Hello Friends—

We are pleased to share with you our annual update on the ongoing activities and developments in the Office of Academic Diversity Initiatives (OADI) at Cornell.

Expanded multi-year grant funding this past year has allowed us to enhance some of our staffing and programming to provide valuable services to more members of our targeted support populations. As many of you know, OADI is designed to provide support to first generation students, meaning those who would be the first in their families to earn a bachelor’s degree; to under-represented students of color; and to low-income students (those eligible for federal Pell grant support). These three distinct groups make up more than one third of the undergraduate student body at Cornell. A little over 20% of each of these groups choose to participate in OADI programs, meaning that in recent semesters about 1,500 individual students come to OADI an average of ten times each during the academic term.

You might not be aware that OADI also provides specialty support and programming to several smaller groups of students including undergraduate military veterans; students who are undocumented; students who might have dependents of their own, whether children or elders for whom they are responsible; students who begin a bachelor’s degree at Cornell above the age of 24; students who have no families—often having aged out of foster care; and some attention to those who transfer into Cornell from community colleges.

For all of these groups of students, it is our central purpose to ensure full and highly successful participation in all that Cornell has to offer—both for the benefit of the students themselves, but also to the tremendous benefit of the Cornell programs in which they participate. Besides raising awareness and confidence, as well as practical preparation, for these research, internship, off-campus learning, and conference opportunities through generous donors, we are able to provide the financial support for travel, program fees, accommodation, and appropriate materials to take part fully in such important experiences. We also support the fees and participation of our students in prestigious societies and awards, so that they don’t turn down being part of Phi Beta Kappa or other honors for financial reasons.

This sort of funding is our greatest need, since having raised the awareness of our students and tripled the number we serve every semester over the first four years of our existence, we want to continue to be able to make full participation a central part of the higher expectations and achievement our students have gained. We have also been able to meet crucial emergency needs of our students this academic year thanks to a generous donor gift to cover medical emergencies, family crises, and unexpected personal needs.

Enjoy this newsletter filled with insights about our students, staff, and programs, and thank you for your continued interest in the Office of Academic Diversity Initiatives.

Associate Vice Provost
## Meet the OADI Staff

- **A.T. Miller**
  Associate Vice Provost for Academic Diversity

- **Carlos Gonzalez**
  Executive Director, OADI; Director, Office of Internal Transfer & Concurrent Degrees

- **Monique Posadas**
  Program Coordinator and Advisor, McNair Scholars Program

- **Trey Waller**
  Director, McNair Scholars Program; Interim Director, Student Success Programs

- **William “Woodg” Horning**
  Associate Director, OADI; Director, Student Opportunity Programs

- **Gizzel Edmond**
  Advisor, NYS Opportunity Programs; Interim Director, Student Success Programs

- **Vanessa Lillard**
  Asst. Director, NYS Opportunity Programs

- **Carlo Lindo**
  Program Manager, POSSE Scholars Program

- **Sarah Anderson**
  Program Coordinator, Community Development & Social Justice

- **Ruth McCoy**
  Interim Program Coordinator, Scholarship & Research

- **Kristin Dade**
  Advisor, NYS Opportunity Program and Pre-Professional Programs

- **Ricardo Gonzalez**
  Program Manager, Pre-Professional Programs

- **Carol Raymond**
  Administrative Assistant, NYS Opportunity Programs

- **Vanessa Lillard**
  Asst. Director, NYS Opportunity Programs

- **Brandon Senior**
  Senior Advisor, NYS Opportunity Programs

- **Gizzel Edmond**
  Advisor, NYS Opportunity Programs

- **Carlo Lindo**
  Program Manager, POSSE Scholars Program

### WELCOME NEW OADI STAFF

- **Gizzel Edmund** - Having graduated from St. Bonaventure University with a Bachelor’s degree in Sociology (2009) and a Masters degree in Community Mental Health Counseling (2012), Gizzel joined OADI as an EOP/HEOP advisor in the fall of 2015. Gizzel’s qualifications include having been an EOP/HEOP undergraduate student and an HEOP graduate assistant. In her free time, Gizzel loves to visit Ithaca’s beautiful gorges, and has become a member of the Ithaca Women’s Rugby team.

