PROGRAM OF EVENTS

SATURDAY
FEB 25 2012
BELLEFIELD HALL AUDITORIUM
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
Honors College

25th Anniversary
Celebration
1987 - 2012
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<th>Time</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Speaker/Contributor</th>
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<tr>
<td>9:00 AM</td>
<td><strong>Morning Session</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Edward Stricker</strong>, <em>Dean of the University Honors College</em></td>
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<td><em>Introduction</em></td>
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<td>9:15 AM</td>
<td><strong>Mark Nordenberg</strong>, <em>Chancellor of the University</em></td>
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<td>Introduced by Nina Sabak, A&amp;S ’13</td>
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<td><em>Welcome</em></td>
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<td>9:30 AM</td>
<td><strong>Colin Stewart</strong>, <em>Managing Director, Bank of America</em></td>
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<td>Introduced by Edward McCord, PhD, JD, Honors College Director of Programming and Special Projects and Director, Dick Thornburgh Forum for Law and Public Policy.</td>
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<td><em>“Community College: Observations on Place, Culture, and Companionship in Pitt’s Honors College”</em></td>
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<td>9:45 AM</td>
<td><strong>Music Performance: The Honors College Quartet</strong></td>
<td>Wil Snead, ENGR ’13</td>
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<td>Jennifer Hess, A&amp;S ’15</td>
<td>Andrew Macgregor, ENGR ’15</td>
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<td>Eric Gratta, A&amp;S ’15</td>
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<td>9:50 AM</td>
<td><strong>The Honorable Dick Thornburgh</strong>, <em>Counsel, K&amp;L Gates LLP</em></td>
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<td>Introduced by Alex Zimmerman, A&amp;S ’12</td>
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<td><em>“The Dick Thornburgh Forum for Law and Public Policy: A New Dimension in Honors College Studies”</em></td>
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<td>10:05 AM</td>
<td><strong>Daniel Armanios</strong>, <em>ENGR, A&amp;S ’07, PhD Candidate, Stanford University</em></td>
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<td>Introduced by Andrea Richards, A&amp;S ’12</td>
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<td>*“Faces of Development”</td>
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<td>10:20 AM</td>
<td><strong>Janelle Greenberg</strong>, <em>Professor of History</em></td>
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<td>Introduced by Jayson Myers, A&amp;S ’12</td>
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<td>*“The UHC Contribution to Undergraduate Research”</td>
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<td>10:35 AM</td>
<td><strong>Coffee Break</strong></td>
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<td>11:05 AM</td>
<td><strong>Nathan Urban</strong>, <em>A&amp;S ’91, Head, Dept of Biological Sciences, Carnegie Mellon University</em></td>
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<td>Introduced by Daniel Holohan, A&amp;S ’13</td>
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<td>*“Benefits of Diversity: Lessons from the Brain”</td>
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<td>11:20 AM</td>
<td><strong>Nancy Pfenning</strong>, <em>A&amp;S ’78, Senior Lecturer, Dept of Statistics</em></td>
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<td>Introduced by Christian Fagan, A&amp;S ’12</td>
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<td>*“UHC Connections: An Elevator Speech”</td>
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<td>11:35 AM</td>
<td><strong>Music Performance: Members of the Pitt Jazz Ensemble</strong></td>
<td>Ben Clifton, A&amp;S ’15</td>
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<td>Will Middleton, A&amp;S ’13</td>
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<td>11:40 AM</td>
<td><strong>Peter Koehler</strong>, <em>Former Dean, Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences</em></td>
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<td>Introduced by Micah Toll, ENGR ’12</td>
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<td>*“Looking Ahead: Some Challenges for the UHC to Take Up Next”</td>
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<td>11:55 AM</td>
<td><strong>Lewis Jacobson</strong>, <em>Professor of Biological Sciences</em></td>
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<td>Introduced by Siyu Xiao, A&amp;S ’14</td>
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<td>*“Undergraduate Research -- The Sorcerer’s Apprentice”</td>
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<td>12:10 PM</td>
<td><strong>Midday Break</strong></td>
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1:40 PM  James Maher, Provost Emeritus  
Introduced by Matthew Stoffregen, A&S ‘12  
“Dreams for Pitt’s Future: Building on Pitt’s Recent Past”

2:05 PM  Mary Ellen Callahan, A&S ’90, Chief Privacy Officer and Chief Freedom of Information Act Officer, U.S. Dept of Homeland Security  
Introduced by Megan Ault, A&S ‘12  

2:20 PM  Nicole Rudolph, A&S ’90, Assistant Professor of French, Adelphi Univ.  
Introduced by Kara Henderson, A&S ‘14  
“Classroom Learning *Is* Experiential Learning”

2:35 PM  Music Performance: Barbershop Quartet  
Josh Niznik, PHARM ‘15 Evan Moncuso, A&S ‘12

2:40 PM  Kathy Humphrey, Vice Provost and Dean of Students  
Introduced by Michael Deckebach, A&S ‘14  
“Students: What They Haven’t Seen, But What They Do See”

2:55 PM  Peter Machamer, Professor of History and Philosophy of Science  
Introduced by James Simkins, A&S ‘13  
“How is Learning Possible in a Complex World Where There Can Be No Absolutely Correct Answers and Our Questions Are All Simple-minded?”

3:10 PM  Eric Shiner, A&S ’94, Director, The Andy Warhol Museum  
Introduced by Laura Dempsey, ENGR, A&S ‘12  
“What Makes Our World Go Pop?”

