

Synaptic Scholars



Final Presentations 2010

Tufts
UNIVERSITY



THE INSTITUTE FOR
**GLOBAL
LEADERSHIP**

SYNAPTIC SCHOLARS

The Institute for Global Leadership

SYNAPTIC SCHOLARS PROGRAM

The Synaptic Scholars program is a leadership program, meant to provide a forum for students to take risks, pursue passions, and challenge assumptions in an intimate, supportive, and collaborative environment. It is designed to cultivate a strong sense of accountability and responsibility, while encouraging scholars to enrich the University's intellectual life and programming.

Scholars, who are selected by their peers to join the Synaptics community, meet weekly to examine a broad range of current events and global issues, organize community events, offer feedback and support for individual and group projects, and reflect on their evolving intellectual interests and personal goals. By moving beyond traditional departmental methodologies with a singular disciplinary focus, the group creates a framework in which intellectual juxtapositions, critical thinking, and self-directed explorations can be realized.

Cover photo: Synaptic Scholars of all class years meet with professor and renowned physicist Freeman Dyson, at the Institute for Global Leadership. October 2009. Photo by Matt Mercier.

<http://tuftsgloballeadership.org>

PROGRAM

- 3:00pm Reception
- 3:15pm Welcome
Sherman Teichman
Director, Institute for Global Leadership
Jamshed Bharucha
Provost and Senior Vice President, Tufts University
James Glaser
Dean of Undergraduate Education, Tufts University
- 3:15pm Student Presentations
- Ikenna Acholonu**
Jumping Hurdles, Meeting Rappers, and Learning to be Black
- Erin Baldassari**
Stepping into the Light
- David Gainsboro**
The New Food Movement at Boston's Farmers' Markets and Conflict Management in South Asia
- Mae-Ling Lokko**
Negotium: A Critical Geography of Architecture
- Margaret O'Connor**
Medical Ethics and Education in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates
- Talya Peltzman**
Perspectives on Immigration and Health: a Journey through National, Transnational, and Local Policy Research
- Duncan Pickard**
Between Scholastics and Service
- Austin Siadak**
Cognitive Science and Morality
- Kelsi Stine**
From Marimbas to the Marcoses: Corruption and Governance in Transitional Societies
- 4:45pm Closing Remarks

IKENNA acholonu

Ikenna Acholonu is a senior at Tufts University majoring in American Studies and Political Science. In his majors, his focus has been on comparative race and ethnicity and political theory. He is currently in the process of writing his thesis entitled *The Performance of Blackness in Presidential Campaigns: A Look at Barack Obama and Jesse Jackson*. In this thesis he discusses aspects of Barack Obama's and Jesse Jackson's presidential campaigns looking at the different images of Blackness presented. Next year Ikenna will be participating in the Coro Fellowship in Public Affairs in San Francisco, an educational institute that trains future leaders in public affairs through experiential learning and classroom seminars. In the future Ikenna hopes to work in improving the U.S. education system particularly focusing on the experiences of students of color.

Title: Jumping Hurdles, Meeting Rappers, and Learning to Be Black

This presentation will be looking at the life lessons Ikenna Acholonu learned while being a Synaptic Scholar and a student at Tufts University. In it he will look at aspects of being a student athlete, his involvement with Hip Hop for Social Change, and the experiences that helped to shape his racial identity.



“Synaptic Scholars has definitely been a program that challenged and continues to challenge my thinking. It provided another outlet on campus for me to meet people of different interests and different thought processes. In undertaking my project I learned a lot about my interests and myself. However the most meaningful thing that I got out of this program was an opportunity to strengthen my friendships with my fellow Syns. The class of 2010 is a group of outstanding people that are all going to do amazing things, and I am excited to see the changes that we make in the world we step into...”

ERIN baldassari

Erin is a northern California native dedicated to the pursuit of journalism and photography as a means of exploring social, economic and cultural issues. Having written in a diary her whole life, Erin is no stranger to documenting the world around her. At Tufts, she became involved in the Exposure program and participated in several workshops, both in Kashmir and in Boston. During her time at Tufts, she worked for several publications, contributing both written articles and photography to the Tufts' *Observer*, the *Somerville Journal*, the *Boston Phoenix Magazine*, and the *Boston Metro Newspaper*. She has also been published in the *Tufts Daily*, the *New England Lacrosse Journal*, the *New York Metro Newspaper*, and the *Boston Globe*.