- **Kristin Dade** - Joining OADI in late 2015 as an advisor to HEOP and P3 students, Kristin is excited to be at Cornell, and is looking forward to forming life-long friendships. She is currently working on her PhD in Higher Education from Southern Illinois University, and enjoys traveling, playing cards, and dominos in her spare time.

- **Ruth McCoy** - As interim program coordinator of Scholarship & Research, Ruth enjoys collaborating with students to guide them toward career and research objectives. A McNair alumna who received her M.P.S. in Applied Statistics from Cornell, Ruth focuses her passion toward connecting students to OADI and campus resources that enable them to attain goals for graduate study.

- **Carlo Lindo** - As an NYC public high school student, Carlo experienced the academic and social difficulties faced by underrepresented students which inspired him to be an agent of change. Himself a Posse Scholar, Carlo worked for The Posse Foundation selecting future scholars and facilitating workshops to encourage their creativity, self-confidence, and leadership. He hopes to continue empowering young people to be ambitious and follow their dreams. In his free time Carlo is an avid reader. He has a B.S. from Babson College.

### About OADI
The Office of Academic Diversity Initiatives — OADI — is all about inclusion and achievement across the Cornell campus so that students of all backgrounds excel in reaching their academic goals. Our students, who are those who come from backgrounds that have been historically under-represented and those who support them, add tremendously to the educational environment that brings excellence to all fields of study. Without diverse points of view coming from varied life experience and ways of looking at and interpreting the world, all classrooms and research at Cornell would suffer. We seek to ensure a high-quality academic and intellectual experience for all at Cornell.
Sharanya Subramony, Akshaya Nambiar, Alia Fierro, Gurang Dimri, Marsha Jean-Charles, Jubek Yongo-Bure

Yinan Sun, Alia Fierro, Jubek Yongo-Bure

OADI UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ASSISTANTS

OADI salutes graduating student assistants, many of whom have worked here since they were freshmen: Binta Diallo, Misha Inniss-Thompson, Mariana Pinos, Adalisa Manjarres, and Jasmine Cotrich. Your contributions have been invaluable and we will miss you!

Much gratitude also goes to Katrina Nangle, Ida Adjivon, Nadia McKinney, Adora Nwankwo, and Paola Ocampo.
The Prefreshman Summer Program (PSP) takes place during the summer before students’ first year, and is the catalyst which jumpstarts the huge adjustment process of transitioning from high school to college. All entering EOP/HEOP freshmen and a selected group of additional students participate in a rigorous academic curriculum which prepares them for Cornell classes and helps improve study skills and learning habits. PSP 2015 was comprised of 190 students.

Although heavily based in academics, PSP also offers a variety of events and opportunities, designed to introduce entering freshmen to both the Cornell campus and Ithaca community. The Office of Academic Diversity (OADI) plays a crucial role in these extracurricular activities. Sarah Anderson, CDSJ program coordinator, orchestrated a day of team building in collaboration with Cornell Outdoor Education. A long lasting effect of PSP is the formation of friendships and a tight knit network stronger than that of the regular Cornell network. Brandon Senior, EOP/HEOP senior advisor, led a day of Field Excursions in which the students went into the streets of their new home - Ithaca - to explore. They went to sites such as the newly renovated Ithaca Commons, Taughannock Falls, the Museum of the Earth, and the Cayuga Nature Center. Brandon also led a day of community service for the EOP/HEOP students, as a component of PSP to instill a sense that it is important for students to give back to their new home. Ricardo Gonzalez, P3 program manager, planned a resource fair, under the premise that a student cannot utilize a resource if they do not know it exists. The resource fair presented a plethora of resources to the students in hopes that they utilize and learn to search on their own for some of the many resources that Cornell has to offer.

PSP is a much needed bridge between high school and Cornell. It is an amazing introduction to the beauty and experiences that Cornell has to offer, and this program has been described as indispensable by its participants.
Chi Alpha Epsilon

National Honor Society

Chi Alpha Epsilon is an academic honors society founded on the vision to recognize the academic achievements of students admitted to colleges and universities through non-traditional criteria. Its purposes include promoting high academic standards, fostering increased communication among its members, and honoring academic excellence. Currently, the society serves OADI Scholars enrolled in McNair, P3, POSSE, and EOP/HEOP. In spring and fall of 2015, the Zeta Upsilon Chapter of Chi Alpha Epsilon inducted its second and third cohort, respectively. To date, the chapter has inducted a total of 70 students and 11 honorary staff.

