Table of Contents

4 A Celebration of Honors
Andrew McConnell Stott
Vice Provost & Dean of Undergraduate Education
Director of the Honors College
Professor of English

5 Achieving Peace Via Conflict
Carly Gottorff
Honors Scholar, Class of 2017

6 Road Maps & Role Models: A Devoted Educator
Jessica Seabury
Honors Scholar, Class of 1994

8 Learning to Fly
Robert DeBortoli
Honors Scholar, Class of 2016

John Assad, Class of 1985
Selina Iozzo, Class of 2019

12 Spontaneous Experiences: Life Outside of the Hamster Wheel
Thomas Betjeman
Honors Scholar, Class of 2002

14 An Unexpected Mission
Erich Devendorf
Honors Scholar, Class of 2005

16 A Return to My Roots
Denise Juron-Borges
Honors Scholar, Class of 1993

18 Alumni Updates
Every issue of *Honors Today* is dedicated to our wonderful alumni, but this one more than ever. The fall of 2016 represents the 35th anniversary of Honors and its growth from an experimental program that began with an inaugural class of 21 young pioneers, to its current incarnation as a four-year college experience that welcomed a record-breaking 430 freshmen this fall. Over that time, we’ve graduated more than three thousand students, a history of growth and achievement that wouldn’t have been possible if it weren’t for our reputation—one that is embodied in every single one of our wonderful alumni.

At 35 years old, we are firmly out of our adolescence and on the road to maturity, and perhaps even a little wisdom. Many things have changed over the years - our curriculum, new staff and new accommodations - but through it all runs a consistent commitment to shared aspirations, engagement with the wider world, and a deep love for the journey of intellectual discovery. Certainly, the impact of Honors is enduring. At our graduation ceremony last May, we were lucky enough to be joined by several members of the original class, all of whom are doing wonderful things, including John Assad, who delivered our alumni address. A proud son of Tonawanda, John majored in biology before attending Harvard University for a PhD in neuroscience, where he is now on faculty in the University’s Medical School. (You can read more about John in our *Then & Now* feature on page 10.) Given his remarkable record of achievement, it was wonderful to hear John talk so warmly of the fundamental role that Honors played setting him on the path to success, and of how important the connection to UB has remained for him. You should have heard the cheer that went around the auditorium when he told us that even after all those years at Harvard, he still considers UB to be his university!

And what does the future hold? My sense is that Honors will continue to grow as the University garners more attention nationally for its excellent programs and commitment to student success and affordability. With that growth, I want to see the College become more diverse and reflective of the citizens of New York State, and to continue to deliver a personalized curriculum that challenges students to move outside of their major and into unexplored territory. More important than ever is refocusing the program on the principles that inspired it 35 years ago, namely the idea that an honors education is not about earning privileges for a high GPA, but about challenging students to do more with their gifts and preparing them for active leadership, engaged citizenship, and a passion for enacting positive change.

One recent innovation is the Honors College Faculty Fellows program, and before signing off, I’d like to welcome our newest Faculty Fellow, Ashley Barr. Faculty Fellows represent some of the most engaging teachers and researchers that we have at the University, and are selected for the contributions they will make to the Honors College curriculum and community. Ashley is an Assistant Professor of Sociology, specializing on all aspects of family life. She is currently working on several projects to understand how romantic relationships get “under the skin” by affecting biomarkers of health and chronic disease, and an examination of “contagion effects” - when stressors experienced by one partner manifest in the other - and a better understanding of the relational underpinnings of health and healthy aging.

All of the Honors Faculty Fellows, along with the staff and myself are looking forward to seeing you at our alumni gatherings this fall, especially for Homecoming Weekend beginning with a special anniversary “Elevenses” (British tea & cake) on Friday, October 7th. Thanks so much for being a part of the Honors family, and I look forward to seeing you all this fall!
I’ve been a cockroach with Kafka and stranded on an island with Golding. I’ve lived in the imaginative, compelling, and fictional minds of the world’s most chaotic dreamlands where the deepest fears and thrills of the collective unconscious are written out and devoured by its populace. As a society, we crave the vicarious experience of these tall, grisly tales set in distant lands, all while tucked safely in our own beds. But I’ve also seen the gruesome reality of the not-so-distant lands where citizens are rampaged by their neighbors or even their own government. It is these real-life worlds that I immerse myself in every day: I research civil conflict and specifically, mass killings.

I often avoid discussing the details of my research with the general population because clearly it is not a cheerful topic of conversation. But while it can be overwhelmingly dismal at times, I do find my work extremely rewarding. Sure, I study some of the most brutal acts of humanity, but my overarching objective is to seek solutions to these terrible events, as well as ways to mitigate their devastating impacts. Every day in my research, I study past atrocities in an attempt to save future lives on a large scale.

As a freshman, I took a class on the study of civil conflict taught by Professor Jacob Kathman from the Political Science Department. I learned that in the frequently forgotten struggles of developing nations, the sentiment in the western world tends to be nihilistic and the use of intervention is often overlooked. This class is where I found my true passion, and it pushed me to pursue a career in deciphering the idiosyncrasies of civil conflict and mass killings. Over the next two years, instead of law school, I decided that I wanted to study this subject at the graduate level. This path would not have been available to me without the community and support I found in the Honors College and the McNair Scholars Program. That path also led me to perform research at Massachusetts Institute of Technology this past summer. At MIT, I found a place where imagination and academia mix in perfect harmony to foster ideas that change the world. My experience was like Disneyland for academia because it allowed me the freedom to explore revolutionary concepts in a uniquely collaborative environment. As a research intern at MIT, I worked in the Governance Lab, which is housed in their Political Science Department. This innovative lab bridges the often distinct gap that exists between academia and policy in the political science field. My research focused on a controversial question: Does humanitarian aid help or hurt a state recovering from civil conflict?

Extending the research done by two graduate students in the department (Nina McMurry and Philip Martin), I used spatial data analysis of the locations of rebel-associated ethnic groups as a proxy for the location of territorial control in order to test the assumptions of their argument. The initial paper argues that previous assertions are correct in finding that humanitarian aid has a destabilizing effect, but contests the conditions under which this proposition is correct. It finds that the destabilizing effect is intensified when rebel organizations controlled territory during the conflict, arguing that this is due to the territorially-based rebels’ greater ability to attract and leverage aid to continue their struggle.

