher can do. What’s more, she is nothing short of the ideal mentor – always willing to offer guidance, explanation, or support where needed while at the same time encouraging independence. It was Professor Lust’s unfailing confidence in my abilities which helped me become the more focused, competent, and self-assured student that I am today. My interactions with her have shaped my undergraduate experience positively. I am incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to work with and get to know such an impressive and personable professor.
Meredith Gudesblatt

Honoring Joanne Killeen of Sayville High School and Debra Castillo of the Department of Comparative Literature

Meredith, a College Scholar, wrote an honors thesis on the globalization of Holocaust discourse in Argentina and Guatemala. She also presented Mi memoria es magnífica para olvidar, a photographic installation exploring the spatial remnants of the disappeared in Buenos Aires, funded in part by the Cornell Council for the Arts. Meredith interned with NYChildren, a post-9/11 photographic project, and volunteered for PH15, an Argentinian NGO working to empower disadvantaged youth in the slums through photography. She was on the dean’s list every semester and a member of Phi Beta Kappa. She was active in Cornell Minds Matter and conducted research about mental health legislation in Argentina.

Mrs. Killeen’s A.P. English Language class was one in which I was challenged to prove my own merits. At that point, I abhorred writing, but her passion and accepting nature instilled in me the confidence to think critically, to find my own voice, and to persevere. Her class was always relevant to the “real world.” The teacher who makes a student want to be a better person and a better global citizen is rare. But that is Mrs. Killeen. Even the most intricate of thank-yous would fail to communicate how truly indebted I am to her.

When I met Debbie Castillo, I knew instantaneously that I had stumbled upon Cornell’s best-kept secret. Her unwavering belief in both my academic and personal potential has inspired me to aspire to many achievements and activities. Her commitment to her students has left me awe-struck, for she is the epitome of what all professors should be: caring, involved, concerned, dedicated, intimate, fascinating, and aware. Debbie is terribly brilliant but also tremendously humble. I appreciate deeply her academic guidance, continued mentorship, warm nature, and stimulating friendship. Knowing her has changed my life for the better.
Chandler Kemp

Honoring Mark Fontenot of Haines High School and Mukund Vengalattore of the Department of Physics

Chandler worked in Professor Vengalattore’s laboratory of ultracold atomic physics throughout his undergraduate career. In 2011, he presented his work at the American Physical Society’s Division of Atomic, Molecular and Optical Physics conference in Atlanta, Georgia. Chandler also competed on the varsity track and cross-country teams, serving as cross-country team captain during the 2011-2012 school year, and was a three-year member of the 400 Club. After graduation, Chandler plans to apply his minor in sustainable energy systems to researching and developing energy technologies in Alaska.

Mr. Mark Fontenot is known in my hometown as “the science cowboy.” He teaches every science class in the high school and creates unique courses like Marine Biology and Power Systems. One of my most powerful learning experiences occurred during his annual solar house competition, which highlighted some students’ talents that were often overlooked. My favorite parts of Mr. Fontenot’s classes were his lectures, which were clear, educational, always hilarious, and occasionally explosive. Mr. Fontenot gave me four years of extraordinary science classes that inspired me to bring enthusiasm to my studies at Cornell.

My decision to knock on Professor Vengalattore’s door and ask to join his laboratory was the best choice of my college career. As a freshman, I did not expect to receive an important assignment immediately, but he started me off with a challenging project essential to future experiments. Since then, Professor Vengalattore has continued to challenge me with unexpected opportunities. He has a contagious passion for science that inspired me to view my lab work as a joy rather than a job. I am grateful that I had such a wonderful mentor.
Emily Magaziner

Honoring Jean-Claude Contassot of Lower Merion High School and Abigail Cohn of the Department of Linguistics

Emily majored in linguistics, and she also studied Indonesian, Persian, Arabic, Spanish, and French. As a recipient of a U.S. Department of State Critical Language Scholarship, she spent this past summer in Malang, Indonesia, happily immersed in the Indonesian language and culture. While at Cornell, Emily found her work as a language consultant for the Cornell International Teaching Assistant Program to be particularly rewarding. She is a Phi Beta Kappa member, was named to the dean’s list each semester, and received a 2011-12 Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellowship from the Cornell Southeast Asia Program.