3:25 PM  Coffee Break

3:55 PM  N. John Cooper, Dean, Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences  
Introduced by Mark Kozlowski, A&S ‘12  
“Once More, With Feeling! Reflections on Teaching Passionately”

4:10 PM  Paul Bové, Distinguished Professor of English  
Introduced by Christopher Stokum, A&S ‘12  
“Words, College, and the Educated Mind”

4:25 PM  Music Performance: Members of the Pitt Men’s Glee Club

4:40 PM  Cindy Skrzycki, Senior Lecturer, Dept of English  
Introduced by Benjamin Robinson, A&S ‘12  
“The Honors College: The Classroom as Catapult”

4:55 PM  Edward Stricker, Dean of the University Honors College  
Closing
ABOUT THE PRESENTERS

Edward Stricker
BS, Univ of Chicago (1960); PhD, Yale Univ (1965); Founding Chair, Dept of Neuroscience (1986-2002); Bernice L. & Morton S. Lerner Chair, Dean of the University Honors College (2011-) and University Professor of Neuroscience.

Mark Nordenberg
BA, Thiel College (1970); JD, Univ of Wisconsin (1973); Professor of Law (1977-1995); Dean of the School of Law (1985-1993); Interim Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (1993-1994); 17th Chancellor of the University (1995-) and Distinguished Service Professor of Law.

Colin Stewart
BA, Amherst College (1995); Managing Director, Bank of America.

The Honorable Dick Thornburgh
BE, Yale Univ (1954); LLB, Univ of Pittsburgh (1957); Governor of Pennsylvania (1979-1987); Attorney General of the United States (1988-1991); Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations (1992-1993); Counsel, K&L Gates LLP.

Daniel Armanios
BS (ENGR), BA, Univ of Pittsburgh (2007); MSc (Management Research), MSc (Water Science, Policy & Management), Oxford Univ (2008, 2009); Goldwater Scholar (2004); Truman Scholar (2005); Rhodes Scholar (2007); PhD Candidate and NSF Graduate Research Fellow, Management Science & Engineering, Stanford Univ.

Janelle Greenberg
Bach. of Music, Univ of Houston (1963); PhD, Univ of Michigan (1970); Assistant Dean and Academic Integrity Officer of the Dietrich School of Arts & Sciences and Professor of History.

Nathan Urban
BS, Univ of Pittsburgh (1991); BA Oxford Univ (1993); PhD, Univ of Pittsburgh (1998); Rhodes Scholar (1991-93); Dr. Frederick A. Schwartz Professor of Life Sciences and Head, Department of Biological Sciences at Carnegie Mellon University (2010-).

Nancy Pfenning
BS, Univ of Pittsburgh (1978); PhD, Carnegie Mellon Univ (1985); Senior Lecturer, Department of Statistics.

Peter Koehler
BA, Harvard College (1960); PhD, Univ of Rochester (1967); Dean, Faculty of Arts and Sciences (1986-1998); Professor Emeritus of Physics and Astronomy, and Assistant to the Dean of the Honors College.

Lewis Jacobson
AB, Amherst College (1963); PhD, Univ of Illinois (1967); Professor of Biological Sciences.
James Maher
BS, Univ of Notre Dame (1964); PhD, Yale Univ (1969); Honorary Doctorates-University of Pittsburgh and London Metropolitan University; Provost and Senior Vice-Chancellor (1994-2010); Distinguished Service Professor of Physics; Fellow, American Association for the Advancement of Science; Fellow, American Physical Society.

Mary Ellen Callahan
BPhil, Univ of Pittsburgh (1990); JD Univ of Chicago (1997); Truman Scholar (1988); Chief Privacy Officer and Chief Freedom of Information Act Officer (FOIA), U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

Nicole Rudolph
BA, Univ of Pittsburgh (1990); PhD, New York Univ (2005); Fulbright Scholar (2000); Assistant Professor of French, Adelphi Univ.

Kathy Humphrey
BS, Central Missouri State Univ (1984); PhD, St Louis Univ (2005); Vice Provost and Dean of Students.

Peter Machamer
BA, Columbia Univ (1964); BA, MA Cambridge Univ (1966, 1971); PhD, Univ of Chicago (1972); Professor of History and Philosophy of Science.

Eric Shiner
BPhil, Univ of Pittsburgh (1994); MA, Osaka Univ (2001); MA, Yale Univ (2003); Director, The Andy Warhol Museum.

N. John Cooper
BA, DPhil, Oxford Univ (1973, 1976); Bettye J. and Ralph E. Bailey Dean of the Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences and Professor of Chemistry.

Paul Bové
AB, St. Joseph’s College (1970); PhD, SUNY, Binghamton (1976); Editor, boundary 2; Distinguished Professor of English.

Cindy Skrzycki
BA, Canisius College (1976); MA, American Univ (1980); Business Correspondent, Global Post; Senior Lecturer, Department of English.
Megan Ault graduated from Mineral Ridge High School in Youngstown, Ohio, where she excelled in dance and sports and gravitated to literature, science, and the outdoors. Megan is majoring in environmental studies, political science, and urban studies, and she looks to a career in land use planning: “The experiences I have had as city planning intern and community development volunteer have shown me the importance of legal frameworks that affect how we acquire and change the land around us. For that reason, I’m interested in attending law school in a place where I can pursue my interest in land use and environmental stewardship.” Pitt also provided Megan the break from her past she hoped for: “Pitt has allowed me to be exposed to classmates and instructors whose viewpoints and background are different from my own. I’ve been challenged by the coursework and the curriculum here, but I’ve also been challenged outside of the classroom.” The Honors College has been central to Megan’s rewarding experiences at the University, beginning with freshman Honors College housing: “The community that was formed in Forbes Quad included students from all over the country, and I received my first exposure to the fascinating diversity of opinion here and established some of my closest friends to this day.” But perhaps most valuable for Megan has been the Brackenridge Summer Fellowship, a program that coalesced perfectly with her ambitions. “Every Thursday I learned about another exciting field of inquiry from the reports of other fellows,” she says. “For my part, I was able to explore my interests in urban planning for rust belt cities. Having lived in Youngstown my whole life, I was accustomed to the rust belt image of the decaying steel city. At Pitt, I’ve been able to explore the alternatives to my hometown’s formerly accepted fate. I’m really excited about the possibilities that innovative and environmentally conscious planning efforts could offer my hometown and other places like it.”