Stepping into the light

From the Boston Tea Party to budding hip hop artists, barbershops in Dorchester to architects trying to survive the recession, Erin has covered culture, art and politics in Boston. This presentation will explore Erin's evolution as a photojournalist and writer during her time at Tufts.

"The Synaptic Scholars program has given me a platform to explore Boston as a city and journalism as a career. Weekly meetings with Synaptics provided fertile ground to develop ideas that would later become a photo essay or article. The program has helped me realize what is possible as a student, and has enabled me to reach further as an individual. I can not imagine the trajectory of my path at Tufts without the guidance of my fellow Syns who have been an invaluable support academically, emotionally and intellectually. I am honored to stand with this community."



DAVID gainsboro

David's college experience has been marked by the pursuit diverging interests. Entering college, he was involved with three club sports teams, also nurturing a passion for the outdoors with his involvement on the Executive Board of the Tufts Mountain Club. Sophomore year, entering the Synaptics community, David refocused his attention on studying violent social movements, negotiation, and conflict and crisis management. David began developing a relationship with Keith Fitzgerald, an EPIIC and IGL alum with extensive conflict and hostage negotiation experience.



Junior year, David studied abroad in Vietnam and Cambodia, pursuing journalism as contributor and editor for both the *Saigon Times* and the *Phnom Penh Post*. During his senior year, David has taken one of his avocations, food, and melded it with one of his academic interests, studying social movements. The product, his Senior Honors Thesis, has given him an avenue to study, sociologically, the New Food Movement and the role it currently plays at farmers' markets, combining ethnographic and interview-based research. He was invited to present his research at two conferences: the Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting, and the American Sociology Association Annual Meeting.

This summer, David looks forward to working in Colombo, Sri Lanka, at a negotiation-consulting firm owned by Keith Fitzgerald. In the fall, he has been invited to work with Tufts alum Dan Barber at his restaurant/farm in New York City, Blue Hill, in a 6-month training/internship program.

The New Food Movement at Boston's Farmers' Markets and Conflict Management in South Asia

David will present about his two diverging research interests: his senior honors thesis research looking at the impact of the New Food Movement in Boston area farmers' markets, and his research studying conflict and crisis management and negotiation through the lens of the civil war in Sri Lanka.

"Synaptic scholars has played an instrumental role in my intellectual and personal development. Beyond meeting some of the individuals who, today, I would consider some of my closest friends, the nurturing and supportive environment, full of highly motivated students has provided endless inspiration. I felt a strong sense of accountability to my peers to challenge myself. They have been enormously supportive during some of the most challenging and most exciting moments of my undergraduate career. The older students served as important mentors, teaching me many of the skills and helping instill a sense of confidence in my. I credit much of my desire for intellectual as well as physical challenge to the synaptic scholars program and its members."

MAE-LING Iokko

Mae-ling embarked upon her Synaptic journey by proposing a landscape design project at the SOS Hermann Gmeiner International School in the industrial capital of Ghana, Tema. This endeavor sought to incorporate ideas of sustainability and the integration of local African materials. Funded by EMPOWER—the IGL’s internship and research program for the promotion of social entrepreneurship—and local Ghanaian companies, she completed the project the summer after her sophomore year.

Her approach to this landscape project was influenced by the Synaptic and IGL community. In conjunction with another Synaptic peer, Mae-ling organized a series of discussions between the Tufts Collaborative on Africa and the Tufts African Student Organization (ASO). Her involvement with Emergency, a non-profit health organization inspired her work ethos—non-discriminating in the high quality service it provides to communities that are in dire need of sensitive responses. Working together with doctors of Partners in Health (PIH) and Emergency, she organized a lecture with fellow Synaptics on 'Collaboration between Non-Profit Healthcare.'