I had always enjoyed my French classes, but it was in junior-year French with Monsieur Jean-Claude Contassot that my appreciation and passion for French and for language deepened. Monsieur’s constant enthusiasm and energy were both engaging and contagious. His joie de vivre inspired creativity in our memorable class skits, and kept us motivated as we tackled the imperfect and the subjunctive. Most importantly, Monsieur’s class sparked the realization that language is more than what I had previously assumed it to be: the satisfying mastery of words and rules. Rather, it is also a connection between people, and a path to new perspectives and better understanding.

In my sophomore year, I enrolled in Professor Abigail Cohn’s Introduction to Phonology—but with some trepidation, given my inexperience in the subject matter. Professor Cohn, however, built our knowledge gradually and systematically. I quickly began to enjoy our discussions and exercises, and to feel comfortable with the topic. Since then, I have had the pleasure of completing several courses with Professor Cohn. Each class period and each office-hours visit has been not only linguistically-enlightening, but also a lesson in active observation and eloquent, effective expression. I feel privileged to have been her student, and I thank her for her support and encouragement.
Phoenix Paz

Honoring Melissa Lima-Sanchez of Westmont High School and Maria Cristina Garcia of the Department of History

Phoenix Storm Paz was a Mellon Mays Undergraduate Fellow and member of Phi Beta Kappa. Her thesis about the California bandit Tiburcio Vasquez and Mexican-American identity in the U.S. won the Undergraduate Messenger-Chalmers Prize and Bernard and Fannie Lang Prize. In 2011, Phoenix won the Cornelius W. DeKiewiett Prize for Junior History Major of Outstanding Promise and published “The G’psgolox Pole: Representations of Haisla History” in Ezra’s Archives. She was secretary for Americans for Informed Democracy, president for Teatrotaller, and social coordinator for Cornell Ballroom Dance Club, and she danced on the Cornell DanceSport Competitive Ballroom Dance Team.

Ms. Lima welcomed me to her class with a fifty question multiple choice test. The questions were carefully worded to make students think about the relationship between different historical events and turning points in history. Throughout that year in A.P. U.S. History, she made me think critically; I analyzed historical causality and learned about the undetermined nature of the past. Challenging and invigorating, Ms. Lima taught me to look for the patterns in history while recognizing what makes each moment unique. She instilled in me the discipline necessary for succeeding in college.

Professor Garcia is inspiring; her work exemplifies the attention to detail and the careful questioning of historical assumptions that makes the study of history relevant. In her Latino America course, I developed a complex understanding of Latino history by learning about the multiplicity of factors and experiences that played into the development of the notions of race and ethnicity and how these concepts continue to affect our present. As she advised me on my honors thesis, Professor Garcia pushed me to find the details, the elements that didn’t fit comfortably within the narrative I wanted to tell, and to use those details to re-conceptualize the very meaning of history.
Paul Picinich

Honoring Mary Somerwitz of Cresskill High School and Cecelia Lawless of the Department of Romance Studies

Paul is a triple-major studying psychology, linguistics, and Spanish, with minors in cognitive science, law and society, and Latin American studies. He is a member of the Phi Beta Kappa Society and the Cornell 400 Club, and has won the J.G. White Prize for Spanish Excellence twice. In his sophomore year, he took 23 credits in the fall while playing sprint football, doing multilingualism research, and participating in Phi Gamma Delta; he followed up with a 31-credit, eight-class semester in the spring. Paul wrote about sports in The Cornell Daily Sun and was a member of the Class of 2012 Student Council. He was in the wrestling and table tennis clubs, and founded Cornell Scrabble Club. Next year, he will be working in finance at BlackRock.

Keeping a classroom entertained on the topics of Spanish grammar and comprehension is not the easiest undertaking, but “Señora” Mary Somerwitz did exactly that. Her positive attitude and cheerfulness always swept away my afternoon doldrums, and helped me realize Spanish was more than just a requirement – it was a passion. Although I haven’t outgrown my goofy antics or too-big smile, her mentorship and guidance have helped me grow into the person I am today.