Michael Deckebach graduated from Ottawa Hills High School in Toledo, Ohio, where he played baseball and served as captain of the varsity football and hockey teams. He is majoring in history and religious studies at Pitt, and earning certificates in global studies and leadership. “I am interested in international studies,” Michael says, “and I plan on traveling through the world as much as possible.” Eastern Religion is among his special interests, developed as result of a class he took last year. “Learning about cultures that are foreign to my own is enjoyable to me, and it pushes my mind. I find that at Pitt I have developed a genuine desire to be a lifelong learner.” Michael is a resident assistant for the Honors College housing in Sutherland Hall, and he credits the Honors College with enlarging his people skills and leadership skills through that
assignment. “The Honors College means ‘opportunity,’” he says, “When I think about the UHC, I think about the means and intentions it applies to aid me in my pursuits. As a resident assistant, for example, the UHC is often the piggybank that allows me to go ‘above-and-beyond’ in my programming efforts—arranging a trip to a Pirates game, or organizing weekly study programs. Initiatives like these and many others would not be possible without the UHC.”

Laura Dempsey grew up in the rural foothills of the Rocky Mountains in Bellvue, Colorado, and graduated from Poudre High School in Fort Collins. The sciences were Laura’s first love, but she was a self-trained artist as well, focusing on drawing and painting, played violin in school and extracurricular venues, and credits her school’s International Baccalaureate program for a “well-rounded, challenging education.” Laura will graduate from Pitt with a B.S. in Bioengineering, a B.A. in Studio Arts, and a minor in Chemistry, an achievement that accommodates the pulls of her passions for the sciences and arts. Laura credits the Honors College with transformative experiences from her very first year. “As a freshman,” she says, “I lived in the Honors College housing in Forbes Hall, and this was truly a wonderful experience for which I will always be thankful. There I met my long-lasting friends and felt comfortable in a new environment more than 1,400 miles from my previous home. Then, in the past year, Judy Zang and Dean Ed Stricker provided critiques, advice, and tremendous support that was extremely meaningful to me when I was applying to fellowships at Cambridge.”

The City of Pittsburgh is a long way from Colorado, Laura says, but it was the perfect choice for her: “I was raised in the middle of the mountains with no other children present for miles around. Pittsburgh was a ‘big city.’ Upon leaving High School I felt it was very important for me to force myself into new environments and learn how to live in an urban environment. I could not have asked for a better place to achieve this goal than Pittsburgh and the University of Pittsburgh. The people here are friendly, the school has great resources, and the opportunities to explore and enjoy the city are endless.”

Christian Fagan is from North Easton, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston, and graduated from Oliver Ames High School. At Pitt, Christian divides his time between the wrestling team and his majors in mathematics and economics. “I have taken multiple courses in game theory at both the undergraduate and graduate level,” he says. “Game theory gives us insight into the strategic machinations of the world around us, and I am fascinated by the idea that information and behavior are quantifiable. It seems like a logical progression to me to move from concentrating on athletics to studying competition in its purest sense.”

One of Christian’s Brackenridge Summer Research Projects for the Honors College applied economic analysis to the circumstance of an athlete allocating individual time in multi-tournament environments. It was a broadening experience for him on several levels. “By participating in the Brackenridge
program, I was exposed to research in a variety of disciplines,” he says, “from the hard sciences to English literature. Also, presenting my research to people outside of my discipline forced me to examine the fundamental components of what I was doing, and the process of explaining it to such a diverse audience was quite instructive.” Christian has taken a number of UHC courses as well. In all, he says, “Becoming involved in the UHC has allowed me to pursue my intellectual interests to an extent that isn’t possible from a typical undergraduate education, and to explore my passions and expand the depth and the breadth of my knowledge.”

Ryan Gayman grew up in Newburg, Pennsylvania, and graduated from Chambersburg Area Senior High School where he was captain of the varsity football team. “I have always enjoyed fixing things that were broken,” Ryan says. “This could be anything, from something as tangible as a stained glass window to as intangible as a riddle. Although riddles do not need fixing, they do present puzzles to be solved.” Ryan found himself first drawn to puzzles of the brain in his studies at Pitt, and to neuroscience and its foundations in biology and chemistry. “However, I was also enrolled in an introductory anthropology course,” he says. “Cultural anthropology challenged my way of thinking, revealing complexity where once there was not, and calling into question the orientation of my assumptions. My love for fixing things was not satisfied through knowledge of how to fix a problem, but in determining how best to view a problem.” Ryan now seeks a greater perspective on human problems in order to find out “how we can better learn to live together.” His volunteer work has been critical to this goal. “Through my three-year involvement in a student-driven organization called Keep It Real,” he says, “I became interested in how urban refugee populations are integrated into society and how their new lives are shaping their identities. Entering this community, I found that conflict between Somali Bantu and African Americans in public schools was a major issue.” Ryan’s research for the Honors College B.Phil. Degree is about conflict resolution among these school populations. Ryan is majoring in Anthropology and Urban Studies toward “an ultimate goal to serve my community,” he says, “whether that be at an international level serving under the United Nations High Council for Refugees, or nationally with the Department of State, or locally as a professor or teacher. Conflict is a puzzle that can be addressed in a multitude of ways. Pitt has taught me to be much more reflective.”