Tri-State Conference

The Tri-State Consortium of Opportunity Programs held its Thirteenth Biennial Conference from April 12 – 15, 2015. The conference brings together Opportunity Program professionals from New York State, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey every two years for four days of intensive professional development. This year the conference convened over 2,000 professionals in Tarrytown, New York to engage in workshops, keynote presentations, and networking opportunities. Important workshops included Different Motivational Strategies in College Persistence of EOP Students and various workshops about race and inclusion in higher education. Cornell EOP/HEOP senior advisor Brandon Senior’s favorite part of the conference was having the opportunity to network with other professionals and share ideas to improve Cornell’s existing programming for OADI and EOP/HEOP students.

Advocacy Day

Each academic year, Cornell EOP/HEOP students have the opportunity to participate in two advocacy days, the purpose of which is to provide students with the chance to lobby in person for the importance of New York State student financial aid programs. In December, Cornell students travel to New York’s capital of Albany to discuss with policy makers why programs such as EOP, HEOP, the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), Collegiate Science and Technology Entry Program (CSTEP), and the NY State DREAM act are so important not only to them, but to future students as well.

In the spring, EOP and HEOP students from Cornell and all across New York State come together and rally at the Legislative Office Building Well in Albany. In addition to this rally, students are given the opportunity to meet with individual legislators and share, through their personal experiences, why these programs are so meaningful to them.

OADI and EOP/HEOP students. To improve Cornell's existing programming for work with other professionals and share ideas, the conference was having the opportunity to network. Advisor Brandon Senior's favorite part of the conference was having the opportunity to network with other professionals and share ideas to improve Cornell's existing programming for OADI and EOP/HEOP students.

Tuesday Lunch Engagement Series

The flagship series of OADI has always been its Tuesday Lunch series. Intended to be both thought-provoking and intellectually stimulating, each week’s speaker and topic is selected with the intent to open the world of idea and opportunity to students. Spring 2015 featured research presentations from OADI Scholars; conversations about gender in the workplace; opportunities with the Peace Corps; and presentations from OADI funding recipients, among others. In the fall, students were highly inspired by a conversation with NYS Assemblyman Michael Blake from the South Bronx; learned how to be engaged and responsible with money from Gretchen Ryan, Cornell Financial Aid; heard about getting on the road to a PhD presented by staff from the McNair Scholars Program and Chad Coates, Assistant Dean, College of Arts & Sciences; and discussed race and identity abroad with a student panel from Cornell Abroad. Approximately 45 - 50 students gathered weekly for lunch and engaging conversation.

Chi Alpha Epsilon Induction Ceremony - November 2015

Con’t from page 11

Mythology and ancient Greek civilizations. I then caught a flight to Santorini and hung out with most of the ship. A cool thing was we could take over cities if we all went to the same place. That's what happened in Santorini. Every store, club, excursion, AirBnb, etc. had somebody from the program and Semester at Sea took over that island for a couple of days. I think Greece overall would be a perfect place for couples, not college students. Everything just seemed so romantic. Even something like dogging down a gyro as fast as possible while driving an ATV to get somewhere because there wasn't much time left in the port. Trust me, that wasn't a pretty site but just the fact you were in Greece could you make you think otherwise.

Other countries I visited included Morocco, Senegal, Brazil, Trinidad & Tobago, and Costa Rica. I was able to take something different out of every country and wish I could've spent a little more time in each one. I plan on returning to some in the future. Semester at Sea was great because I was looking for exposure. I can say now that I’ve seen the world and I’m addicted to traveling. My goal is to have visited 30 countries before I turn 25 and I’m already half way there. I hope this article inspires others to branch out and study abroad. I will gladly share more with anyone in person regarding Semester at Sea and/or specific countries.

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The Posse Scholars Program is in its third year at Cornell with three cohorts of ten students each from Chicago, and the program has been expanding and changing each year. Similar to the New York State Opportunity Program students, Posse Scholars typically come from first-generation backgrounds and are tasked with adjusting to the academic setting of Cornell. The program is focused on opportunity and providing students access to attain undergraduate degrees.