On the first day of class, Profesora Cecelia Lawless declared me El Guardián de los Nombres, calling upon me to remember each classmate’s name and be able to recall it on command. Professor Lawless taught me the value of not just befriending, but be-familying those around you—taking to heart what they say and being able to communicate your own opinions and ideas (and in Spanish, no less). Her lessons on understanding others and appreciating Spanish have fed into my interests in psychology and linguistics, and I cannot think of a more inspiring mentor during my time here.
Natalie Raps
Honoring Matthew Schilling of Winston Churchill High School and Dawn Chutkow of Cornell Law School

Natalie, who majored in government and minored in theatre, is graduating as the president of the Student Assembly after four years of service. She was a member of the Quill and Dagger Senior Honor Society, Phi Beta Kappa, Mortar Board Honor Society, and Pi Beta Phi Fraternity. Natalie, who is also a senior information specialist for Cornell Information and Visitor Relations, has met prospective students and their families from all over the world. During her summers she interned for the American Civil Liberties Union of the Washington, D.C. as well as for former House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer.

I still remember sitting in Mr. Schilling’s 9th grade A.P. National State and Local Government class, learning about the different branches of government. His passion for teaching, enthusiasm for the impact that students can have on their own communities, and his ability to make government appealing to high schoolers has influenced my decision to concentrate in American politics. An amazing teacher that all of the students admired, his commitment and constant dedication to enhance students’ love of learning fueled my desire to get involved both in extracurriculars as well as in academics at Cornell.

Henry Brooks Adams has said that “A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.” After taking all possible undergraduate classes with Dawn Chutkow it is safe to say that her teaching and excitement for the Supreme Court and the Constitution has rubbed off on me. It is Professor Chutkow who encouraged me to get involved in the non-profit world, and to this day I credit my interest in the law to her. An amazingly strong woman and teacher, Professor Chutkow has been an inspiration for all that I hope to achieve.
James Wang

Honoring Geoffrey Gabbott of Sir Winston Churchill Secondary School and James Blankenship of the Department of Molecular Biology and Genetics

Jimmy began his Cornell career by penning a winning essay for the New Student Reading Project. He has strived to satisfy his intellectual curiosity by taking classes in five of the seven colleges and at the Law School. His research on breast cancer has taken him to two national conferences and culminated in a submission to PNAS and an honors thesis. He enjoyed leadership roles in the International Students Admissions Ambassadors, The Research Paper, Cornell Asian and Pacific Islander Student Union, Cornell Piano Society, and Model United Nations. He is a member of Phi Beta Kappa, a Biology Student Advisor, and received the International Student Book Award. Jimmy plans to attend medical school.

Dr. Gabbott was my biology teacher, the coordinator of our International Baccalaureate program, and the advisor for our monthly science newspaper. He is phenomenally creative. I remember the whole class being surprised when a test turned out to be a blank sheet of paper on which we were to draw our understanding of the topic. After that, I never forgot how to diagram a cell! He shared with me his passions, showing me the importance of following my own dreams. This was the most valuable lesson I learned in high school.

I met Jim Blankenship when I took his Biology Seminar. He immediately piqued my interest in the molecular workings of HIV viruses and the mental somersaults that scientists need to perform in order to combat them. I remember raising my hand to ask why HIV brings its own tRNA, to which he responded, “No one really knows. Maybe you’ll be the one to find out someday.” His wisdom and reassurance were invaluable; I was lucky to work as his teaching assistant. Jim is one of the most outstanding and dedicated faculty members at Cornell.
Michael Dezube

Honoring Thomas Lee of Newton South High School and Michael Macy of the Departments of Sociology and Information Science

Michael, who will stay at Cornell next year to earn a master’s degree in engineering, has been a member of the Social Dynamics Laboratory, webmaster of the Ski and Snowboard Club, technical director of the Behavioral Finance Organization, and vice president of Tau Beta Pi. Michael made dean’s list all semesters, and received honors from Omega Rho and the Golden Key. He won the Knight Scholarship, the Masters of Engineering Committee Scholarship, the D.O.D. SMART scholarship, and a scholarship from Google. Michael has interned at Cisco and Merck and will intern at TripAdvisor this coming summer. He developed an iPhone app, Reverse Dictionary, which was bought out for future equity, and won the National Microsoft Firenze BXT competition.

As a retired actuary, Mr. Lee channeled his knack for conveying concepts through his passion for teaching. I was privileged to have him as my teacher. Not only did he teach the curriculum well, but he enriched it with more challenging problems taken from the real world. This was my first exposure to truly difficult math problems and it had a profound impact. It is through Mr. Lee’s passion and teaching that I learned never to dismiss an opportunity or challenge, no matter how small or formidable it may be.

