



protecting academic quality

UNITED ACADEMICS NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release: September 28, 2009

United Academics announces Brace Award winners for 2009-2010

Burlington, VT: Four students at the University of Vermont--including sisters from Underhill, VT--have been awarded a scholarship by United Academics (AAUP/AFT). Each year the faculty union at the university provides \$500 certificates to be used for books and supplies by students who exemplify not only academic excellence but also an active commitment to achieving social justice. The scholarship is named in honor of an early 19th-century Black Vermonter, Jeffrey Brace.

The United Academics Jeffrey Brace Book Award for 2009-2010 goes to four students who have been judged to demonstrate their dedication to economic, social, and environmental justice. They are Lydia and Elise Corriveau, Nursing majors from Underhill, VT; Briana Martin, a Social Work major from Bronx, NY; and Jessica Serrante, an Environmental Studies major from Bridgewater, NJ. This is the sixth year the scholarship has been awarded.

"United Academics is pleased to be able to present the Jeffrey Brace Award to four deserving student activists," said Professor Stephanie Kaza, Director of the Environmental Program and a faculty member in the Rubenstein School of the Environment and Natural Resources. "These students have taken their commitment beyond campus into community and national work as well."

"We hope this award will continue to encourage students to take action on key issues in social justice, inspired by the example set by Jeffrey Brace," said Kaza, one of three United Academics judges for this year's awards. Also on the award selection committee were Professors Alice Fothergill, Sociology, and Peter Spitzform, UVM Libraries.

###

For more information:

Stephanie Kaza, Scholarship Committee Chair

United Academics (AAUP/AFT) at the University of Vermont

802-656-4055, stephanie.kaza@uvm.edu

NOTE: Below (and attached) is more detailed information about each of the four students awarded the scholarship as well as about Jeffrey Brace, in whose honor the scholarship is named.

Lydia Corriveau: “Passionate about economic and social justice”

On Saturdays, you're likely to find senior Lydia Corriveau in the Old North End of Burlington, volunteering at Kids Alive, a non-denominational ministry for at-risk children--many of whom have experienced homelessness, witnessed drug and alcohol abuse, or suffered abuse. But go back to the Old North End on Monday nights, and you'll find her there again, this time running the "Girls Group."

"The purpose of Girls' Group was to create an event in the week for the girls who are beginning to outgrow what Kids Alive has to offer," she said. "Our goal is to ... form relationships with them so that they have mentors with whom they can talk about countless difficult issues that they face on a day-to-day basis."

Explaining her motivation, the senior said, "I cannot think of a more important thing for us to each be doing than investing in the lives of those younger than ourselves."

"Lydia is an extremely bright young woman who is passionate about economic and social justice issues," said Professor Rebecca Montgomery of the College of Nursing and Health Sciences. "She is dedicated to community service while she diligently works towards obtaining her nursing degree."

Elise Corriveau: “A natural and growing compassion for the poor and oppressed”

Like her sister Lydia, sophomore Elise Corriveau began volunteering at Kids Alive when she was in high school. When deciding what to major in at UVM, she chose nursing because of her desire to continue to help others.

"My time at UVM has also played a large role in stirring up my passion to help those in need," she explained. Last fall semester, she volunteered at an outreach in Lowell, MA, serving people seeking help to overcome crime, drug and alcohol abuse, and violence.

During spring break, the Nursing major volunteered at a church for the homeless in Atlanta, GA. "Atlanta was extremely eye opening to me because it proved many of the things I had been learning in my Race Relations in the United States class here at UVM," she recalled.

This past summer, she volunteered at Neighborhood Ministries in Phoenix, AZ, which she refers to as "my next step in working to battle social and economic injustice."

According to Stephanie Hobold of UVM's Spiritual and Religious Life Council, "Elise is intentionally participating and putting herself in environments of learning and exposure so that she can use her nursing degree and passion for nutrition and health care in a way that will serve others and address major social justice and race issues."