The arrival of each new cohort has come with growth and improvement as Cornell’s Posse Program staff continues to learn the best ways to support students and connect them to resources, while also balancing their interactions with faculty mentors and the Posse Foundation.

In the fall of 2015, Posse 3 families were hosted by OADI to attend Cornell’s First Year Parents’ Weekend of events. William “Woodg” Horning, associate director of OADI and director of Student Opportunity Programs, acknowledged the importance of bringing families to see Cornell. First year students are often homesick, and being able to see their families is helpful in easing the transition to college. For this important reason, OADI invited families of Posse students to campus to check in with their students, and meet and interact with the larger OADI and Cornell community.

This visit illustrated families’ need for, and appreciation of, being able to spend time with their students. They had the opportunity to explore Cornell’s campus together and many began to understand the experiences that their students describe to them. One parent noted how “wonderful [it] was to actually see the campus. Now when my son talks about it, I can visualize where he is spending his time. It was a great help to see through his world.” Parents overwhelmingly shared that they were better able to understand their student’s day-to-day activities. We look forward to bringing Posse 4 families next year!

Every year, The Posse Foundation and Posse Scholars facilitate an annual weekend-long PossePlus Retreat attended by members of the larger student body, faculty, and administration, with the goal of discussing an important campus issue as identified by Posse Scholars. This year, over 100 people from Cornell participated in the retreat, engaging with this year’s central issue, “Crime and Punishment”, which was incited by social justice hot-button events in 2015 such as those in Ferguson, MO. Throughout the weekend, students discussed systemic racism, rising black incarceration rates, and the nuances of the criminal justice system. Students discussed these issues first, and as the weekend continued, shared personal stories and confrontations with the criminal justice system, crime, and punishment.

Sarah Anderson, OADI’s CDSJ program coordinator, stated that the weekend was “amazing” and “emotional”, and it was “really incredible to hear how awesome our students are.” Toward the end of the weekend, students moved from learning and sharing into action, focusing on the question, “How do we use this [conference] as a social justice tool?” After the weekend, students continue exploring these issues and stay connected through a Facebook group.
The McNair Scholars Program, entering its 4th year at Cornell, serves to prepare underrepresented undergraduate students for success in doctoral study.

This year, nine Cornell McNair scholars had the opportunity to attend the annual McNair National Research Conference hosted at the University of Maryland. The purpose of the conference was to provide exciting learning opportunities for McNair Scholars and other undergraduate researchers to share their research experiences and results with their peers and other scholars in their discipline; to provide opportunities for students to discuss their academic profiles with various research university representatives; and to provide opportunities for McNair Scholars to initiate face-to-face dialogue with prospective graduate school faculty.

At the conference, second year McNair Scholar Misha Inniss-Thompson presented her research findings about her recent paper titled, Is There Power in Forgiveness?: How the Impacts of Discrimination are Shaped by Public Regard and Forgiveness. Her presentation drew in about 25 scholars and staff members. She says that as a result of her experience, “I feel more comfortable giving oral presentations” in front of groups.

Opportunities like this conference offer McNair students a lot of personal and academic growth. Similar growth was shown as a result of the Summer Research Experience which allowed students to participate in research, take GRE classes, and graduate school preparatory courses. One scholar, Claudia Mimoso, did her research in epigenetic modifications and said of the McNair program, “We are a family ... an amazing support system” as she thought about how the program helped her understand the process of applying to graduate school, especially as a first generation college student and thus the first in her family to attempt graduate school. The McNair Scholars program continues to be a great resource to its students.

Fullbridge Program - In the spring of 2015, a new partnership was formed with the Fullbridge program. The Fullbridge program trains students in business fundamentals and employment management skills, including professional communication, business research and analysis, financial literacy, team and project management as well as creative problem solving. With generous support from Fullbridge and the Office of Academic Diversity Initiatives, 10 students from the Pre Professional Programs were able to spend six days completing a rigorous preparation program ahead of their summer internships.

Many people contribute their time and talent to making this annual publication happen. Special thanks goes to student editorial staff, writers, photographers, and collaborators: Daneille Jodi-Gail Scott ‘16; Binta Diallo ‘16; and Katrina Nangle ‘17. Shout out to Jillian Harmon ‘15, for the jumpstart.
Each year, OADI recognizes the outstanding achievements of its members during its annual OADI Honors reception and Diversity in Scholarship and Engagement Symposium (DSE). In early May, more than 150 students, staff, faculty, and alumni convened for a series of awards, presentations, and keynote speeches to honor OADI’s spirit of excellence.