To further probe these findings, I created a dataset of rebel groups associated with ceasefires, the ethnicities associated with those rebel groups, and where those ethnicities are located spatially. Since a comprehensive dataset of territory held by rebel groups does not exist, the work I have done could contribute to the future study of rebel groups in civil conflicts. Using this dataset, I can then calculate the distance from the shape files I created that represents the rebel held territory of each nation, as well as their respective capitals and borders. My experience at MIT was a culmination of everything I have learned at UB and a unique exploration of all the facets of my academic career. I owe much of my achievements to the people I have met and had the pleasure of knowing at UB, including professors, advisors, and peers.

Some of the most heinous crimes against humanity happen during civil conflicts and they rival the fictional world authors like Kafka and Golding created to horrify and entertain us. Studying these brutal real life acts can at times be disheartening, but by focusing on what these terrible events can teach us, I am optimistic for the future. The study of developmental political science can save lives and strengthen our global communities, and I hope one day my research will be able to contribute to these important goals.
In chatting with Mary Anne Rokitka, it becomes clear that the Honors Scholars she has mentored over the last thirty years are at the heart of her long-standing relationship with the Honors College. Though their stories are as unique as the students themselves, underpinning them all is Rokitka’s affinity for teaching and mentoring. Rokitka keeps up with many of her former students both personally and professionally; her own physician, Dr. Diana Pratt-Wilkins ('00) is an Honors graduate.

Reading through *Honors Today* alumni updates, Rokitka says she recognizes numerous names: “I knew these students from when they were very young, and they’ve become accomplished adults. I’ve watched families grow in size, I’ve watched people move from one position to another or from one country to another. Seeing them progress throughout their careers and lives, and now being able to have absolute trust in them professionally, is very gratifying.”

It is fitting that Rokitka’s collection of student stories is bookended by her two teaching stints with the Honors College. The first was an Honors seminar in the late ‘80s called “Life in Space.” An environmental physiologist, Rokitka focused the class on how plants and animals, particularly the human body, survive in space. Rokitka, who conducted research with NASA, arranged for astronauts to speak to the class in person and via live interviews. “At the end of the seminar I told Clyde ‘Kipp’ Herreid (Academic Director of the then Honors Program) that this was the most incredible teaching experience I have ever had,” Rokitka says. “I had a group of twenty-four students whose names and faces I knew within a week. Being able to turn them on to something that I really cared about, that was perhaps incidental to their majors, was a really great experience.” In fact, she fondly recalls one freshman declaring in class that she wanted to be an astronaut when she grew up. That student, Alka Patel ('93), also turned out to be the first Honors Scholar Rokitka was asked to mentor. Over the years, Rokitka has mentored Alka as life took the Honors alumna in different directions (she went on to earn an MD/PhD); during that time the two evolved from their initial student/teacher relationship to friends. They still catch up over lunch whenever Alka visits Buffalo.

More recently, Rokitka was called out of retirement to step in for ailing colleague Peter Nickerson and teach the perennially popular Honors Seminar “What They Died From.” Initially, Rokitka was uncertain about her reception as “the sub” and also wondered how she could relate to a class of students from a new generation. But those concerns soon melted away; the freshmen enthusiastically joined her in examining the lives and times of musicians, artists, engineers, former presidents, and athletes and the diseases that claimed their lives. Rokitka states that this incredible teaching experience was capped off by what happened at the last class, as students lined up around the room, waiting to exchange words, hugs and handshakes with her. Calling it a “major curtain call”, Rokitka says that moment is reflective of what happens in the Honors College: “It is smaller and more intimate than the larger campus. I think that whole notion of scale makes it so important. Moreover, the faculty who are involved in the Honors College care about their students in a personal way, so I consider this a special place.”

Like many of her own students, Rokitka was fueled at an early age by a love of all things science. She initially earned her bachelor’s in education, and she notes that at that time women either became teachers, nurses, or wives and mothers. She did teach high school science for a bit, but while continuing on at UB for graduate school she met Professor Kipp Herreid, one of her research and teaching mentors in biology. Herreid suggested that she take a course in physiology, a decision that serendipitously changed her life. The discipline combines all of Rokitka’s science loves into one. “I didn’t need to make a decision about becoming a biologist or a chemist - physiology is the best of both worlds,” Rokitka says.
Although Rokitka earned a master’s degree in both biology and natural sciences, she enjoyed physiological research so much that she chose to pursue a PhD in the field. Following a postdoc fellowship under esteemed physiologist Hermann Rahn, she was offered a faculty position in UB’s School of Medicine, and the rest she says, “is history.” Her research has focused on two extreme environments—the depths of the sea and the weightlessness of space. As part of her ten-year NASA grant she traveled to mission control, communicating with astronauts and overseeing the science being conducted during missions. “It was like living a childhood dream. In my high school yearbook there is a picture of me holding a model rocket I made out of tin cans and cardboard and paper. And here I was, doing the very thing that I had dreamed of when I was 16.” In the classroom, Rokitka became the face of the PGY 300 course for innumerable UB pre-med undergraduates, teaching it single-handedly for many years. Former mentor Herreid says, “She was renowned among medical students for her exceptional teaching skill, a talent that she consistently displayed when she was my TA. I am personally indebted to her for helping me hone my own skills, as I learned them watching her interact with students.”

Rokitka says that perhaps the capstone of her career is the creation of the Biomedical Sciences BS degree in 2004. Pre-health undergraduates at UB had previously used the special major option, combining courses in biology, chemistry, physiology, and anatomy to build a degree to best prepare them for the health care profession. As pre-health overwhelmingly became the predominant special major, Rokitka was asked to put together an official undergraduate major in UB’s School of Medicine. She recalls meeting an incoming freshman at a summer orientation picnic who informed her, “I am going to be in your major, and I am going to be a physician someday.” That student, Dr. Brian Mitzman (’06), is currently completing his training in thoracic surgery and says, “Dr. Rokitka is the epitome of a devoted educator.