Professor Michael Macy has enabled me to view the world through a different light. When I took Group Solidarity, he was not didactic, but rather showed how sociological concepts govern real world situations. After the course ended, I was honored to work with Professor Macy for two years as an undergraduate research assistant, analyzing sociological concepts and aiding in Ph.D. students’ dissertations. He has taught me how better to manage teams. I have taken these lessons to heart, and have put them to direct use in the organizations I help run.
Kevin Fuhr

Honoring Jennifer Schinleber of Cypress Creek High School and Charles Williamson of the Sibley School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering

Kevin, a mechanical engineering major, will be working at Dominion Engineering, Inc. after completing his master’s degree in engineering in the fall. He was a mechanical lead on the championship-winning Cornell University Autonomous Underwater Vehicle team, which he joined as a freshman. His final three semesters, Kevin also researched the development of vortical structures in ground effect with Professor Williamson, winning the CEAA Undergraduate Research Award.

Over the summers, Kevin interned with Lockheed Martin and GE Energy. He was also the treasurer of Tau Beta Pi, the engineering honor society, and an Engineering Peer Advisor.

In my 10th grade A.P. World History class, Ms. Schinleber pushed me to develop a strong work ethic and dedication to the task at hand. Despite pursuing an engineering degree, I can trace much of my current academic and extracurricular accomplishments to the dogged determination it required to complete her all-encompassing review compilations. Despite the challenge posed by her class, she kept the class engaged with her sharp wit and command of the material. Ms. Schinleber always pushed her students to do their best and showed me that hard work is a prerequisite for success.

Among courses I have taken, Professor Charles Williamson’s Introduction to Fluid Dynamics stands out as the most educational and entertaining. Never one to stand idly and lecture, he kept the class engaged with his “impromptu” demonstrations including walking on non-Newtonian fluids and having a vortex ring battle across the lecture hall. As a result of the myriad demonstrations and clear, well-prepared lectures, his enthusiasm and passion for fluids impressed me and I have continued to study fluids through both research and class work. After joining Professor Williamson’s research group, I continue to be impressed by his knowledge and eagerness to assist in every way possible.
Eva Huang

Honoring David Hawes of Point Grey Secondary School and Jeffrey Varner of the Department of Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering

Eva will be pursuing a Ph.D. degree in Chemical Engineering after graduation. She received the Donald F. Othmer Sophomore Academic Excellence Award and was on the dean’s list every semester. Eva was a teaching assistant, a peer advisor, a peer tutor, and an Academic Excellence Workshop facilitator. Since sophomore year, Eva has studied the human coagulation cascade using a Systems Biology approach in the Varner Lab, and she looks forward to further investigating biological signaling pathways in graduate school.

During my years at Point Grey, Dr. Hawes was both a physics teacher and a life mentor. His humor guided me through the daunting topics of mechanics and electromagnetism, while his challenging exams trained me to become an independent problem solver. When Dr. Hawes first approached me with the Kwantlen Science Challenge application form, I was terrified. I had to gather a team, build a rocket car, and represent our school at a competition against thirty other teams from the province. With his guidance, I learned the importance of task delegation, tips for managing people, and the value of applying knowledge learned in the classroom.

Professor J. D. Varner is another life mentor who inspired me to pursue additional experience in academia. I joined his coagulation team during sophomore year. With the lack of a leading graduate student, Professor Varner provided us with extra attention and support. He taught me the concepts of Systems Biology, which are never introduced in traditional chemical engineering curriculum, and also the dedication required to be a successful researcher. “You can earn big money and live comfortably being a no-namer, or you can be at the frontier of a field and make groundbreaking contributions to human-kind,” he said. This message influenced my career decision, and it will remain with me for the rest of my life.
Thomas Jackson

Honoring Charles Christoe of High Technology High School and Stephen Wicker of the School of Electrical and Computer Engineering

Tom is an electrical and computer engineering major in the College of Engineering. When he is not doing class work, he spends his time as team leader of the Cornell University Autonomous Underwater Vehicle team helping to build an autonomous submarine. With his help, the team placed in the top two at the past three international competitions in both design and exhibition of the vehicle. He is also a dedicated member of the Big Red Marching and Pep Bands, where he plays clarinet. Tom will be attending graduate school at Carnegie Mellon next year, pursuing a Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering.