OADI Honors awards OADI community members for their academic achievements. Honorees are nominated by faculty, staff, students, and administration, or local community partners, and in the spring, a total of ten awards were given. Lance Collins, the Joseph Silbert Dean of Engineering, and Thaddeus Talbot ’15, were the keynote speakers. Dean Collins discussed the roles of leadership, community, engagement, and scholarship in the Cornell experience, while Talbot spoke about his experience as a OADI student and his path to becoming a G.W. Fields Award winner. In its second year, OADI Honors recognizes current notable OADI community members as well as inspiring OADI students who continue to achieve and push their own boundaries of possibilities.

OADI Student Spotlights

Nadia McKinney ’17
Biology and Society

My life goal revolves around positively impacting underprivileged individuals. As a Biology and Society major with a Global Heath minor, my ultimate goal is to obtain my Masters in Public Policy and implement programs that will allocate resources equally to impoverished communities. Cornell has definitely been my best learning experience. I started my freshman year as a shy, unconfident, fearful individual, but through the struggles and plethora of support systems, I am approaching my future with confidence, excitement and optimism. My participation in a number of programs, such as P3, HEOP and Baraka Kwa Wimbo have helped me through my journey. These groups have become my supplemental family, providing me with support and knowledge on how to achieve my endeavors. I am more than blessed and thankful for those who have inspired me and hope to do the same for others in the future.

Antoine Saint Victor ’16
Biological Sciences

My family has worked very hard to make sure that I was provided for and supported. In fact, my mother and grandmother’s influences are what piqued my initial interest in medicine, and that is the field I have chosen to be involved in for the rest of my life. Ultimately, I would like to earn an MD and MBA to practice cardiology or emergency medicine, as well as to design and build my own healthcare network that will increase the access of underprivileged communities to quality care. The Pre-Professional Program (P3) has helped me work towards this goal by providing the resources and support I need to learn more about my career path and to broaden my skill set in medicine and business through conferences, workshops, and professional boot camps.

Maria Chak ’18
ILR

At Cornell, I have the freedom to explore my own interests and the chance to step outside my comfort zone. For example, this summer I participated in the High Roads internship as a service learning & action research fellow in Buffalo. The exposures of public economic policy, civic engagement, poverty alleviation, etc. allowed me to narrow down and even

Dinner at OADI Honors
In fall 2014, working with first-generation college students and others to create the first IvyG conference held at Brown University in spring 2015, CDSJ program coordinator Sarah Anderson was inspired to begin to look at first gen students as a cohort, which resulted in the formation of First in Class Mobilizers, a program which allows first gen students to take advantage of experiences in their lives that traditional students may not have. The mobilizers work in several groups to promote advocacy for other first generation students using expanded communication tools such as social media as a method to promote additional programming, mentorship, and advocacy; through experiential learning (in coordination with Cornell Study Abroad and Engaged Cornell), and in other developing ways.

CDSJ signature programs in OADI, include the Trailblazers program, Social Justice Roundtable Dinner series, and MLK Day of Commemoration, and continued with many events throughout 2015. Always popular, the interactive and thought-provoking Social Justice Roundtable Dinner series featured topics such as *The Power of a Lyric; 20:1 Sexual Assault Prevention* (led by students at Binghamton University); *Motivating Women of Color in STEM*, to name a few. Held monthly, this dinner series is open to the Cornell and greater Ithaca communities.

Consider other career aspirations that I had not before. With the endless opportunities on campus, there is always a program, class, or lecture that can contribute to my growth as an individual. It has been a little over a year since I began my journey here at Cornell and looking back, I can’t help but smile at the unforgettable memories and how fortunate I am to participate in higher education. With the support of OADI, especially Vanessa, the ILR student service center and my friends, Cornell has become my second home.