Sarah Geisler was raised in Pittsburgh and graduated as valedictorian of the Pittsburgh High School for the Creative and Performing Arts (CAPA), where she majored in Literary Arts. As Sarah reports, “Every day I received three hours of instruction in creative writing, ranging from poetry, creative nonfiction, and fiction to screenwriting, journalism, and playwriting. It was a life changing experience and sparked my interest in the study of poetry.” At Pitt Sarah is majoring in Urban Studies with a Global Studies certificate and a
concentration in English Writing and Poetry. “I am interested in the literal and metaphysical divides that create separate identities within a City,” she says, “and in looking specifically at displacement and ethnic conflicts as a way to address human rights issues and global health initiatives.” Sarah has worked as a study-abroad student in Nicosia, Cyprus at a peace-building camp for Greek and Turkish children, and with inner-city youth through various mentoring and tutoring programs. She has studied in Istanbul and plans to enter the U.S. Foreign Service. Last June Sarah was named a 2011 Thomas R. Pickering Undergraduate Foreign Affairs Fellow—one of only 20 new undergraduate Pickering Fellows nationwide and the only one from a Pennsylvania institution of higher education. Sarah credits the Honors College and Judy Zang with helping her win the Pickering Fellowship. Yet of all ironies, she says, when she came to Pitt she mistakenly thought her test scores excluded her from the Honors College. But she learned these were misconceptions about how the Honors College works, and this year, she says, “Dean Stricker has asked me to help find ways to ensure that no motivated freshman is discouraged from the Honors College. But first was that encounter with Judy Zang, who helped me to take my experiences at Pitt and focus them in a way that would enable me to grow with them.”

**Rachel Harris** is from Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and graduated from Shorewood High School where she was an avid Mock Trial and Forensics participant and enjoyed reading novels, hiking in the woods by Lake Michigan, winter camping, astronomy, and playing the cello in her high school’s symphony and chamber orchestras. She is majoring in Chemistry with a concentration in materials science. “I would say that coming to Pitt and declaring a chemistry major have been the two best decisions I’ve ever made,” she says. “I am so much more confident in myself as a student and as a researcher than I was even since last year, and I think I have learned how to keep a balance of work and play. In the chemistry department, I have found a family of like-minded people who are passionate about the same things I am. I don’t know of a more close-knit department on campus, especially considering its size.” Recognizing the Honors College, she fondly recalls “Doc Stewart in honors physics as a freshman, who taught me that learning is a never-ending adventure, and that avid curiosity is more important than your ‘numbers;’ the Brackenridge Research Fellowship, where I met fellow fellows who taught me how to play hard in addition to working hard; Mike Giazzoni, who patiently listened to my rantings and ravings about the Honors College and understood that I just wanted to help; and Judy Zang and Ross Reilly, who taught me to evaluate myself fairly, celebrate my strengths, and go for the long shot.” In high school, Rachel says, “I used to panic about not knowing what I wanted to do, and that is at last a way that I have changed at Pitt. By seeking out things that I enjoy and eliminating things I don’t, I feel I have managed to carve out a place for myself in the world.”
Kara Henderson graduated from Princeton High School in Cincinnati, Ohio, where she excelled in a wide range of pursuits encompassing superior academic achievement, leadership as senior class president, and stage performance in choirs and musicals. Kara was attracted to Pitt by the reputation of the Honors College and the proximity of the University to the cultural energy of a major city. “Besides the programs of the Honors College and the opportunity at Pitt to design my own major,” she says, “I wanted to be in an urban environment so that I could experience ‘city life’ and have convenient opportunities for jobs and internships. I ended up with the best of both worlds at Pitt--suburban ambiance with Schenley Park and the upper campus, and urban stimulation with the vast cultural resources of Pittsburgh.” Kara has designed a major in “Multi-Media Broadcasting” that incorporates aspects of broadcasting and journalism including print media, television, and radio. “I have a passion for music,” she says, “and a strong interest in business, especially international marketing, and I am taking both jazz and classical voice lessons.” Kara also believes in pursuing studies “that lie outside my strengths,” she says. “I attend forums focused around issues that don’t occur to me on a regular basis and push myself outside my box, for example, pursuing international programs that open me to worldly perspectives best obtained in collegiate years. At the Honors College, I have connected and bonded with students who share these same academic and personal pursuits. Almost every day I get to see a piece of literature or an idea in a new way.”

Daniel Holohan came to Pitt from an upbringing in New York City, New Jersey, and Alexandria, Virginia, where he graduated from Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology. In high school Dan was a varsity debater with a growing interest in neuroscience inspired by a research opportunity at the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke in his last two years. He says he became interested in Pitt after an interview with the Honors College for a scholarship. “It was the only interview I had that delved into topics such as the mind-body duality and the evolution of language,” he remembers. Dan is majoring in neuroscience, molecular biology, and philosophy, and he says he is especially excited about immunology: “My first exposure to the field was through an internship at Sloan-Kettering this past summer, and in my Honors Human Physiology class, a guest lecturer (Dr. Woodward) taught a unit on the subject. The immune system is fascinating to me due to its incredibly adaptable nature in order to achieve specificity.” For Dan, intellectual links with the Honors College were laid in advance: “I knew Dr. Stricker before he became the Dean of the Honors College through his ‘Honors Introduction to Neuroscience’ class. This was the first class I had in which students read primary scientific literature. Dean Stricker has provided generous amounts of his time for me to discuss graduate school and a career in science.” According to Dan, the Honors College has fueled his scientific ambitions and broadened his perspective: “Honors College adviser Nate Hilberg, now a good friend, has been a great resource for
navigating the university, getting acclimated, and discussing my future plans, and Nate especially fed my interests in philosophy and religious studies. The opportunity to explore those fields has highlighted and refined new interests of mine in ethics and politics.”