Her passion for teaching is obvious, and I can think of no better mentor. Throughout medical school she was my trusted confidant and always available when I needed a push in the right direction...I look back on her as family. Without her support, I would never have come so far.”

Rokitka supported Honors Scholars behind the scenes as well. An integral member of the Honors Council for many years, she helped shape the direction and curriculum of the Honors College from its earliest days. Herreid says, “As the (then) Honors Program was rapidly expanding, (Administrative Director) Josie Capuana and I decided to create an advisory council to help guide us along the road to excellence. One of the first people we recruited was Mary Anne. She had become an important advisor to students wishing to enter the medical field, and year after year she livened our Honors Council discussions with insight and good humor as we grappled with the intricacies of medical school requirements.” For her part, Rokitka says she enjoyed the camaraderie and shared purpose of the Council, and she notes the important contributions made by the “engaging, bright, and dedicated faculty,” as well as the student and alumni representatives.

Rokitka says that perhaps the capstone of her career is the creation of the Biomedical Sciences BS degree in 2004. Pre-health undergraduates at UB had previously used the special major option, combining courses in biology, chemistry, physiology, and anatomy to build a degree to best prepare them for the health care profession. As pre-health overwhelmingly became the predominant special major, Rokitka was asked to put together an official undergraduate major in UB’s School of Medicine. She recalls meeting an incoming freshman at a summer orientation picnic who informed her, “I am going to be in your major, and I am going to be a physician someday.” That student, Dr. Brian Mitzman (’06), is currently completing his training in thoracic surgery and says, “Dr. Rokitka is the epitome of a devoted educator.

Her passion for teaching is obvious, and I can think of no better mentor. Throughout medical school she was my trusted confidant and always available when I needed a push in the right direction...I look back on her as family. Without her support, I would never have come so far.”

Rokitka supported Honors Scholars behind the scenes as well. An integral member of the Honors Council for many years, she helped shape the direction and curriculum of the Honors College from its earliest days. Herreid says, “As the (then) Honors Program was rapidly expanding, (Administrative Director) Josie Capuana and I decided to create an advisory council to help guide us along the road to excellence. One of the first people we recruited was Mary Anne. She had become an important advisor to students wishing to enter the medical field, and year after year she livened our Honors Council discussions with insight and good humor as we grappled with the intricacies of medical school requirements.” For her part, Rokitka says she enjoyed the camaraderie and shared purpose of the Council, and she notes the important contributions made by the “engaging, bright, and dedicated faculty,” as well as the student and alumni representatives.
From hosting Honors Scholars in her home for Evenings with Faculty, to attending students’ sporting events (such as those of volleyball player Marisa Hornbaker (‘11)), to serving as the faculty advisor for APMS (Association of Pre-Medical Students), to writing countless letters of recommendation for students entering medical school, Rokitka’s impact on her students has been multi-dimensional and widespread. Former APMS President Sujata Sofat (’05), now Attending General, Robotic and Bariatric Surgeon at Northeast Georgia Medical, sums up her mentor this way: “Dr Rokitka is one of those women that I compare other amazing women I meet to - one of those women who stand out among others as someone you may only meet once in your lifetime but who impact it forever. I am fortunate that I have had Dr. Rokitka be a constant in my life.”

Rokitka, unfailingly humble, more often than not redirects any talk of her countless accomplishments back to the stories and successes of her students. Her teaching and mentoring career has been founded on the many relationships she built and fostered along the way. She credits her students with being the true inspiration. “I really enjoyed mentoring these young men and women. There were times I am certain that I got more from my students than I offered to them,” Rokitka says. “But we are there as road maps and role models. They could learn what we teach them on their own, I am certain of that, but it is how we relate to them, what we do for them, that is important.”

As my research progressed, I increasingly realized that this was the world I wanted to spend the rest of my life in. “

By Robert DeBortoli
Class of 2016

CRASH! My quadcopter had slammed into the wall again and yet another propeller had shattered. I was testing flight algorithms inside UB’s Davis Hall as part of the career path in robotics I had unknowingly embarked upon 8 years prior. I joined my high school’s FIRST Robotics Team as a freshman and helped to build a robot for regional competitions. So when it came time to choose a collegiate major, I settled on electrical engineering because of how much I had enjoyed the coursework and hands-on projects in high school.

After a semester of basic engineering courses at UB, I enrolled in a computer science course just for fun. I enjoyed it and subsequent CS courses so much that in my junior year I changed my major to computer engineering (a blend of computer science and electrical engineering). Once I had found the right major for me, it was time to get involved with research, which was an experience many of my fellow Honors Scholars raved about. On the Center for Undergraduate Research website I found a listing for “Indoor feature detection using Micro-Aerial Vehicles”; the robotics aspect of the project would provide a unique opportunity to mesh my electrical engineering and computer science backgrounds.

After speaking with the professor leading the project, Dr. Karthik Dantu, I learned the research would center on outfitting an 8-inch lightweight quadcopter with a 1-gram camera and have the quadcopter navigate in a space filled with obstacles (doors, walls, desks, etc). Similar work had already been done using high powered laptops; our goal would be to achieve the same navigation capabilities with less computing power than that of a smartphone. It was initially overwhelming to hear Karthik talk about the variety of fields required to reach the goal -- I realized there was a lot to learn!

From the start of my research, Karthik stepped back and let me teach myself. Even though the work was new to me, I was able to use much of what I learned in the classroom, from circuit design to programming. I soon understood that because the copter was so light, stable flight was difficult because minor variations in motor speed meant huge changes in physical orientation. After poring over forums, manuals, and online articles, it was an awesome feeling to finally stabilize the copter and make it hover. Once I got it to hover for a short period of time, there were a lot of improvements to make in stability and control to make it hover for a prolonged period of time. This is where my professor really helped by introducing me to the field of control theory, which I applied to the quadcopter to make it more stable. It was exciting to see that I could use an algorithm from control theory directly on my quadcopter and then see the improved stability almost immediately. Seeing the physical effects of the code I wrote was one of the first experiences that inspired me to make robotics my career.

