Congratulations to the 2015 United Academics Scholarship Recipients

David Shiman Award: Jess Fuller

Jess Fuller is a double major in History and Economics. She will be graduating with honors—her thesis investigates the intersection of wage theft and sexual harassment within the serving occupation and how these two dynamics perpetuate the feminization of poverty and precarity. In her freshman year, Jess co-founded and led Vox: Voices for Planned Parenthood at UVM, the feminist groups on campus that is concerned with reproductive justice and sexual health.

In her senior year Jess has organized student coalitions surrounding sexual assault on campus. She organized another coalition to reform the Economics curriculum that pays great attention to the barriers to access due to intersecting race, class and gender status. In her free-time she organizes with the Vermont Worker's Center. Following graduation she hopes to go into labor organizing to strive to achieve economic and social justice.

Linda Backus Memorial Award: Hillary Danis

Hillary is a sophomore chemistry major with a mathematics minor originally from Essex Junction. She is involved with several local volunteer organizations, most notably serving as the Chair of the Board of Directors at Essex CHIPS and Teen Center. Essex CHIPS is a non-profit that aims to form valuable youth-adult partnerships in the community. It hosts a drop-in Teen and Tween center after school and works to promote health and wellness in the greater community, with a focus on youth drug, alcohol, and tobacco prevention initiatives. Hillary also volunteers as an EMT for Essex Rescue, running at least fifteen hours a week on the ambulance. Finally Hillary is a ski instructor for Vermont Adaptive Ski and Sports. She teaches ski lessons to clients with physical, mental, and cognitive disabilities.
Jeffrey Brace Awards: Caroline DeCunzo, Sammie Ibrahim, Nishani Kessler, Anne Mientka, Bianca Rizzio.

Caroline DeCunzo
Caroline DeCunzo is a CAS junior studying Global Studies, Environmental Studies, and Spanish. Caroline was born in Madison, WI, and raised in NY. Caroline loves community organizing and works on issues concerning student debt, labor, divestment, and dismantling the cis-hetero-patriarchy. As a white girl, Caroline likes talking with other white people about racism, police brutality, and mass incarceration. Outside the organizing scene, Caroline makes music, hangs with her supportive girlfriends, and works with her advisor, IL Nelson, to whom she is very grateful. Caroline thanks UA for this award and for their consistent and radical presence, support and mentorship in campus struggle.

Sammie Ibrahim
Sammie is a junior Geography major at UVM. Sammie’s research and community involvement has centered on creating better access to community resources for the local resettled refugee community. In this vein, she has especially focused on issues of transportation equity and access to legal resources, which led her to create a series of workshops to educate refugee service providers on the legal issues impacting the refugee community. Sammie also works to mobilize young people around global human rights issues, serving as co-president of the UVM chapter of Amnesty International (AI) and as the AI student activist coordinator for Vermont. In addition, Sammie co-founded the student organization, Students Against Sexual Assault, which works to raise awareness of sexual assault and promote a culture of consent on UVM’s campus. Sammie hopes to further these experiences professionally as a human rights advocate.

Nishani Kessler
Nishani Kessler, a first year student at the University of Vermont. Currently transferring to the School of Business with a concentration in Global Business and Marketing. She is perusing a minor in Critical Race and Ethnic Studies. Nishani received the Rodney S. Patterson award at the ALANA Award’s Banquet for her commitment as a first year student, to better the ALANA community. Nishani held the first ever trans-racially adopted/grew up in a predominately white area meeting at the ALANA Student Center on April 16, 2015. She wants to continue having meetings once a month in the 2015-16 academic year. Nishani will be a program director for the ALANA House (in Living and Learning) and will continue to spread her love for social justice.

Anne Mientka
Anne Mientka is a senior Psychological Sciences major with a minor in Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies. She currently works in the Social Development Lab, and was the recipient of the Summer Research Grant, which allowed her to create and execute her own psychological substudy. She is a member of Triota, the honors society for academic excellence in Women’s Studies. Starting her freshman year, she received her Crisis Hotline Worker certification from H.O.P.E. Works (Chittenden County’s rape crisis center). She worked on the hotline and chatline, taking calls from survivors. She plans to continue advocating for survivors of domestic and sexual violence, promoting safe and healthy relationships, and empowering women

Bianca Rizzio
Bianca Rizzio is a native Vermonter and first generation college student in the Psychology and Gender, Sexuality and Women’s Studies department. Her undergraduate involvement is reflective of her interest in the intersections of underserved populations, educational policy, and social/economic justice. Through the UVM Career Center, Bianca developed and launched a Financial Literacy Program to help students of lower socioeconomic statuses access critical resources. In hopes to translate this upward mobility training to populations outside of the university, she currently teaches a career preparatory class with Vermont Works for Women to inmates at the Chittenden Regional Correctional Facility. This work has fostered her interest in educational leadership and policy, with a particular emphasis on the school-to-prison pipeline.