Mark Kozlowski came to Pitt from New Trier Township High School in Winnetka, Illinois, where he excelled in speech and debate, and chorus, and co-led the Science Olympiad team, which won the state championship all three years he was on it. At Pitt, Mark is majoring in chemistry and economics, and his ambition is someday to help popularize chemistry, making it accessible to wider audiences through books and lectures. He is especially drawn to materials chemistry. “A lot of the great technological revolutions have been made possible by better materials,” he explains, “whether that is the bronze age giving way to the iron age or being able to carry a powerful computer around thanks to miniaturized components.” Mark says that Pitt has enlarged his perspective on the world, especially the research world. “Before I came to Pitt,” he says, “I had notions of research that weren’t entirely accurate, and a few that turned out to be accurate in limited ways. It was the Honors College Brackenridge summer research program in the summer of 2011—a summer spent in a research lab—that decided me on continuing my education in chemistry. The Brackenridge Fellowship, and the Honors College Friday lectures, were also wonderful ways to get exposed to many different fields of endeavor, including areas that I had not really studied before.” But for Mark the paths always led back to his passion for chemistry: “I am particularly excited about nanochemistry. While nanoparticles have been around for some time, their careful study is something that has only started in the last 20 years or so. With so many unknowns, who could fail to be excited?”

Raaka Kumbhakar was raised in Austin, Texas, and Vestal, New York, where she graduated from Vestal Senior High School with passions for chemistry, math, and history, and “spent a great deal of time on fine art and piano.” Raaka is majoring in History and Philosophy of Science at Pitt with a certificate in Global Studies and minors in Chemistry, French, and Economics. “I will be attending medical school next year,” she says, “and ultimately, I’m hoping to do clinical medical work in infectious disease or critical care through the scope of public health. I’ve already been doing research in the Epidemiology Data Center of the Graduate School of Public Health, where a young and progressive faculty is developing new ideas at the forefront of the field.” Coming to Pitt for her “was a bit of an accident,” Raaka says, “I had never heard of Pitt until my good friend and class valedictorian selected it and encouraged me to apply based on her positive experiences with the Honors College.” Raaka remembers from her first visit, “I was floored by how fast I fell in love with the City, the general atmosphere around campus, and most of all, the Honors College community, which, because it is genuinely non-exclusive, truly provides a nurturing academic and social environment for anyone willing to show initiative in almost
anything.” As Raaka perceives it, “Pitt has given me the confidence in myself to pursue the goals I want. If I want to do research, it’s easy to find a mentor. If I want to apply for a national scholarship, I will, and Judy Zang and Ross Reilly will make sure that I am competitive. If I need funding to do something, I can find it. I’ve learned that as long as I take strong initiative I can accomplish whatever I want.”

Jayson Myers graduated from Central York High School in York, Pennsylvania, where his main preoccupations were the mock trial team, history, writing, and literature. Today Jayson’s interests have not changed much from those, he says. He has always liked reading “authors and poets with a certain degree of ambition who are interested in exploring Big Ideas—time, history, memory, humankind’s mutability or lack thereof. So, in high school this meant James Joyce, Rainer Maria Rilke, Robert Lowell, Nabokov, and the ancient Greeks. And now, it means more contemporary fiction, plays, and poetry, like that written by Roberto Bolano, Geoffrey Hill, and Tom Stoppard, whom I love with the greatest enthusiasm.” Jayson is majoring in history with a minor in economics and a certificate in medieval and renaissance studies. “I discovered in the study of history the same sort of delight that came to me in my high school pursuit of fiction and literature—a delight in realizing that people change their minds. I found that analyzing texts, trying to solve the problems they present, and the moment of complete understanding that sometimes results, aroused a similar joy that I felt in understanding a great poem.”

Through involvement with the Honors College Jayson has worked on two Brackenridge Summer Research Fellowships, served as an undergraduate teaching fellow and he is completing a B.Phil. on English political thought in the seventeenth century. Looking ahead, he says he hopes for a career that will “muddy the waters between my personal life and my professional life in an intellectually stimulating and personally gratifying way. I take seriously the idea that people should make a career out of what they love.”

Kevin Ramser grew up in Gibsonia, Pennsylvania, and attended Pine-Richland High School where his interests in digital photography and mixed media painting drew him to the school’s art department. He was attracted to Pitt by the breadth of academic options, the urban location, and the quality of its faculty, especially in the English and Film Studies departments, he says. “I also liked the prospect of taking classes at Pittsburgh Filmmakers, where I have studied black and white photography, as well as digital video production and editing.” Kevin is a Film Studies Major and is pursuing a certificate in Public and Professional Writing. “I’ve enjoyed many of my Film Studies classes,” he says, “particularly a class on modern American horror films, in which I found the material very challenging because of its disturbing nature. My classmates and I were forced to confront troubling texts and extract meaningful, constructive insights. I am most interested in subject matter that challenges me by pushing me into unfamiliar or uncomfortable territory.” Kevin remembers that
he became involved in the Honors College after attending an information session on Humanity In Action’s summer fellowship. “I met with Judy Zang, who gave me invaluable advice on the interview process,” he says, “and I won the fellowship. This past summer I had a fantastic time in Denmark studying contemporary human rights issues with a group of international students and interacting with leading Danish intellectuals, politicians, journalists, and historians.” Unsure of his future career, Kevin is confident in his prospects. “I am a strong writer and public speaker,” he explains, “and for that reason I am sure that my career will entail contributing to a critical discourse, most likely in the arts. I hope one day to pursue a job in radio, journalism, or video production.”