**Frederick Blaisdell ‘16 Biological Sciences**

I’m a member of the Oneida Nation bear clan and currently a senior bio major conducting research in Dr. Kimberly O’Brien’s laboratory. The McNair program has given me an extraordinary opportunity to be mentored by two exceptional faculty members. I am grateful for Dr. Kimberly O’Brien and Dr. Angela Gonzales, both of whom helped me to challenge myself in the lab environment and participate in programs that have further developed my interests. I have researched mineral metabolism in adolescent pregnancies for the past year and progressed my interests to the University of Arizona where, over the summer, I studied the effects of intrauterine growth restriction on glucose utilization and fat metabolism. I plan to continue to develop my interests within maternal nutrition and genetics by earning a PhD so that I can offer my science training to improve the health conditions for Native American/First Nations communities.

In 2015, Cornell, Ithaca College, and the Ithaca community commemorated the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Students, faculty and staff attended educational workshops, community breakfasts and luncheons, interactive artistic performances, and more. The community breakfasts and luncheons attracted over 1,000 attendees. According to those who participated in these events, community support was astounding. In particular, over 150 students, faculty, and staff raved about the powerful “Climbing PoeTree Artivism Performance”, led by two boundary-breaking soul sisters who use their art (spoken word, audiovisual art, and more) to expose injustice, channel hope, and make a better future more visible, immediate, and irresistible for all. Climbing PoeTree has performed for colleges and universities across the country, and attendees left the event truly moved and inspired. This focus on social justice advanced Dr. King’s legacy into the 21st century, tackling the myriad of social justice issues across all marginalized groups and reflect the unwavering hope of all.

**Stuart Pena ‘17 Chemical Engineering**

My current goal is to able to help this world in one way or another, I wish to become a source of hope and light to all people around the world. I want to achieve that goal by becoming an entrepreneur and impacting people’s live through my own methods. However, before any of this could be accomplished, I need to obtain the knowledge required for my goals. And thanks to OADI, I will be able to work ambitiously toward that goal. From the first day I was accepted into Cornell, OADI welcomed me with open arms into a beautiful family. Not only helping with financial support (HEOP), but also from a social and emotional perspective, they will always be available to help me succeed, no matter how difficult the challenges may be. With this support here at Cornell, my family back at home, as well as with all the friends I have made in this journey, I’ll will succeed and make sure that future generations can live in a happier future.
Throughout my stint at Cornell, I have had the opportunity to pursue my personal interests through a variety of different social, academic, and professional avenues. In particular, participating in the Cornell in Washington program has been by far one of the key highlights of my undergraduate experience. The program - structured to provide students with both an academic foundation through regular academic courses as well as career exploration opportunities through a professional internship placement - has undoubtedly prepared me for life after Cornell. Throughout my experience in the program, I was able to continue pushing the boundaries of knowledge by taking an array of interesting courses spanning topics from international finance to the microeconomics of higher education. Concurrently, I was also able to pursue my professional interests by interning at the US Department of the Treasury where I was exposed to current policy initiatives pertaining to US financial institutions. This unique combination of academic pursuit and professional exposure allowed me to blend my academic interests with my professional aspirations, culminating in an experience unlike any other. Additionally, living and working in the vibrant District of Columbia was a thrilling adventure. Throughout my experience I was able to explore the multiple historic sights and monuments scattered throughout the capital, immerse myself in the stimulating political atmosphere, attend US Supreme Court oral arguments and witness federal legislation being scrutinized first-hand, indulge in a variety of DC’s diverse restaurants, among a whole host of unique experiences. While my overall experience on Cornell’s campus has been stimulating and enriching, my off-campus experience in the Cornell in Washington program is unparalleled. As such, I encourage all Cornellians to seriously consider the amazing opportunities that the Cornell in Washington program has to offer.

My study abroad experience was an adventure. It was like a roller coaster filled with so many highs and even some lows. Overall I experienced euphoria, happiness, and a sense of accomplishment. I encourage everyone to study abroad because I really appreciate what I learned about each place I visited, along with what I learned about myself. I must add a salient point however. You will not come back as the same person. You will have new goals and a new perspective on life. More importantly, you will be placed in a situation where you will be completely independent. This will give you time to find yourself. You will find yourself questioning values of others and more importantly your own. Your personal growth will be incredible from the short amount of time you are actually there; however, this will only occur if you truly immerse yourself and accept the differences.

You will have a mindset that differs to those who have not experienced this. Studying abroad is more of personal growth than an academic experience. Remember this is a choice, and it is up to you to immerse into this experience. Nothing will be the same, because you will not return as the same person. This experience is all about indulging in as much as possible.