Having spent her junior year abroad studying at the Bartlett School of Architecture in London, Mae-ling returned to Ghana the following summer to produce a documentary on urban growth with renowned Ghanaian architect, Joe Addo. The documentary was shown during the annual ArchiAfrika Conference in Pretoria in the fall of 2009. Based on this, Mae-ling submitted an article entitled "Negotium: Architecture of Accra" for the 3rd edition of Discourse. Currently, Mae-ling is working on her Seniors Honor Thesis entitled "The Brazil House: Exploring Urban Growth in Accra through a Critical Geography of Architecture" which advocates for using architecture as a platform for understanding change within the urban landscape. Her thesis will be published by the Brazilian Embassy in Ghana in June 2010. After Tufts, she will pursue her Masters at Symbiotic University of Western Australia, where she intends to research the possibilities that biotechnology may hold for sustainable African architecture.

Negotium: A Critical Geography of Architecture

Mae-ling will be presenting on her senior's honors thesis that explores urban growth through the biography of a house in the Jamestown where Accra, the capital city of Ghana, began. This project had its beginnings in her first Synaptic landscape project and developed as a result of internships and projects throughout her Synaptic career.

"Syns has been a negotiating platform for me at Tufts—it was simply an environment of sharing and absorbing, a rich exchange of ideas and enthusiasm. It was a community where my intellectual and personal growth went hand and in hand in a seamless way. Through coordinating and organizing various Synaptic events I have learnt that leadership is bound to a sense of respect and compassion for your peers, mentors and mentees. More importantly, I've experienced the glory of gaining treasure friends who challenge and inspire me."

MARGARET o'connor

Throughout her undergraduate career Margaret pursued the integration of her interests in global public health, health politics, comparative politics, the greater Middle East, and ethics. Struggling to distinguish between fleeting inspirations and deeper curiosities as a sophomore, she participated in a variety of endeavors, from research on female genital cutting, to internships related to policies of children's health, to Tufts' Ghana Gold Study Tour and Colloquium.

In the spring of her sophomore year, at the encouragement of a Synaptic peer, Margaret joined ALLIES (the Alliance Linking Leaders in Education and the Services), as part of the 2008 Joint Research Project. On this project she surveyed the effects of the Iraq War on Jordan's political reform process, in conjunction with students from the US Naval Academy and West Point. This project convinced Margaret of the need for understanding between civilian and military leaders in any effective foreign policy work. Becoming more involved as junior, she held an internship during the summer of 2009 at the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies at National Defense University in Washington, DC. Returning to ALLIES as co-chair her senior year, Margaret has been privileged to increased involvement and initiative for ALLIES among Tufts students, the growing capacity of existing ALLIES chapters at other schools, and the expansion of ALLIES chapters to new institutions. She is pursuing her Masters in Public Health at Tufts University.



Medical Ethics and Education in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates

In January 2010 Margaret conducted interviews with medical and health care professionals in Kuwait and the UAE during the Institute for Global Leadership's New Initiative for Middle East Peace (NIMEP) annual fact-finding mission. Kuwait and the UAE both boast healthcare system profiles comparable to those in the West. One of the main challenges that each country continues to face is a reliance on non-national healthcare providers. Margaret's research examines national emphasis on medical education and professional pipelines in light of this challenge.

"...The Synaptic Scholars program has been an important factor in shaping my experience at Tufts. It has provided the opportunities to explore and reflect on projects and paths with colleagues who have your best interests at heart and friends who are enthusiastically engaged in your intellectual development. These opportunities were especially valuable during moments of uncertainty or disappointment. Furthermore, the Synaptic community has enabled the kind of informed and energetic discussions that every idealistic undergrad imagines is commonplace, but so often is shunted by crazy schedules. Following these discussions, I often find myself spending an hour or two compulsively searching the Internet for obscure branches of neuroscience, gender studies, or the animal kingdom...."

TALYA peltzman

Talya first became interested in the field of immigrant health when, after her Freshman year, she worked as a translator and research assistant for the Institute for Health Research and Policy at the University of Illinois in Chicago. This project, aimed at improving diabetes prevention programs for Spanish Speaking immigrants on Chicago's South Side, encouraged Talya to continue exploring immigrant communities and the complex social and political structures that shape them.