I then moved to attaching a camera to the copter so that it could detect features indoors. I was thankful for my electrical engineering background, which helped in connecting the camera, and for my computer science background which allowed for me to design and use software to detect walls, doors, and other obstacles. I began to see the opportunity for groundbreaking research more clearly, as existing algorithms proved impossible to implement on such a low-powered robot. As I worked on designing sparser algorithms for feature detection, the nature of my experiments started to involve a lot of crashing and broken
parts. The Honors College was supportive in providing funding to buy replacement parts and continue testing.

As my research progressed, I increasingly realized that this was the world I wanted to spend the rest of my life in. Working in the lab challenged me to work on problems with no known solutions and allowed me the unique opportunity to use everything I had learned up to that point. It also gave me the chance to work with graduate students, many of whom I also became friends with. I discovered that although much of research is independent, collaboration is a vital and time-saving element. I learned who to go to for computer vision help, algorithm assistance, and other topics; these discussions often lead to better solutions for my work than those arrived at by searching textbooks or the web alone. By the end of my time I was even able to help others working on the quadcopters!

Karthik and UB also gave me ample opportunity to share my work, an aspect I really enjoyed. In December 2015 I took part in the CSE Department’s “CS Education Week”, where I was able to lead a robotics activity for children aged 5-15. I not only had an awesome time but I learned from professors in the department how to engage the kids, provide meaningful activities, and handle the crowd of hundreds of parents/students. I also presented a poster of my work at the University’s Celebration of Academic Excellence, where I was able to share my project with many professors, fellow students, and members of the Buffalo community.

At the end of my junior year, I began to apply for Robotics PhD programs across the country. Through my work with Dr. Dantu I connected with the newly formed Robotics Program at Oregon State University. The Program is a perfect fit because it emphasizes applied research and offers a track focused solely on robotics. As I reflect on my collegiate career, I am thankful for the easy entry into research offered by UB and for the supportive Honors College community which encouraged me to try it out. These factors were the primary reasons I joined the Robotics Lab at UB and why I’ll be able to spend the rest of my days playing with robots (and hopefully getting paid for it!).

In Bob’s research, he used an existing algorithm to try and match features from the image on the left to the same features in the image on the right. Accurately correlating features across images allows a robot to determine if it has been in a location before.
Then... (1981)

John Assad ('85) entered UB in September 1981 as part of the first entering class of the Honors Program, which admitted just twenty-one Presidential Scholars. In his senior year he received the Faculty of Natural Science and Mathematics Outstanding Student Award and he graduated with a BA in biological sciences in 1985. John attended Harvard University on a National Science Foundation Graduate Fellowship, completing his PhD in neurobiology in 1991. He did postdoctoral stints at the University of Rochester and Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, and was hired by Harvard Medical School as an Assistant Professor of Neurobiology in 1996, eventually becoming a tenured Full Professor in 2007. In 2011, he moved to Italy to serve as the Director of Neuroscience for the Italian Institute of Technology, until returning full-time to Harvard this past fall. John’s lab does research on sensory and cognitive processing in the brain. He lives in Boston with his wife and three kids -- whom he has propagandized to become die-hard Bills and Sabres fans.

1981 Highlights:
- Jan - Ronald Reagan becomes the 40th US President
- Mar - 53rd Academy Awards, hosted by Johnny Carson
- Apr - Space shuttle Columbia launches
- Aug - MTV is launched on cable TV in the US
- Aug - Original Model 5150 IBM PC is released (base price $1,565)
- Sept - Sandra Day O’Connor: First female Supreme Court Justice
- Nov - Luke and Laura marry on TV soap General Hospital
- Dec - First American test-tube baby born in Virginia

1981 Prices:
- Stamp: 18¢
- Milk (gal.): $1.69
- Bread (loaf): 54¢
- New car (avg.): $5,743
- Gas (gal.): $1.13
- Home (mdn.): $65,800
- Movie ticket: $2.78
- Highest grossing film: Raiders of the Lost Ark

Why UB? - John: I grew up in the Town of Tonawanda, a short walk from the Main Street campus. Both of my parents and my oldest sister graduated from UB. In fact, UB was the only college I applied to; I honestly couldn’t imagine going anywhere else.

Honors Admission - John: Applying to UB was pretty boilerplate back then - just submit high school grades and SAT scores. After I had been accepted to UB, I received a letter from then-President Robert Ketter that I had also been awarded a Presidential Honors Scholarship. That came as a nice surprise.

Registration Process - John: During the first few weeks of classes came the dreaded registration period. If you had to change your class schedule, there was the nightmarish “drop-add” line of hundreds of students snaking through the halls and spilling outside of the old Squire Hall on the Main Street campus. The wait could be hours long, and it was hot in late August and everybody was pretty testy. I remember my mom, who was then teaching part time at UB, standing in line to hold my place while I was in class. Luckily, the Honors Program started doing drop-add for us, which was enormously helpful (although I realized this a bit late!).

Honors Classes - John: My undergraduate classes were really stimulating, including several honors classes that included other students in the Honors Program. I also attended the first Honors Colloquium (on Sunday evenings!), which was taught by Gerald Rising, Professor of Mathematics and Computer Science. We read and discussed the book Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid by Douglas Hofstadter, a metaphorical musing on human and artificial intelligence. The truth is, I never really understood too much of that book (although I would never have admitted it to my classmates!), but Dr. Rising did a great job keeping the discussion lively and engaging. All in all, it was a great introduction to UB and the Honors Program.

What the Honors College Has Meant to Me - John: My Honors advisor/mentor was (the great) Clyde “Kipp” Herreid, Professor of Biology and later the Academic Director of the Program, for more than twenty years. He was just wonderful - inviting me to visit his lab the day after I graduated from high school. I did research in his lab for several years after, a fantastic experience that inspired me to become a scientist.
Selina Iozzo (Class of 2019) is a sophomore Honors Scholar from the small town of Lewiston, NY, which is about thirty-five minutes from UB’s North Campus. A music theatre major, Selina loves city life and consequently, she found UB’s size of to be one of its major draws. She spends most of her free time hiking and adventuring, and of course singing, dancing, and acting.

**Why UB? - Selina:** As a high school student, the process of choosing a university and major can be daunting. Applying as a music theatre major made the whole process far more difficult because I had to travel to every school and go through a rigorous audition process to see if I would be accepted into the program I desired, as well as the school itself. When I was accepted into the BFA Music Theatre program at UB I was ecstatic.