Andrea Richards grew up in the small town of Bucyrus in rural Ohio and graduated from Wynford High School where she distinguished herself in varsity track and field competition, concert band performance, and language studies. Andrea is majoring in Chinese and Russian and has studied abroad in China and Russia for the last two summers. “I think my study abroad has expanded my intellectual capacity more than anything else,” she says. “I have seen how despite linguistic and cultural barriers, humans are simply human, and everyone possesses similar desires and needs.” Andrea values a strong involvement with Pitt’s television station and filmmaking club. “I know the power that writers, directors, and editors hold,” she says, “and I keep this in mind each time I see something in the news or for entertainment, whether the material is Chinese, Russian, American, or something else.” Staff members of the Honors College were among Andrea’s first acquaintances at Pitt, and she is grateful of that: “I realized that these were the sort of people I wanted to be around and to guide my education, and I think I chose quite correctly. Mike Giazzoni has been a wonderful mentor and advisor, helping me to navigate the academic system as well as simply giving advice and listening to my concerns. Judy Zang has helped me realize the scholarships that are available to me, since at times the list seems daunting. I am a member of Dean Stricker’s Student Advisory Board, and I have seen first-hand that he truly cares about students. His type of leadership exemplifies the reason I adore the UHC.”
The board of the Student Honors Activity Council cemented friendships while instilling a sense of commitment, trust, and fun into my life.” In the end, Ben says, “I would not be the person I am today without my Honors College experiences.” Ben is a senior majoring in economics and urban studies, and plans to earn a Master’s Degree in public policy toward a career in urban affairs and applied policy analysis. “I have become interested in the intersection of economics and urbanism,” he explains, “the way markets interact with city life. As the world’s population grows larger, the percentage of humanity living in cities will continue to balloon. The displacement and transition of mass populations from traditionally rural lifestyles to city life will involve adjustments to new modes of living that involve increased interactions between diverse people, senses of place, and dense spaces. At Pitt, my mind has been opened to the possibilities and struggles that lay in wake for the cities of the future.”

Matthew Schaff graduated from Conestoga High School in Berwyn, Pennsylvania, just outside Philadelphia. He was most stimulated there by science and English classes, and he was so proficient on the French horn that he played in the 2008 Pennsylvania State Orchestra. At Pitt Matt is majoring in Neuroscience and Economics. “From the moment I learned the organ systems in 9th grade biology,” Matt says, “I was forever hooked on the idea of people’s brains studying themselves, both in terms of the philosophical implications and physiological mysteries posed. Lucky me, the person with a young brain so fascinated by others’ brains happened to land in one of this nation’s premier undergraduate neuroscience programs. What I’ve found

Nina Sabak graduated from Fairmont Senior High School in Fairmont, West Virginia, where she pursued writing, French, and flute. She also read voraciously, in part seeking out the literature and culture of her Russian heritage. Today, majoring in English writing with a minor in French, Nina’s principal interest is in fiction, but she also is drawn to creative nonfiction. She notes in particular her fascination with “the growth of magical realism as a genre in relation to both 20th Century Russia and 21st Century America, and how both subjects use the appearance of truth as a way of speaking about unspeakable things.” Nina’s lifelong goals are to write, she says, and “to evangelize the importance of literature,” and the Honors College has provided her with a larger vision to do that. “I’d like to think that I’ve become a more adventurous person,” she says. “Pitt has challenged me not only to meet my goals but to set better, more interesting goals, and that’s a gift. The UHC has encouraged and occasionally forced me to explore other fields, if only for the pleasure of doing so. I’ve taken honors courses and received honors advising, and I’ve claimed the Honors College space itself as a study area and safe place. Through the UHC, I’ve been offered opportunities and have met like-minded people through the programs (Brackenridge) and publications (Collision, Three Rivers Review) that it sponsors. UHC has opened doors for me, and it has taught me that I can open those doors myself.”
so exciting about neuroscience these days is not just the new-found power to answer medically relevant questions about how and why we perceive, process, and respond to the world—which is itself an enormously reinforcing enterprise -- but also the sheer bounty of unanswered questions.” Matt appreciates the Honors College for the interdisciplinary experiences promoted in its residence halls and fellowships. “My freshman year participation in the Forbes Hall honors community,” he says, “opened me up to people of all backgrounds and academic interests, and my ability to interact with and gain from the company of intellectually different people was greatly enhanced. The 2011 Fall Research Fellowship gave me a chance to witness peer-delivered academic presentations on a variety of different academic pursuits and enabled me to better respect academics of all strains.” Among Honors College courses, this budding scientist of the brain reserves special praise for one class in particular. “They’ve all turned out to be wonderful,” he says, “but nowhere else in my life have I found environmental stimuli so revelatory, so elucidating, and so challenging as I found in Honors Introduction to Neuroscience. That experience alone would have made Pitt worth it.”