After her sophomore year, Talya was awarded a grant from Tufts University to pursue a self-guided research on US immigration health policies. Through this opportunity, Talya developed a critical analysis of the US HIV Ban which she submitted to the International Centre for Migration and Health in Geneva, Switzerland, along with a proposal to continue this research at their center under Dr. Manuel Carballo, a former Chief Public Health Advisor for the United Nations. Talya's proposal was accepted and, during the spring of her junior year, she traveled to Switzerland, interviewing officials from the WHO and IOM to produce a topical report for the ICMH on comparative international immigration health policies.



Since then, Talya has held internships with the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's Primary Care Office as well as with the Harvard Catalyst Institute for Community Health. Talya is graduating this May with dual degree in Community Health and Sociology and will be in Indonesia on a Fulbright next year.

Perspectives on Immigration and Health: a Journey through National, Transnational, and Local Policy Research

Talya Peltzman's presentation will focus on the research and internships Talya has undertaken during her time as a Synaptic Scholar, which have touched on the interface of policy, health, and immigration, both nationally and internationally. In particular, Talya will focus on her production of a Senior Thesis on the topic of the impact of Massachusetts' healthcare reform on immigrant communities.

"My Synaptics experience has encouraged me to challenge my own intellectual interests with a sense of seriousness and vigor that I would not have without the support and structure of the program. Having a group of peers to discuss my ideas, challenges, and successes with has been an invaluable resource over my time at Tufts. At the same time, I know that I have grown from my peers' intellectual fervor and pursuits, which are an incredible and continual source of inspiration and fascination. As a member of the first elected class, I have enjoyed helping the program to grow and develop a structure rooted in both exploration and outcomes. It is a great pleasure to pass on my Synaptics experience to incoming classes, and to feel a part of a community that, I believe, will continue to define my intellectual and professional life for years to come."

DUNCAN pickard



Duncan has majors in History, Middle Eastern Studies, and American Studies, and his coursework has focused on transnational approaches to history and anthropology. His sophomore year, he began research for his thesis on the Jesuits and African slavery in colonial Peru. Writing a thesis over two years has given him time to consult with a dozen professors in Boston and London, finish a draft in time for extensive revisions, and research in Peru, the Dominican Republic, and Colombia. He successfully defended his thesis, which received high honors

Duncan has applied postcolonial studies also to the Arab world through the apertures of sociocultural anthropology, civil society, and international development. He studied abroad in Amman on a Boren Scholarship where he conducted research on USAID programs in rural Jordan. He was also an intern at the American Embassy in Damascus during summer 2009 where he worked with human rights activists and Iraqi refugees. Each of these experiences has provided data for senior projects including his thesis, a directed research paper on human rights reporting in Syria, and a high school curriculum on Arab Americans.

Duncan has honed his leadership skills and passion for public service at Tufts as a Tisch Scholar, working in Somerville on labor rights and housing. As president of the Tufts Community Union Senate, Duncan led the Senate to eliminate the cost of on-campus events and to sponsor more intellectual programming. He has received the Student Leader of the Year Award, a Senior Award from the alumni association, and a Presidential Award for Leadership & Public Service.

Duncan hopes to spend some time this summer at home on Martha's Vineyard. He will then work at the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, after which he will enter the Master of Public Policy class of 2012 at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government.

Between Scholastics and Service

I believe that learning only takes place where there are hooks on which to hang knowledge, and that scholarship must be dedicated to solving the world's most pressing problems. This is the mission of the Institute for Global Leadership that has guided me through Tufts, enabling me to take advantage of its richest resources.

"The Synaptics force me to clarify my thinking and their feedback has often challenged me to approach my data in different ways. I hope I have contributed to others' work in a similar way. Also, Sherman's indefatigable support of students like me has inspired generations of Tufts students. So when he told me that I was missing the common thread in my interests during my sophomore year presentation, I listened. Everything now only makes sense in retrospect. I am so grateful for the support of this community."

AUSTIN siadak

Austin hails from the beautiful city of Seattle and is a senior majoring in International Relations with a focus on International Conflict, Cooperation and Justice.