**Honors Admission - Selina:** After committing to the school and the program, I immediately applied for the Honors College at UB. My older brother, an alumnus of the Honors College who is now pursuing his PhD at Cornell University, had nothing but great things to say about his Honors experience. I myself can say the same now.

**What the Honors College Has Meant to Me - Selina:** As a sophomore, I can already look back and say that the Honors College has done so much for me as a student and as a person. Aside from the curriculum of the Honors College, I met my best friend, and my roommate, through the Honors Orientation and by living in the Governors Residence Hall with other Honors students. The first year of university can be tough at times, but having such a supportive group away from home is what helped me get through it all. Attending such a big school can be scary, but the Honors College really makes the school feel smaller and less intimidating. I am so happy to be an Honors student at the University at Buffalo.

**Registration Process - Selina:** One of the best perks about being an Honors College student is priority registration. Registering for classes in college is much different than high school and the entire process is done online now through our HUB Student Center. I would not know how to search for specific classes, add them to my shopping cart, or enroll without the help of my advisor. It is nice to know I do not have to wake up at 7:00 am, stressed, trying to get into a class that will fill up quickly!

(Editor’s Note: This year UB students will be able to add all their required classes for their degree into their Planner in HUB, upload the courses each semester to their Shopping Cart, chose from multiple schedule options (including indicating preferred instructor and free/busy times to accommodate for jobs or other commitments) through a Schedule Builder and then register for their favorite schedule with the click of a button. Although not all Honors students fret about registering right when the system opens at 7:00am, Honors advisors know that many will be on their computers (maybe in PJs) at the moment the registration window opens. Some things, like Honors students exhibiting Type-A tendencies, don’t change over time.)

**Honors Classes - Selina:** My favorite experience in the Honors College was my Honors seminar my first semester. I chose the “On the Edge” seminar taught by Professor of Music Jean Kopperud. This seminar was performance-based and helped me make advances in my skills as a music theatre major, but more importantly, I learned so much about myself as a person and as a performer. I will carry these skills with me for the rest of my life.

---

2016 Prices:
- Stamp: $0.47
- Milk (gal.): $3.43
- Bread (loaf): $2.32
- New car (avg.): $33,560
- Gas (gal.) $2.30
- Home (mdn.): $294,600
- Movie ticket: $8.66
- Highest grossing film: Captain America: Civil War
As an undergraduate at UB I studied philosophy, focusing primarily on phenomenology. I recall nearing graduation and heading in to the philosophy department office to see if I could conjure up some ideas about how to sustain myself in life with my degree. I saw a flyer in the office declaring in large font, “What do you do with a degree in philosophy? Anything you want!”

I didn’t feel prepared to commit myself to graduate studies in philosophy immediately and had a strong desire to get out of academia, and New York, and the US, and, if I could have, the planet. I wanted to jump into the river of spontaneous experience and see life through as many perspectives as possible. It was actually a buddy from UB who had also studied philosophy who suggested joining the Peace Corps. After the rather arduous application process and rejecting an offered position in Namibia teaching English, I was offered a spot as an agricultural volunteer in Mali, West Africa. It seemed to be a perfect fit and it was potentially an opportunity to learn French (useful in graduate philosophy) as well as how to farm (an area I knew nothing about but was very interested in). As it turned out, most of my Peace Corps colleagues also had no prior experience in agriculture, but many had liberal arts backgrounds and so we were deemed to be easily teachable.

After completing my technical training in the Malian capital, Bamako, I was assigned a location where I would stay for the next two years. My only input was that I wanted to be in as remote a location as possible. As chance would have it I was selected to go to a Dogon village of 300 people called Dologou. I was the only volunteer in the area and spent the following two years in a house of mud and stone, without electricity or water, perched atop an enormous cliff escarpment.

I was given about two acres of land to farm by the village chief. There I grew millet, sorghum, various beans, peanuts, and hibiscus. I learned to farm by working on other people’s fields and see life through as many perspectives as possible. It was actually a buddy from UB who had also studied philosophy who suggested joining the Peace Corps. After the rather arduous application process and rejecting an offered position in Namibia teaching English, I was offered a spot as an agricultural volunteer in Mali, West Africa. It seemed to be a perfect fit and it was potentially an opportunity to learn French (useful in graduate philosophy) as well as how to farm (an area I knew nothing about but was very interested in). As it turned out, most of my Peace Corps colleagues also had no prior experience in agriculture, but many had liberal arts backgrounds and so we were deemed to be easily teachable.

After completing my technical training in the Malian capital, Bamako, I was assigned a location where I would stay for the next two years. My only input was that I wanted to be in as remote a location as possible. As chance would have it I was selected to go to a Dogon village of 300 people called Dologou. I was the only volunteer in the area and spent the following two years in a house of mud and stone, without electricity or water, perched atop an enormous cliff escarpment.

I was given about two acres of land to farm by the village chief. There I grew millet, sorghum, various beans, peanuts, and hibiscus. I learned to farm by working on other people’s fields and see life through as many perspectives as possible. It was actually a buddy from UB who had also studied philosophy who suggested joining the Peace Corps. After the rather arduous application process and rejecting an offered position in Namibia teaching English, I was offered a spot as an agricultural volunteer in Mali, West Africa. It seemed to be a perfect fit and it was potentially an opportunity to learn French (useful in graduate philosophy) as well as how to farm (an area I knew nothing about but was very interested in). As it turned out, most of my Peace Corps colleagues also had no prior experience in agriculture, but many had liberal arts backgrounds and so we were deemed to be easily teachable.

After completing my technical training in the Malian capital, Bamako, I was assigned a location where I would stay for the next two years. My only input was that I wanted to be in as remote a location as possible. As chance would have it I was selected to go to a Dogon village of 300 people called Dologou. I was the only volunteer in the area and spent the following two years in a house of mud and stone, without electricity or water, perched atop an enormous cliff escarpment.