James Simkins grew up in California, Tennessee, and New York, where he graduated from McQuaid Jesuit High School in Rochester. “In those years before coming to college,” he says, “I was particularly interested in political philosophy, biology, physics, history, politics, and in the challenges of medicine in developing nations. I was also an avid rugby player.” Today James is majoring in philosophy, history, and history and philosophy of science, and he plans to attend graduate school in philosophy. “I am particularly interested in developments in intellectual history of the early modern period,” he says. “I have taken courses in all three of my major departments covering this period, and I have learned about developments in fields as seemingly diverse as physics, medicine, Judaism, philosophy, and legal theory that all occurred in early modern Europe. What is particularly interesting is the interconnections between the development of radical ideas in each of these fields and the common historical forces that were driving this change.” James says that the Honors College has been a central part of his university life. “I lived in honors housing for my first two years, and the vast majority of my friends I met in that setting. I have done a total of four Honors College fellowships so far including three for research projects on malaria, Spinoza’s epistemology, and Spinoza’s theory of religion, as well as one as a teaching assistant. The Honors College was my only real community before I began building an identity within my majors, and it is still today a huge part of my intellectual and social life.”

Matthew Stoffregen is a Pittsburgh native and graduate of Woodland Hills High School where he studied languages and played piano and guitar. But most gratifying to Matt was his top placement in state and national math competitions. As he puts it, “It is fair to say I was preoccupied with math
contests.” Matt is now a mathematics major at Pitt, and his present interest is group cohomology. “This discipline,” he explains, “takes our ideas about shape – in particular, the number of ‘holes’ in an object – and applies them to ‘groups’. For a ‘group’ one need only think of the integers, say. It turns out that this connection is quite profitable, and allows one to measure ‘holes’ in groups, seemingly purely abstract, mathematical constructs. In general, I am interested by such connections that make an analogy between something completely abstract and something completely natural.” Matt says his experience with the Honors College during the selection process brought him to Pitt, and he feels richly rewarded. “My experience at Pitt has given me both a wider picture of the mathematical world, and a sense of how academic disciplines fit together and interact (beneficially, of course). Something I view as particularly valuable is my growing sense of how mathematical results eventually become useful in physics. One of my best experiences was participating in the Brackenridge Summer Research community. From that, I saw several interesting topics, stretched across all fields, and learned that it is possible to accomplish breadth as well as depth.”

Christopher Stokum graduated from Avella High School in Burgettstown, Pennsylvania, where he wrote fiction and poetry and played guitar and trumpet. He is majoring in English writing and philosophy with a minor in religious studies and co-curricular pursuits in songwriting and in performing and recording music. Cultural studies would be his choice for graduate school. “Cultural studies professors contributed greatly to my sense of how philosophy, literature, and the rest of the humanities hang together,” he says, “their respective advantages and limitations of perspective, and the way in which they communicate with and ballast one another.” Chris says that Pitt expanded his appreciation of cultural diversity, or as he puts it, made him “aware of the innumerable ways of looking at and extracting meaning from the same state of affairs.” All the while there grew a greater sense of self, he says: “If I can identify a unifying thread that runs throughout all the UHC courses I’ve taken, it is developing the student as a person—not as a biologist, a philosopher, or an anthropologist, but as an individual who can fruitfully work within a field but is not limited by that discipline. The Honors College has brought me to appreciate the importance of being a cultivated person and, perhaps more importantly, of working in a way that cultivates others. It has instilled in me a sense that everything I produce, be it a piece of fiction or a song, ought to change something in the person receiving it—by challenging their convictions or making them aware of a different interpretation.”

Micah Toll lived in Tennessee, Georgia, Arkansas, and Lebanon, Pennsylvania, before coming to Pitt. Mechanically minded, he and his father restored old cars, and from his earliest years Micah was preoccupied with inventing and engineering endeavors. He submitted his first patent at age 15, founded his first engineering company at 17, and by the end
of high school had won many dozens of awards in science and engineering at local, state, national, and international levels. Micah’s major at Pitt is mechanical engineering, or as he puts it, “I am passionate about design engineering as well as entrepreneurship. I enjoy taking my engineering education and using it to create innovation that I can provide to the world.”

Micah was drawn to Pitt by opportunities he found in the engineering school for enrichment outside of the classroom. The school’s focus on sustainable engineering has especially resonated with him. “I have always been interested in cars, and possibly working in the automotive industry,” he says, “but Pitt’s emphasis on sustainable engineering practices have helped me focus more specifically on electric vehicles. I recently founded Pittsburgh’s first electric vehicle company, Pulse Motors, and will continue to work on growing and developing the company.” Micah also intersected very early with the Honors College: “I had a great relationship with Dean Stewart. Our first interaction occurred when I was a High School Senior and he interviewed me for an Honors College scholarship. I also took part in the Freshman Honors in Engineering Seminar through the Honors College and more recently have worked with Dean Stricker on a project with fellow engineering students to research electric vehicle drivetrain designs.” Micah believes his self-designed path of education across diverse studies prepares him best for the challenges ahead. “I have excelled in speaking competitions,” he says, “because communication skills will advance my career, and I designed multiple classes for myself as independent studies and spread my electives among many different schools at Pitt to make myself a well rounded engineer.”