As my Principles of Engineering and A.P. Physics teacher, Dr. Charles Christoe helped shape my love of engineering. The most valuable skill I learned from him was how to break down and systematically solve complex problems. For one particularly memorable project Dr. Christoe had us build a car powered by a mouse-trap. Instead of just letting us design blindly, he encouraged us to analyze the system and design it intelligently. This was one of my most memorable engineering projects in high school, and it influenced my decision to study engineering.

My junior year at Cornell, I took Digital Communication Receiver Design with Professor Wicker. I learned a lot about designing digital receivers, and Professor Wicker also took the time to engage the class in interesting discussions about engineering ethics and design trade-offs. His class helped me think about electrical engineering differently, specifically from the role of a designer for industry instead of just a student. The discussions we had in class are what inspired me to pursue a Ph.D. so I can contribute to industry in the field of research and development.
Nipun Jasuja

Honoring Dawn McMaster of the American International School of Johannesburg and Charles Williamson of the Sibley School of Mechanical and Aerospace Engineering

Nipun will be working for Oliver Wyman Financial Services in New York City after graduating. He was a teaching assistant for Introductory MATLAB for six semesters. He was also a teaching assistant for Introductory Fluid Mechanics, a student assistant in Hans Bethe House, an engineering peer advisor, and a member of Tau Beta Pi honor society. He was published in Microfluidics and Nanofluidics for his research on insect cyborgs with Professor David Erickson. Nipun co-founded I. D. E.A., a student organization that hosts TEDx Cornell University conferences. He also spent a summer volunteering for UNICEF in the Maldives and was honored as an Engineering Global Fellow.

Ms. McMaster was not just my high school physics teacher. She was also a counselor, a mentor, and a guru. Her physics class, the perfect balance of theory and experiment, instilled in me intellectual curiosity and an insatiable desire for knowledge. Ms. McMaster is observant and keenly aware of the needs of her students. As I was adjusting to the new cultural environment of South Africa, Ms. McMaster was my biggest support. She helped me stay levelheaded when things seemed too difficult. Ms. McMaster always gave me something inspiring to take home besides homework, and continues to inspire me even today.

If teaching can be compared to theater, Professor Williamson is undoubtedly a master of the craft. Each of his Fluid Mechanics lectures is a magnificent performance that makes the most intricate concepts appear simple and elegant and the most banal equations seem awe-inspiring. He is enthusiastic and dedicated, and takes pleasure in imparting knowledge. He is more than willing to go out of his way to help them. As his student and teaching assistant, I developed a passion for teaching and realized that it is more about helping students discover ideas than stuffing facts.
Ju Khuan Pan

Honoring Cheng Puay Lim of Raffles Girls’ School and Monroe Weber-Shirk of the School of Civil and Environmental Engineering

Ju Khuan spent three rewarding years training to be an environmental engineer. Besides making the dean’s list every semester, she also received an Engineering Learning Initiatives Undergraduate Research Award to study the biodegradation of chlorinated ethenes by anaerobic bacteria under Professor Ruth Richardson. One of her most meaningful experiences was researching sustainable water treatment technologies as part of the AguaClara team. After graduating, she will pursue a M.S. in Environmental Engineering at Stanford University. She will then return to Singapore to work in the National Environmental Agency and Public Utilities Board, sponsors of her education in the States.

In high school, I was part of a team that went on an overseas service-learning trip led by Mr. Cheng Puay Lim. To me, he has always been an excellent role model. He was humble, respectful, and genuinely interested in befriending everyone, regardless of his or her background. During the trip, he shared insightful observations and asked perceptive questions that prompted me to reflect deeply about my place in this world. This interaction with him strengthened my resolve to contribute my best towards bettering the world. Mr. Lim made this trip a defining point of my life.