I was given about two acres of land to farm by the village chief. There I grew millet, sorghum, various beans, peanuts, and hibiscus. I learned to farm by working on other people’s fields and see life through as many perspectives as possible. It was actually a buddy from UB who had also studied philosophy who suggested joining the Peace Corps. After the rather arduous application process and rejecting an offered position in Namibia teaching English, I was offered a spot as an agricultural volunteer in Mali, West Africa. It seemed to be a perfect fit and it was potentially an opportunity to learn French (useful in graduate philosophy) as well as how to farm (an area I knew nothing about but was very interested in). As it turned out, most of my Peace Corps colleagues also had no prior experience in agriculture, but many had liberal arts backgrounds and so we were deemed to be easily teachable.

After completing my technical training in the Malian capital, Bamako, I was assigned a location where I would stay for the next two years. My only input was that I wanted to be in as remote a location as possible. As chance would have it I was selected to go
I helped them manage a Malian restaurant and $1 store and in return had food and a place to stay. This sustained itself for about a year until I was able to readjust to life in the US. Once back on my feet I set out again gaining knowledge/experience through eclectic work experiences. I worked as an interpreter in Spanish, French, and Dogon for child protective services in NYC, then at the African Services Committee in Harlem, both of which had me bicycling all over the city sharing in many different lives and living situations. I also took the opportunity to train as an EMT and work for several volunteer ambulance organizations in the city. I thought about medical school but found the medical education environment in the US to be depressing and largely uninspiring. I decided to give public health a try, and returned to Mali as a technical advisor for the Guinea Worm Eradication Program through the CDC/Carter Center. I was stationed on the border between Mali and Niger and worked with a small team of Malian doctors and health care promoters. We would go out on missions into the desert tracking infected Tamacheks (the predominant nomadic tribe throughout much of the Sahara, otherwise known as the Tuareg) for days at a time. We would isolate and treat infected individuals and then treat all water sources that they came into contact with. The doctors who I worked with in Mali were all generalists, capable of treating adults and children, delivering babies and performing common surgeries. They functioned in pretty much any setting. That was the kind of doctor I could see wanting to be.

Upon returning to the US I took off for Alaska to work as a salmon fisherman for a season and make some money-enough to complete the required courses to apply to medical school. I went to SUNY New Paltz, a beautiful place with excellent rock climbing. When it came time to decide on a medical school I was looking ideally for a school in a part of the world I had not yet lived in, where doctors were sorely needed, where I would get a good education, and where I would not need to spend a fortune I didn’t have. After interviewing at several schools in the US I learned about a relatively new school in Israel called the Medical School for International Health (MSIH) in collaboration with Columbia University Medical Center. It advertised itself as focused on preparing doctors to work all over the globe, specifically in low resource areas. I applied and was awarded a four-year scholarship to attend.

After a brief stint as a licensed stockbroker on Wall Street, it was back to the desert, though this time the Negev desert in southern Israel. MSIH is located in Beer Sheva, the closest major city to Gaza, and as such rocket strikes and running for bomb shelters were a part of daily life. We also had to take elementary Hebrew in order to be able to communicate with our patients, though it turned out most of our patients were Bedouin (Arabic speaking), Russian, or Ethiopian (Amharic speaking). During my studies I took a year off between 3rd and 4th year to move to Indonesia and work with a rural hospital network in central Java, leading a program on improving infectious disease surveillance and treatment as well as reducing early childhood morbidity and mortality.

The closest approximation in the American medical system to the doctors I had worked with in Mali was the rural family physician. After interviewing all over the US, I decided to do my residency at the University of New Mexico in rural family medicine, which is where I am now starting my third and final year of residency. In Sante Fe, surrounded by natural beauty and a relatively laid back pace of life, I feel glad to be where I am, and to have trod the path that led me here. Along the way I learned French, Spanish, Dogon, and some Hebrew. And there is still more to come. Recently, I was awarded a fellowship to go to Iquitos, Peru. I will teach at the University of the Peruvian Amazon while developing a research initiative utilizing plant medicines in a standard curriculum for training rural family docs and associated healthcare workers.
Our instructions are specific. Stand facing a grey cinderblock wall, no speaking. Atop the fifteen foot wall observers prowl a catwalk that runs its entire length. Both my hands rest on that wall, in the same spot hundreds of hands have occupied before. The wall is cool in comparison to the Alabama sun, which promises to add heat to the stiflingly muggy weather. My five teammates are Air Force Captains, dressed identically to me in Air Battle Uniform (ABUs). To my left is a fighter pilot who goes by Tweak and to my right a chaplain. We all listen to the countdown with anticipation. Five - Four - Three - Two - One: Begin problem solving. I take three steps back, motioning my team to form a half circle around me. I can see them looking over my shoulder at our challenge problem and resist the temptation to join their gaze. Chaplain nods as I point to her and say “Time,” which means she is responsible for calling time hacks, slang for time elapsed. I quickly assign our other roles and begin reading the scenario, rules of engagement, and objectives to the team from our Project X challenge card. We have fifteen minutes to cross a river using only a ragtag set of materials. Complicating the crossing are two “live” electrical wires that impede our path to the other bank. I am the only civilian on this team but leading it is my responsibility. There is no opportunity to appreciate the unique path that led me to this moment: leading a Project X challenge at Squadron Officer School.

Time Hack: Four years earlier: I am leaving an interview with the Air Force Research Laboratory Information Directorate (AFRL/RI) in Rome, NY. What had started as a seminar on the PhD research I was conducting at the University at Buffalo (UB) had turned into a job interview. Originally I thought I would work in academia after graduate school but the Air Force presented a compelling alternative. I receive a job offer from a contractor at AFRL/RI and an opportunity for a position as a civilian employee of the Air Force. As a mechanical engineer, I never thought I would be working in computer security. I was also unaware there was such a thing as a civilian in the Air Force. Civilians have unique opportunities to work directly and closely with the military on a daily basis. Those interactions are what led me to Squadron Officer School, a Professional Military Education program for Air Force Captains.