David Wang spent most of his childhood in Pittsburgh and attended Mt. Lebanon High School, where he was known for his exceptional academic achievements and piano playing. “Probably my best distinction in music was playing the Grieg Piano Concerto with the Three Rivers Young Peoples Orchestra,” David says. Next year, David will enter medical school following majors at Pitt in Chemistry and Applied Mathematics, with minors in Physics and Economics. “If we consider a specific class or set of classes that excited me most,” he says, “I would have to say Modern Physics 1 & 2. The courses were so interesting because they explore topics that the mind cannot believe to be true. For example, it is theoretically possible to make someone grow older slower, not because of better healthcare or whatever, but literally by altering time.” About his education at Pitt, David says “it is without question that the research opportunities Pitt provides have influenced me most intellectually. Through scientific research I learned not just to accept scientific theory and facts but also to investigate further extensions and future applications. I went into Pitt thinking I would come out wanting to be a physician. I now desire to become a physician scientist.” While most of David’s passion is for the natural sciences, he says he especially appreciates the Honors College for the many people he has met “with such passion in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. One major reason for that is the Brackenridge Summer Research Fellowship, in which approximately 80 students had the same goal: to engage in scholarly research.” David says that Pitt
“has taught me to be a better communicator and collaborator. I embrace working in small groups now because there’s always something new one can learn from others.”

Siyu Xiao was born in Nanjing, China, and grew up in Houston, Texas, and Westfield, New Jersey. She graduated from Westfield High School with a strong foundation in science and fervent avocations ranging from piano and painting to leadership in community service. Siyu is majoring in biochemistry and minoring in studio arts with an eye to a medical degree and helping disadvantaged people. “I was drawn to Pitt’s central location in a world-renowned medical center,” she says, “because I was interested in becoming a physician and using my degree to work with Doctors Without Borders—that would be the ideal for me.” Pitt has already broadened Siyu in unexpected ways, she says, one of them a new appreciation and love for writing. “I have taken two nonfiction writing classes and loved the experience. I now hope to use writing as a means of expression and exposure in my career, whether it be in medicine, science, or service.” Siyu is grateful to the Honors College for a research assistantship and fellowship that sponsored her two lab experiences. “I was able to meet very bright people through the Honors College who shared my excitement for science and who humbled me with their skills,” she says. “By taking Honors College classes, I have gotten to know Dr. Steve Weber and Honors College Dean Ed Stricker, who have been very supportive of my ambitions and are also just fun to talk to. I especially appreciated the challenges posed by Dean Stricker in his neuroscience class. He encouraged us to think like scientists and to understand material until we mastered it. I spent a lot of time studying for that class, making charts and diagrams until I was confident that I could answer any question the exam threw at me. And then I used the exams as a sort of game, and I applied the same method to my other classes, achieving a level of understanding that I might not otherwise have known was possible.”

Wen Xu can trace her life in equal stages to Chengdu, China, then Winnipeg, Canada, and finally to Pittsburgh, where she graduated from North Allegheny Senior High School. Planning on medical school, Wen’s major is Neuroscience with minors in Chemistry and Bioengineering and a certificate in Conceptual Foundations of Medicine. She has enjoyed every course she has taken in neuroscience, she says. “Learning about the various parts of the brain and what they do,” she explains, “not only broadened my horizon, but made me realize how little we know about ourselves. Oftentimes, courses are taught in a way that presents all the information as factual. Functional neuroscience, however, made me question the current knowledge, and more importantly, inspired me to include a participation in research in my career goals.” Wen initially intersected with Honors College courses in a memorable and privileged way. “I was in Doc Stewart’s Honors Physics course freshman year,” she says, “and I enjoyed his stories as well as his teaching.” Subsequently, Wen reports, “I received the Chancellor’s
Research Award from the Honors College in my sophomore year, and then I participated in the Brackenridge Summer Research Program twice. This was one of the most intellectually satisfying experiences I have had as an undergraduate. Although I enjoy the discussions I have in my normal science courses, what makes the Brackenridge experience different is the group of eager scholars with diverse backgrounds that make it possible. Learning about their research in other fields made me realize that although the content of everyone’s research differed, the methods and thought processes are similar across fields.” In hindsight, Wen says, Pitt may have changed her most in awakening a first-hand appreciation of social complexity. “Pitt has made me appreciate the diversity in people,” she explains. “Having spent all of middle school and high school in a suburb of Pittsburgh, it was eye-opening to meet people representing so much geographic and socioeconomic multiplicity.”

do research and undergraduate education comes as an afterthought.” Alex says he figured that if he had any chance of finding an intellectual home at Pitt, the Honors College was probably the place to start. “I wound up in the office of UHC’s Dave Hornyak,” he says, “the advisor for politics and philosophy (P&P).” This special major combines studies of political science, philosophy, and economics in a concentration that is uniquely advised in the Honors College. “Jackpot!” Alex exclaims: “This intellectual free-for-all landed me in classes ranging from transatlantic security to problems in the philosophy of religion. Taking only small courses that were taught by professors I thought were especially interesting became my goal. I had found a way to make Pitt the small liberal arts college I had wanted to attend in the first place.” Alex served as an elected member of Pitt’s Student Government Board and is an editor of the Pitt Political Review as he pursues an Honors College B.Phil. degree that seeks to bridge a gap between theory and practice in human rights. He looks forward to graduate school or to law school, perhaps, and imagines an interesting and fulfilling job in journalism, or public interest law, or teaching, he says, “but these are in no particular order, and subject to day-to-day change. There are lots of different things I could imagine enjoying.”

Alex Zimmerman graduated from Friends Select School in Philadelphia where he immersed himself in basketball and music (a drummer) while leading the debate team, student government, and the school newspaper. From that background, he says, “I never imagined I would find a home at a major public research university. Coming from a small Quaker high school where everyone was on a first name basis with their teachers and classes were never larger than twenty students, I thought large universities were places where professors and graduate students