On campus Austin is involved in a myriad of groups that reflect his widespread interests. Along with Synaptic Scholars, he was member of 2007-2008 EPIIC Colloquium on Global Poverty and Inequality, is a core member of the Tufts Buddhist Sangha, is music director for the on-campus street percussion group B.E.A.T.S, was a trip leader for the 2009 Tufts Wilderness Orientation program, and is actively engaged with the Tufts Mountain Club. He has traveled to rural Honduras twice with other Tufts students to work on sustainable agriculture projects and spent his junior year studying abroad in Santiago, Chile and traveling all over South America. Most recently he was inducted in Tufts 2010 as a Phi Beta Kappa.



Austin is deeply interested in international politics, conflict issues, and in particular many of the current debates surrounding weak and failing states. He is passionate about the relationships between natural resources, conflict, and development, and has sought to develop a better understanding of how poor states rich in natural resources can avoid many of the traditional "traps" that have left them seemingly impervious to development. Another of his major interests surrounds the social, political, and economic differences between authoritarian and democratic states. In addition, the global food system and its social, economic and environmental effects have become of greater interest to Austin over the past two years. Austin's final EPIIC research paper on the global food crisis—in which he analyzed the crisis' complex causes and its effects on the poor—was published as the lead article in the Spring 2009 issue of *Discourse*. Austin plans to eventually pursue a Master's degree in State-Building and Conflict Resolution.

Cognitive Science and Morality

"Since becoming a Synaptic Scholar after my first year at Tufts, this program has given me a much needed opportunity to ponder and confront perplexing and fascinating issues that I would rarely get to address in my own academic studies. My biggest disappointment with my early experiences at Tufts was that, despite having the opportunity to take interesting courses and interact with fellow students in class, I was unable to find a close-knit group of friends who were interested in actively and rigorously pursuing intellectual and personal development outside of the classroom. Upon joining the program, however, I have been continuously thrilled to find myself immersed in a community that promotes intellectual exploration for the love of learning itself..."



I began my first semester as a Synaptic Scholar in the 2007-2008 EPIIC Colloquium on “Global Poverty and Inequality.” With four other EPIIC students, I began working with IGL INSPIRE Fellow Jose Maria Argueta, to study how Guatemala’s entrenched ruling oligarchy creates social inequality. I travelled to Guatemala in January and May 2008 for research, and our first findings paper was cited in a November 2009 publication by the US Millennium Challenge Account. The following spring, I led a research trip to the Philippines to complete a second case study, which was submitted to the MCA last November.

In April 2008, I attended Helsinki 2, a high-level private diplomacy meeting for Iraqi political representatives together with now-reconciled leadership of the South African ANC, ministers of the Bore apartheid government, and high ranking leadership of the IRA and provos from Northern Ireland. The project stemmed from the IGL’s “Iraq: Moving Forward” Project. I then interned with the Crisis Management Initiative, a private diplomacy organization spearheaded by Finnish President and Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Martti Ahtisaari. For ten weeks, I organized a seminar entitled “An African Perspective on Statebuilding” that brought African leaders together with European donors to improve African ownership in state building activities.

I am now a combined degree student at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, where I am earning my Masters of Arts in Law and Diplomacy. This summer, I will intern with the Asia Foundation in Sri Lanka, where I will assist with programming, monitoring, and evaluation on a local governance initiative.

From Marimbas to the Marcoses: Corruption and Governance in Transitional Societies

As a co-founder and former leader of the IGL’s Poverty and Power Research Initiative, my passion is in learning how elite state capture, inequality, and internal conflicts interact in fragile states. Over the last three years, my personal and intellectual journey as a Synaptic Scholar has taken me from Guatemala to Finland, South Africa, the Philippines, and soon Sri Lanka to learn how international institutions can be leveraged to reduce power disparities in countries emerging from prolonged conflict.

“Though I have completed a double major in International Relations and Peace and Justice Studies, these titles do not accurately capture what or how I have learned about myself and the global community during my time at Tufts. I am a student of development, peacebuilding, corruption, colonialism, human security, state capture, and intractable conflict. I have loved the opportunity to participate in a community of citizen learners who share my passion for interdisciplinary and socially conscious learning beyond the classroom. Synaptics has also been incredible in providing me with institutional support, funding assistance, and peer feedback that has helped my projects come to fruition.”



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