I finish reading the Project X challenge card and turn to observe the physical laydown for the first time. My education and training as an engineer is telling me to start putting the pieces together to solve the water-crossing problem. However, the last three weeks of education and training taught me that would be a mistake. It is critical for a leader to focus on leading. It seems obvious now, but in the heat of the moment it is hard to avoid being seduced by the glamour of the problem at hand. Instead, I ask my team to generate courses of action and they quickly produce three suitable options. I choose one and Tweak maneuvers a set of boards into place while he takes the point position.
SPLASH! The second officer attempting to cross hits the water and a voice directs us: “Cease physical problem solving for one minute.” Without orders, Chaplain helps the wet officer out of the water and I turn to my team to determine what happened. We cannot physically work on the problem, but we can use the minute to adjust our plan. Tweak is precariously perched on a board with his toes just above the water and we need to extricate him. Another teammate describes how our plan to crawl had dislodged our makeshift bridge and proposes we walk instead. I concur and repeat the revised plan to ensure conceptual unity on the team.

**Time Hack: Two years earlier:** I am driving through the desert to the airport and I am concerned that the 104°F temperature might be a bit too much for my compact car. The drive provides the opportunity to reflect on my just completed week-long visit, which included a trip to the flight line where I discussed vehicle stability and control with a test pilot. It had been years since I took controls courses at UB with Dr. Crassidis and Dr. Mook, but that core knowledge and my mechanical engineering background opened the door for conversation with the pilot and allowed me to walk up and touch the aircraft in the hangar. I mentally note that you never know when a particular piece of information will prove useful. I work in a field of impersonal 0’s and 1’s. I am grateful for excursions such as these because they show that my work is having an impact. When I return to home station, I will resume the laboratory component of this project. As the technology to make these aircraft safer is refined, I will return to see it integrated into the platforms used by the operators here.

A minute has passed and we hear the call: “Resume physical problem solving.” The team puts our revised plan into action and extricates Tweak from harm’s way. The others cross quickly and I look forward to seeing where the next opportunity will take me and know that I can not do much wrong if my work makes our service members safer in their mission each day.
As I fondly think back to being a UB Honors freshman in the fall of 1989, one particular memory emerges as a hint of my ultimate career path: During my Honors seminar, which was co-taught by then University President Steven Sample, a PhD in electrical engineering, and Professor Robert Daly, a PhD in English literature, I became captivated by a discussion of Stephen Hawking’s *A Brief History of Time*. The invigorating interdisciplinary approach of that class was a starting point for my own multi-faceted professional journey in the field of architecture.

Today, as Vice President of Development & Planning at Ciminelli Real Estate Corporation I create transformative projects in my hometown region of Western New York. The position draws on my varied professional experiences and continually inspires me to grow in a multi-disciplinary environment. Each project presents a unique set of opportunities to be embraced and challenges to be creatively solved, including Conventus and 33 High Street on the Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus; the mixed-use 201 Ellicott Street and QueensLight (the re-use of Women & Children’s Hospital); and the primarily residential Bethune Lofts, The Sinclair, and The Mentholatum.

As college years tend to do, my time at UB significantly shaped my life. My dream was to become an architect because the field encompassed so many of the subjects that I enjoyed, such as art, literature, science and history, and offered the promise of truly being able to make the world a better place. I was elated to be accepted into the architecture program, which, as my grandmother wrote to congratulate me, “just proves that hard work, determination and prayers always pay off.” While at the School of Architecture & Planning, I stretched academically, forged a bond with my best friend and met my future husband. Emerging with bachelor’s degrees in architecture and English, I was ready for some adventure.

In chilly, snow-covered January 1995, my parents and sisters saw me off to Philadelphia to earn a Master of Architecture from the University of Pennsylvania. While the Buffalo area represents my roots, Philly became a first love. I was charmed by the city’s history, its five square plan, its scrappy grit, and the emerging rebirth of its Center City. I lived in many distinct neighborhoods, from the established to the up-and-coming: West Philly, Northern Liberties, Fitler Square and finally, South Philly. After graduation, I commuted by train to a nurturing architecture firm in New Jersey which provided me with mentoring and opportunities for greater project responsibilities working on community buildings, university projects, multi-family housing and urban planning.

However, after a few years, it was time for change. In 2002 I became a licensed architect, got engaged and relocated to the Kalorama neighborhood in Washington, DC. My husband and I—and eventually our infant son—lived in a small one-bedroom condo. I was fascinated by the district’s monumentality, its energy, its wave of new residents with each election. Everyone was from somewhere else and eager to make connections. I worked on exquisitely detailed high-end...
residential projects at a prestigious Georgetown architecture firm and practiced a modern sensibility at a well-awarded firm with exacting corporate and government clients. During this pivotal time of professional development, I began to shift from project architect duties to project management on complex projects.

As my own family was growing, a large network of extended family beckoned me home in the spring of 2007. The dozen years that I had spent in Philly and DC provided me with valuable professional experiences and a fresh perspective on Western New York. I had gotten to know and treasure these other places by walking and jogging, step-by-step, every day. I had witnessed neighborhoods stabilize and transform for the better before my eyes. Now, the Buffalo that had been “talkin’ proud” in my childhood was in bloom with real change and possibility.

After a cherished hiatus to have a second son, spend time with my children and reset in an old-but-new environment, I widened my job search beyond architecture firms in order to innovate my career path. I was fortunate to find a perfect fit at Ciminelli, a well-established full-service commercial real estate firm, in its Development Department working alongside a visionary, talented, and supportive team of professionals.

Many skills that I garnered while practicing in architecture firms have served me well in the real estate development arena: the ability to focus on both the big picture and the smallest details, concise and compelling communication, fulfilling critical objectives while meeting the needs of diverse stakeholders, and being a self-starter who thrives on collaboration. Plus, a bit of that Philly grit and DC diplomacy goes a long way! In my current role I represent the owner’s interests, manage consultants (including architects), coordinate with end-users, and present to the public on behalf of our projects. I still practice architecture--just from a different place in the process.

To me, practice and service go hand-in-hand. A term on the board of the Buffalo/Western New York chapter of the American Institute of Architects led me to take up their long-time goal of establishing a foundation. In 2010, the same year that I joined Ciminelli, Buffalo Architecture Foundation was born through the proactive passion of many volunteers. Dedicated to inspiring the exploration and appreciation of architecture, the organization’s mission is implemented through educational activities for school-aged children and public awareness events that engage citizens of all ages. My ongoing service to the Foundation as a past-president, past-secretary and current board member is personally meaningful and energizing. I am grateful for the amazing opportunity to contribute to the changing environment in Western New York and to impact the area my own children and so many others will experience and be enriched by.