With the AguaClara program, Dr. Monroe Weber-Shirk has demonstrated how engineers can make the world a better place. His passion and drive to create sustainable water treatment technologies that empower poor communities have been absolutely inspirational. Before starting every semester of research, he first humanized our team’s engineering challenges by telling us stories about the people we were helping. He taught us to be excited about those challenges, to have fun with the science, and to really love our work. Dr. Weber-Shirk is truly a great educator, and I hope to emulate his innovative and pioneering spirit in my future endeavors.
João Paula Machado

Honoring Bárbara Labanca of the British School of Rio de Janeiro and Steven Pond of the Department of Music

João is a dual-degree student majoring in operations research and mathematics. He is a scholar of Fundação Estudar and a member of Tau Beta Pi. At Cornell, João has been involved in student teaching positions in engineering courses for two and a half years and has participated actively in music ensembles, focusing mostly on Brazilian music. He has presented research in probability applications to sports rankings in the Mathematical Association of America Seaway Section meeting in 2011. During summer vacations João interned at three asset management companies and will be joining Goldman Sachs Investment Management Division after graduation.

Education is, to me, a product of personal interest and good mentoring. Ms. Bárbara Labanca, my International Baccalaureate Portuguese teacher, was the person who most successfully represented this idea in my education. Her lessons in literary analysis in particular have stuck with me and prepared me to perform well in advanced freshman writing seminars. I also owe my continued reading of Brazilian poetry to her. Today I consider her a friend and I am grateful for the chance of honoring her as I am sure that my classmates would have liked to have the opportunity to do so themselves.

When I joined Deixa Samba, Cornell’s samba ensemble, as a freshman, I was looking for a way to practice guitar, but due to Professor Pond I found much more. He was the person who introduced me to the music scene at Cornell and ultimately the one who inspired me to make music a bigger part of my life here. I subsequently took his courses in jazz and diasporic music genres and pursued an independent study with him about the Brazilian genre baiao. Today music is still part of my future plans and this would not be possible without his outstanding encouragement.
Brandon Ho
Honoring Alvin Tan of Catholic High School and Rupert Spies of the Department of Food and Beverage Management

When Brandon is not serving or cooking for guests at Taverna Banfi, he is writing his next restaurant review for the Cornell Daily Sun. When he is not busy as a teaching assistant for three culinary courses, Brandon is researching restaurants, having recently completed his senior thesis on the effect of placing mirrors in check folders to increase server tips. Once a freshman rower and currently president of Ye Hosts Honorary Society, Brandon also puts his leadership skills to good use as study abroad outreach leader and lead student coordinator in the 2011 International Student Orientation.

Mr. Alvin Tan is more of a friend than a teacher. As advisor to the drama club, for which I was an active executive board member, Mr. Tan guided me both in my artistic pursuits and management philosophy. He cares for his underlings both in the classroom and in social settings, and this heart-over-mind approach to leadership has left its mark in the way that I handle group dynamics and collaborative work at the School of Hotel Administration. Ask him a favor and he goes above and beyond—a trait that all in the hospitality industry should strive toward.

He forgets things easily; I hardly remember anything. He cracks German jokes; I love dry humor. He loves food from all over the world; I love travelling to experience different cuisines. Professor Spies is exactly the older version of me. He has a fatherly quality about him that makes it easy to share my successes and woes with him. He is a great listener and dispenses useful advice to those who seek his guidance. I love the way he looks at life—with “the sky’s the limit” optimism and “ask and you shall be given” magnanimity. His experience with food also makes for meaningful, enriching discussions.
Eric Rabinowitz

Honoring Olga Banks of Half Hollow Hills High School West and J. Bruce Tracey of the School of Hotel Administration

Eric was awarded the 2012 Joseph Drown Special Prize and will deliver the School of Hotel Administration Student Address at graduation. He won the Gertrude Spencer Prize for Writing, was twice awarded the SHA Writing Excellence Award, and was a Models of Excellence Finalist. Eric was president of the Hospitality Law Society, vice president of Ye Hosts Honorary Society, treasurer of Hotel School Ambassadors, and teaching assistant for four different core courses. He co-authored a journal article and interned at PricewaterhouseCoopers, Goldman Sachs, Ritz-Carlton, and Starwood Hotels. After graduation, he will join Walton Street Capital as a real estate private equity analyst.

Vivacious, inspirational, and kindhearted, Señora Banks motivated me. From the imperfect subjunctive to the magical realism works of Gabriel García Márquez, my passion for the Spanish language, culture, and literature was born in her class. In each class, I embarked on an enthralling pedagogical journey, one that would take me out of my comfort zone. Señora Banks influenced my future; I completed minors in Spanish and Latin American Studies and plan on working in Latin America. I am thankful for the knowledge and inspiration that Señora Banks has given me—she is truly a beacon of academic excellence.