Your life will be about balance. I learned this well throughout my experience. You will change, and your friends and family will expect you to come back the same. However this will not happen, at least from my experience - to see myself and my friends here reach a new level of personal growth, gain invaluable life skills, and gain new types of leadership skills.

Travelling especially helped with this, particularly while I was alone. I was able to go to Greece, Germany, Belgium, Spain, France, Holland and all throughout Italy. You see, study abroad is really what you make of it and with careful planning the world becomes smaller and truly is at your disposal.

When I was younger, I often dreamt of Paris. I was fascinated by the French language and mesmerized by the beauty of the city from the shows I watched and the pictures I saw. I’m not sure when exactly or how the desire began to brew, but it did. And in April 2015, at twenty years old, I walked towards the Eiffel Tower, amazed at its grandeur. I had finally reached Paris! But not only did I reach Paris, I reached Bologna, Florence, Madrid, Barcelona, Seville, Zurich, and Lisbon too. My decision to seize the opportunity and go abroad was filled with uncertainty, but it was the best decision I could have made. I spent four months in the quaint Spanish city of Segovia, living down the street from a still standing Roman aqueduct, and attending IE University, an international English-speaking (thank God!) institution. My time in Segovia was nothing short of amazing, despite its uncanny resemblance to Ithaca for which my friend and I affectionately referred to it as “Spanish Ithaca.” I visited the Alcazar—which was the castle inspiration for Disney’s logo, casually and frequently went out for tapas, regularly visited the nearby city of Madrid (much like Cornell students do with Syracuse), and indulged in cochinillo and cordero—which tourists from near and far specifically traveled to Segovia for.

Before leaving for Spain, I was filled with uncertainty and anxiety because of my less than adequate Spanish, being away from my friends and family for an extended period, and being immersed in a culture I knew very little about. However, in a few short weeks Spain felt as close to home as it could. Being abroad taught me a lot about myself, the elements of survival and effective traveling, and how to be independent. It is an experience that I would not change for anything. Though I did not return to the United States fluent or even close to being fluent in Spanish—although I like to believe that I have mastered what I call “restaurant Spanish”—I returned a better version of myself and I am so thankful for the experience.
W
ow! Before departing JFK International Air-
port in the beginning of September, it hit
me. I knew my life would be changing draconi-
ly. I remember questioning how this kid from the
Bronx was given this privilege? Heading off to
London at 20 years old to begin a 4 month jour-
ney on a ship that would scale down Europe to
Africa, cross the Atlantic Ocean, and finally scale
back up South America to get back to the states
before Christmas. I always said I’d travel around
the world, but never truly believed it. And now
I know I won’t ever be able to stop. I can write
a book on my experiences but will rather give you
a synopsis of the countries within the Eurozone.
Long story short, traveling is an amazing way to
expand your mind. Everyone should try it. I be-
lieve exploration and trying to understand other
cultures/environments causes one to continuously
reflect and makes them a more selfless person in
the long run.

The Ship - When you first board, the energy
is crazy. We noticed quickly that everyone partici-
pating in the program (Semester at Sea) was fairly
outgoing, which was awesome because later on
in the voyage the shipboard community was
inter-connected and we were all friends. It was
a little weird at first because in reality every one
wished their friends from back home could be
there with them. Instead, we had to travel with
strangers from all over the country. That feel-
ing passed quickly though and then best friends
from opposite sides of the countries formed. My
roommate was from Rochester and went to school
at the University of Tampa and my other close
friend is from Madison, Wisconsin and attends
the University of Colorado. I spent everyday with
them for 4 months straight and still talk to them
practically everyday. We were caught in a storm
the first three days and the sea sickness was so
bad I hated myself for picking the program. After
a while though, you get your sea legs and don’t
even notice the rocky days till you look out the
window.

Italy - The first port and the one country I always
wanted to visit. Immediately after departing from
the ship I went straight to Rome with a group of
my new friends to backpack around the country.
It felt cool being able to cross things like the Coli-
seum and Pantheon off my bucket list. I ate lunch
and dinner in front of both. The food was amazing
but shocked me. If you didn’t know, they aren’t
too big on meat over there. Don’t think you’ll be
able to order a chicken parmigiana; that is not
a thing. There was a lot of fish, ground beef for
items like lasagna, and salumi. I was a little hurt
because meat is essential to just about every meal
I have. It was a good thing I love pizza, which was
something I ate a lot of. Weird enough though,
practically every country sells pizza. I visited the
Island of Capri, Naples, Sorrento, and Pompeii. If
Italy was a wet towel, I definitely squeezed out all
the water.