Briana Martin: “Every small action can mean so much”

A first-generation college student from Bronx, NY, Briana Martin says she experienced race and class inequality before arriving at UVM. Once in Burlington, she discovered similar issues exist "at the bottom of the hill" from the university. Martin is a tutor for Shades of Ebony, a program at Burlington High School for students of color, several of whom are from refugee families.

"I work with them on a daily basis offering homework help and college preparation so I hear some of their personal stories," the junior said. "I believe just having someone to listen and help them means the world to these students. Every small action can mean so much."

Martin, who went on an Alternative Spring Break trip this past year to work with an inner city youth group in Chicago, is passionate about her major, Social Work. "Many of the classes I'm taking shed light on the vast amount of economic and social inequalities around the world," she explained. "I challenge and acknowledge these issues by getting involved in extracurricular activities and organizations that I know have a positive impact on different people."

"Briana is someone who is very committed to making a difference in the lives of others and advancing the case for social justice," said Janet Bossange, Associate Dean of the College of Education and Social Services. "I would describe her as a strong advocate for children."

Jessica Serrante: Spreading the "activism bug"

An Environmental Studies major with a concentration in Social and Environmental Justice, Jessica Serrante is committed to spread the "activism bug." After returning from the spring 2007 PowerShift (global climate change) Conference in Washington, D.C. with 44 other students from UVM, she helped launch the "Kleercut" campaign: The goal was to work with UVM administration to cut UVM's custodial paper contract with Kimberly-Clark, whose paper products are made from clear-cut old-growth forest in the Boreal Forest in Canada.

Inspired by the success of that campaign in spring 2008, Serrante spent the summer in San Francisco training with the Greenpeace Organizing Team, where she learned the skills needed to become a community organizer.

The senior put those skills to use this past spring as the lead organizer of the UVM students going to the PowerShift Conference 2009, bringing the largest delegation of students from any school. "We were able to help 204 UVM students organize themselves to get to this powerful conference on climate change, environmental justice, and student activism," she said.

This fall, Jessica is planning her senior thesis around designing a student-taught course on environmental Activism. She wants to share the skills she has gained with others just getting started in environmental and social justice activism.

After graduating from UVM, Serante says she hopes to "raise awareness not only about the injustices of our world today, but also the power that resides within each individual that sees these injustices and seeks to find a way to improve them."

"Jessica is doing this work for all the right reasons," said Elizabeth Getchell, Student Services Coordinator for UVM's Environmental Program. "She is thoroughly committed to both her academic and extra-curricular responsibilities relating to economic and social justice."

UVM students and social justice: In the tradition of Jeffrey Brace

Born in West Africa, Jeffrey Brace was captured in 1758 by slave traders and eventually sold as a slave in Connecticut. Brace enlisted in the Revolutionary Army in 1777 and fought for American liberty for five years before being honorably discharged and, only then, freed from slavery. Following the war, like many veterans, Brace and his wife moved to the new State of Vermont to take up farming. Virulent racism drove him and his family from their first homestead in Poultney to St. Albans where Brace established a new farm. Brace's struggles for personal and social justice are detailed in one of the earliest biographies of a Black American still in existence. The Special Collections of the University of Vermont contains one of the few copies of this important and rare book, "The Blind African Slave."

Jeffrey Brace did not seek out struggles for social justice but neither did he fear them. Although stolen from Africa, he fought for national independence. Although a veteran, a farmer, and a Vermonter, Brace had to continually fight for his rights as a citizen in the country he had helped create. He fought this fight in words, using the courts and the press.

"It is in memory of this important early Vermonter that United Academics seeks to facilitate the pursuit of academic excellence and social justice by the students of the University of Vermont, which is exemplified by Lydia Corriveau, Elise Corriveau, Briana Martin, and Jessica Serrante," Kazza said.

###

Posted on the website: November 19, 2009