Professor Tracey was my faculty advisor, professor, senior thesis advisor, and mentor. I could always count on him to guide me: from career advice and industry connections to course selections and direction for my senior thesis, he was always there to encourage me. I could not have asked for a better mentor and advisor, one who grounded and supported me. His genuine personality, passion for his subject, and love for life are truly infectious. I will be forever grateful for the inspiration Professor Tracey provided me; I would not be the individual I am today without his ongoing support.
Kristen Hojnowski

Honoring Suzanne Pietrapaolo of Bishop Ludden Junior/Senior High School and Charles McCormick of the Division of Nutritional Sciences

Kristen will be attending medical school in the fall. While at Cornell, she was inducted into Kappa Omicron Nu and was president of the Human Ecology Honor Society. She was chairperson of the Human Ecology Ambassadors and a student advisor for the Division of Nutritional Sciences. She was on the dean’s list every semester and worked as a research assistant in a synthetic organic chemistry lab. She spent summers working in a translational critical care lab at SUNY Upstate Medical University and presented her published work at a national conference.

When I entered Suzanne Pietrapaolo’s French classroom, I found a teacher who had a profound impact on me. She saw within me a potential for leadership that I had yet to realize and encouraged me to think on a larger scale. Her high standards for work ethic and achievement were a part of her inspiring nature and I felt myself growing towards my full potential as an active learner in her class. Mrs. P was constantly available and a trusted source of guidance and support. Whether I found myself in times of doubt, sadness, or joy, I always knew I had a confidant in her.

In Mineral Nutrition and Chronic Disease, I relied on Professor McCormick to guide me through in-depth literature reviews. While the names of all the proteins involved in calcium absorption may elude me now, I have found that the lessons Professor McCormick taught me regarding attention to detail, critical thinking, and scientific curiosity have been unforgettable. No other course I took devoted so much time to investigating every angle of a scientific discussion. His constant challenges to look closer and not take any piece of information for granted inspired me. His candid commentary and obvious passion for the material made classes into engaging, thought-provoking exploits.
Joshua Mbanusi

Honoring Robbin Sweeney of West Orange High School and Rosemary Avery of the Department of Policy Analysis and Management

Joshua, a Harry S. Truman Scholarship Finalist, was a teaching assistant for PAM 2300. He is a member of Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society and Kappa Omicron Nu Honor Society, and served as academic development chair for Cornell’s Black Student Union. Joshua received a $5000 Pepsi Grant to finance a campus-wide mentoring program he created to combat low graduation rates among Black men at Cornell. He held internships at the U.S. Department of Education and the New York State Senate. Upon graduation, Joshua will be teaching high school social studies as a Teach for America corps member.

Ms. Sweeney’s high energy and unabashed style of teaching made my 10th grade U.S. History course come alive. She taught history from the perspective of the disadvantaged. She exposed me to the parts of American history that were not so blissful and rosy. I learned about great American icons, studying both their accomplishments and their sins. I learned how the United States, a country of great progress, tolerated a past tainted by unequal opportunity. Ms. Sweeney planted the seeds of social justice in my heart, creating in me a spirit of service that has guided me until today.

Professor Avery’s course, Introduction to Policy Analysis, has been instrumental in shaping how I view effective policy implementation, as it taught me to analyze policy through an empirical lens. Professor Avery once said, “You don’t make policy in a vacuum. Policy is informed by data and research.” She taught me that although a policy may appear logically correct, morally sound, or politically feasible, one cannot automatically conclude that it should be implemented. Challenging many of my preconceived notions, Professor Avery helped shape my understanding of appropriate government intervention, ultimately preparing me for a life dedicated to public service.
Kelton Minor

Honoring Helen Petach of Fairview High School and Jack Elliott of the Department of Design and Environmental Analysis

Next year, Kelton will continue his studies at Cornell towards an accelerated masters of science in Human Environment Relations: Human Factors and Ergonomics. He spent last year studying in Copenhagen, where he was named the DIS Design Student of the Year and took first place in Chicago Architecture Today’s 2011 International Skyscraper Design Challenge for Stockholm. In summer 2011, he designed an interactive bike room for Google’s Manhattan office. At Cornell, his research on fiber optic day lighting took first prize at the 25th Annual Cornell Undergraduate Research Forum and received the Linda Kay Krause ’73 Memorial and Human Ecology Alumni Association grants. He received the 2012 Beyer Award for Sustainable Design.