Croatia - Originally, we were scheduled to visit
Turkey but it was later determined to be too dan-
gerous. Thus, we went to this gem of a country. I
had never even heard of Croatia, but it is one of
the best ports out of this set. Some people knew
about it because it is where Game of Thrones is
filmed (Side note: I love that show!). My time there
was mostly spent jumping off cliffs into the
Adriatic sea, which doesn’t have any dangerous
animals in it compared to other bodies of water
because it’s so salty. Hearing that really makes you
do things you wouldn’t normally do. Not having
to worry about sharks is a big deal. My favorite
experience was jumping off a 50-60’ cliff. The city
of Dubrovnik (where we were) has a lot of history.
They’ve been at war practically since their first set-
tlers arrived. The old city is fortified, which is why
Game of Thrones found it suitable. On top of cliff
jumping adventures, I took a sacred spaces and
Game of Thrones tour to get a pretty deep insight
into a country I didn’t even know existed prior to
my arrival.

Greece - Exactly what I expected in a histori-
cal sense. We ported in Athens and I visited the
Acropolis, the new Acropolis Museum, and the
Archaeological Museum. A few more things to cross
off that bucket list. I learned a ton about Greek

Where Are They Now: Alyssa Banks ’14

As senior year rolled around, I had just
completed my summer internship in
Brand Management at Unilever. Though the
internship challenged me in ways I hadn’t
experienced before, it was all worth it when
I received a full-time offer to be in the global
CPG giant’s Future Leaders Program post-
graduation! As a Communications major
with a focus in Persuasion and Social Influ-
ence, I knew this position was where I could
make a real opportunity to make a difference.
The three-year global management rotation
program has allowed me to rotate between
Marketing and Customer Development roles
within the organization, following which I
will be prepared to take on managerial roles
within the company.

What initially attracted me to this position
was the value the company placed on being
a sustainable business with a social purpose:
to make sustainable living commonplace.
Throughout my life, I have always been pas-
sonate about giving back and helping others,
so finding an organization that shared those
same values and passion was a dream come
true.

Since entering the UFLP program, I have com-
pleted roles as a Retail Field Representative
and a Trade Market Analyst, and am currently
working as the Assistant Brand Manager on
the company’s corporate branding team. This
role has been my favorite because I have truly
been able to make a difference in peoples’
lives by having the opportu-
ity to lead
the planning
and launch of
the company’s
“Share a Meal”
program which is focused on
spreading
awareness
about the issue
of child hunger
in America.

My goal was to
create a program that not only spread aware-
ness of child hunger, but also gave consumers
the opportunity to get involved and make
a difference. Launched in early November
2014, spokesperson Ciara and other celeb-
ity influencers such as Joe Jonas, Kourtney
Kardashian, Fergie and many more helped
spread awareness about the campaign on social
media by posting photos of empty plates with

Share A Meal written on them to help create
a movement and inspire consumers to help Uni-
lever donate 1 million meals. Each time a con-
sumer engaged with the hashtag ShareAMeal
on social media, one meal was donated to
Feeding America. A simple “like”, a comment,
a retweet, posting their own photo of an empty
plate on Instagram or tweeting ShareAMeal
counted towards a meal donation. The tremen-
dous support allowed the campaign to reach
its goal of donating 1 million meals in the first
36 hours! It was so inspiring to see so many consumers get
involved and rally around this
great cause!

I truly believe that the Office of
Academic Diversity Initiatives
has played a key role in my
success so far. The first time I
ever visited the Cornell campus,
it was Woodg who met with me
and made me feel like Cornell
was the right place for me. Then when I was
working as an administrative assistant in
the office, it was Cathi Sullivan who constantly
challenged me with new projects and opportu-
nities to grow. And anytime I needed a place to
study, do work, or simply just relax, OADI was
my first stop. The staff at OADI are a special
group of people and they really made a posi-
tive difference in my Cornell experience and so
many others as well.

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Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined.

Henry David Thoreau