QueensLight, Buffalo NY (rendering) CannonDesign
QueensLight is a transformational project aimed at re-use of the Women & Children’s Hospital facilities in the Elmwood/Bryant area of the Elmwood Village. The project will feature residential, educational, retail, hospitality, and public spaces that will bring a new energy to this established neighborhood.

The Sinclair, Buffalo NY CJS Architects
The Sinclair is Ciminelli’s most recent residential, mixed-use development project.
1994

Kelly Asher - Kelly was recently promoted to the position of Community Coalition Coordinator at the Erie County Department of Health. She and her husband were delighted to welcome their three newest grandchildren, Rylee & Charlotte (October 2015) and Jack (January 2016) to the family. That brings their total of grandchildren to nine!

Thomas Sharp - Thomas and his husband, Bert Russ, had their first child, Katherine Elizabeth Russ-Sharp, via surrogate in November 2015. Bert was home with Katherine for the first four months, and Thomas just completed four months of paternity leave.

2002

Samuela Franceschini - Samuela recently obtained a position as Knowledge Transfer Manager at Ca’ Foscari University of Venice, Italy.

2003

Joseph Brittain - In 2015, Joe became Director of Exhibitions at Lehmann Maupin Gallery, New York and Hong Kong as well as had his second solo exhibition of artworks with Catinca Tabacaru Gallery, New York.

2004

James Youngs - In 2016, James was elected a partner at the law firm of Hancock Estabrook, LLP, based in Syracuse, New York.

2005

Megan Stewart - After five years in the Honors College, Megan assumed a new position at UB working as a Fellows and Scholarships Advisor.

Seana O’Mara - Seana and her husband Greg recently welcomed their son, Keegan, pictured at right.

2007

Amanda Marcus - Amanda is currently a psychotherapist in private practice specializing in the treatment of eating disorders for athletes.

Bryan Weinstein - Bryan returned to WNY and joined Prudential Financial as a financial advisor and welcomed his second child, a girl named Riley Nicole Weinstein, on May 1st, 2016.

2008

Kelly (Sayles) Currie - Kelly finished plastic surgery training at the University of Colorado in June 2016 and currently is undergoing hand surgery training at Southern Illinois University.

Mike Habberfield - Mike completed his PhD in Geography & Ecosystem Restoration at UB in June and got married in August.

Jennifer (Stabel) Kessler - Jennifer and her husband Alexander Kessler (2008) just welcomed their son, Michael Richard Kessler. Jennifer is working as an internal medicine hospitalist at Strong Memorial Hospital.

Tracy Stepien - This fall Tracy became a Postdoctoral Research Associate in the Department of Mathematics at the University of Arizona.

2009

Meher Singh - Meher recently became Educational Workforce Specialist for the Clinical and Translational Science Award at the Jacobs School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences. She also graduated with her Masters in Public Health from Johns Hopkins School of Public Health.

2010

Jeffrey Ackerman - Jeffrey received a PhD in Mechanical Engineering from Purdue University.

2011

Laura Habberfield - Laura recently returned to Buffalo and began working at New Era Cap, Inc. as the Sales and Operations Planning Manager.

Catherine Boatman - Catherine is applying to medical school and hopes to enter the class of 2021.

2012

Allie Funk - This fall Allie started in the Clinical Psychology PhD Program at Hofstra University.

Andrew Hunt - Andrew is now a Graduate Lighting Design student at Carnegie Mellon School of Drama, where he designed seven shows in one year. This summer he worked at Reveal Design Group (architectural lighting design) and also worked with the Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre School as the lighting designer for their end of the year showcase.

Lauren Little - Lauren recently graduated from UB’s Jacobs School of Medicine and began her OB/GYN residency at Memorial Health University Medical Center/Mercer University in Savannah, GA.

2013

Megan Klyczek - Megan got married in August 2015, got a new dog, moved to Florida and got a job in a surgical ICU. This fall she will begin the Doctor of Nursing Practice program at the University of Florida on the Acute Care Adult-Gerontology track.

2014

Angela Kapsiak - Angela became a CPA in June 2016.

David Nichols - David spent the past year co-founding a preventative medical company, Restore Medical Fitness, in Williamsville, NY and is now in his first year of medical school at Stony Brook Medicine on Long Island.

Stephen Rabent - Stephen graduated from the University of Maryland with a Master of Public Policy degree and is working as a budget analyst at the Congressional Budget Office.

Jeannette Russell-Shepherd - Jeannette was promoted to Senior Associate at PwC.

2015

Jeanie-Marie Austin - Jeanie-Marie earned her MA in Humanities with a focus on Global Gender Studies and Colonial Latin American History and was the recipient of the Arthur Schomburg Fellowship. She is a full time Instructor at Michael Phelps Swim School.

Lauren Carnevale - This past spring, Lauren entered the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign’s Molecular and Cell Biology PhD program where she will focus on Microbiology.

Helia Zand - Helia is finishing a year of service as an Americorps member at Foodlink’s Cooking Matters where she led 6-week cooking and nutrition courses and interactive grocery store tours. This fall she entered UB’s Jacobs School of Medicine.

2016

Max Crimmin - Max is working full-time as a Research and Planning Assistant at Evergreen Health Services in Buffalo and plans to enter medical school next fall.

Derek Spath - Derek entered UB’s Jacobs School of Medicine this fall.

Celia Zhang - Celia began her Doctorate of Audiology (AuD) and PhD in Communicative Disorders and Sciences at the University at Buffalo this fall.
In just one visit, Hannah Griffith knew UB was where she wanted to go to college. Having grown up in “a very small town,” she found the university to be “an entirely different planet” where she could hear three different languages spoken on one short walk. A scholarship made attending UB possible for Griffith, an international studies and Spanish major. Later, study abroad funds helped her to live in Mexico and visit Russia as a UB student. A frequent volunteer, Griffith hopes to work for a non-profit humanitarian organization after she graduates. She thanked UB donors, saying “I would not be who I am today without the scholarship, and I will never forget that.”

The best public universities have the strongest private support.
Class of 2016 Honors College
Graduation Celebration

May 13th, 2016
Research Studies Center
UB’s Downtown Campus