In my high school physics course, Dr. Petach challenged our class to collaboratively research and present viable energy alternatives and renewable energy technologies. By allowing us to explore contemporary applications of physical phenomena, she enabled me to sense the palpable connections between core class concepts, real world issues, and potential applied solutions. Her innovative instruction and wise mentorship instilled me with a constant hunger to understand how the world works. I am eternally, humbly indebted to Dr. Petach for serving as an academic compass and helping to steer me towards her alma mater.

While Dr. Petach stirred my curiosity to understand how things behave under the lens of empiricism, Professor Elliott inspired me to play with the potential of what things can become by design. He taught me to reason spatially and apply attention with intention to the subtle details and finite resources that compose our experience of the built environment. He has helped me to understand design research as a cyclical, dialectic process. He guided my efforts to understand contemporary metrics of sustainability by supporting my venture to become the youngest LEED Accredited Professional in the country.
Ethan Erickson

Honoring Jean Biebel of Wauwatosa East High School and Kate Bronfenbrenner of the School of Industrial and Labor Relations

Ethan was active in the Cornell Organization for Labor Action, the ILR Student Government Association, Cornell Winter Ambassadors, the ILR Labor Roundtable, ILR Union Days, Golden Key International Honor Society, and National Society of Collegiate Scholars. He spent his junior year at Pembroke College, Oxford University. He spent summers researching at the Milwaukee Area Labor Council and was a Research Assistant in the Office of Labor Education Research. Ethan was a Truman Scholarship Finalist, ILR Research Fellow, on dean's list all semesters, and won the Stuart Linnick Prize, Chaim and Ida Labor Internship Award, Irving M Ives Award, and Cornell Club of Wisconsin Scholarship. Upon graduation, Ethan will be working in union organizing and political work and plans to do graduate work in public policy, industrial relations, or law.

In Mrs. Biebel’s Challenge Seminar, I was exposed to philosophy, ethics, education, logic, science, math, language, art, and history. I had to do substantial writing, particularly a long research paper on the judiciary, and a great deal of public speaking in class discussion and debates. Challenge Seminar truly challenged me to develop my academic skills. For helping me prepare for what Cornell would bring me and making me a better student, I cannot thank Mrs. Biebel enough for her inspiring and devoted tutelage.

Professor Bronfenbrenner pushed me to work to my utmost potential. I cannot thank her enough for helping me pursue my passion for the labor movement and social justice. Her research and the influence it had on legislation stimulated my interest. She has helped me to explore my passion by helping me find my summer internships. By her teaching, Professor Bronfenbrenner has equipped me the skills I will need not just for work with trade unions, but for how to organize and mobilize for broad social change.
Robert Solomon

Honoring Linda Zschoche of Penfield High School and David Lipsky of the School of Industrial and Labor Relations

Robert is a candidate for graduation with honors, was on the dean’s list every semester, and wrote an honors thesis. He was awarded the James E. McPherson Scholarship and was a two-time winner of a Cornell Club of Rochester scholarship. After graduation, he will work to develop partner companies of the Venture For America Organization as a VFA Fellow. He has interned with Mansa Capital, the Elmcore Group, and MGM Resorts International. As a member of Cornell’s Heavyweight Crew his sophomore year, Rob’s boat won a gold medal at the Eastern Sprints League Championship. He also competed for the Cornell Rugby Football team and coached and played for the Club Lacrosse team.

I always enjoyed math, but never had I learned such challenging material as quickly and easily as I did in Mrs. Zschoche’s class. It was evident to me that she took an incredible interest in her students and taught with passion. Often I would ask her for extra time outside of class to go over material, or to dig more deeply into something that we had already discussed. She would frequently sacrifice her lunch breaks to do so. Her dedication to teaching and the special relationship she created with each of her students was inspiring.

I first met Professor Lipsky during his class on negotiations. With his hilarious anecdotes, he engaged us and crafted us into masters of negotiation from a practical, as well as theoretical standpoint. During his office hours, we discussed entrepreneurship, arbitration, private investment, and my thesis on Israel and Palestine. No matter the subject, he always seemed know the answers, and if not, someone who could help. Any professor who exhibits even a fraction of the knowledge, sincerity, and friendliness Professor Lipsky possesses will surely be successful in motivating their students.