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**Howard J. Swearer Student Humanitarian
Award Nominees &**

Frank Newman Leadership Award Nominee

New York | **Campus Compact**

OCCASIONAL PAPERS

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The New York Campus Compact Occasional Papers are publications designed to advance an understanding of and appreciation for collegiate civic engagement in its many forms.

Occasional Papers will describe promising practices in service learning and civic engagement, and the role of civic engagement programs in fulfilling institutional missions and promoting student learning.

Manuscripts are invited that represent the viewpoints and experiences of the variety of individuals who have a stake in civic engagement - presidents, academic administrators, faculty, students, and community partners.

Publication guidelines and contact information can be obtained on the New York Campus Compact web site – www.nycc.cornell.edu.

Editor's Note: Each year, Campus Compact recognizes students for extraordinary service to their communities through the **Howard R. Swearer Student Humanitarian Award** and the **Frank Newman Leadership Award**. These prestigious national awards highlight public service commitments and individual leadership. This edition of the New York Campus Compact Occasional Papers features essays written by the four New York State students nominated for these awards in 2007.

Howard J. Swearer Student Humanitarian Award Nominee

*by Dana Roberts
Syracuse University*

▶ At Syracuse University, I have become involved in a broad range of groups and projects that focus on many area issues: mentoring as a solution to the low literacy rates in the city's school district, community-based mapping as a key component to connecting youth to programs, and dialogue circles to spark collaboration across generations. While my interests span a variety of issues, I've discovered that my own passion has always been for the two extremes of the population: youth and the elderly. My service commitments reflect this. I serve as president for the Association for Student-Elderly Connection (ASEC), a student organization committed to bridging the gap between SU students and the elderly in Syracuse through volunteering and intergenerational collaboration, and I also work as a leadership intern for the Mary Ann Shaw Center for Public and Community Service, where I've

worked with youth programs both directly and on a research level. Through these experiences I have learned the extent of the impact students like me can make in the community, which is a lesson I strive to share with my peers every day.

I became involved with ASEC my freshman year after realizing I missed the connections I'd formed with the elderly through my job in high school as a server at an assisted living facility. So I began volunteering with ASEC at the local Veterans Administration Medical Center every Sunday in the long-term care unit. As time passed, however, I felt that it was important to make a greater impact both on campus and off, so I ran successfully for president of ASEC last spring, determined to promote interaction between SU students and the elderly in the community and to educate other students about the various aspects of aging.

As president, I've achieved the goals I've set in a number of ways. Under my direction, ASEC's membership has nearly tripled through on-campus recruitment, rising to about 80 active volunteers. Twice a week, a group of 10-15 students serve patients at the VA. This year, we've tried to make our volunteering more meaningful for the veterans; we performed a holiday show in December, began a "Wall of Fame" of the veterans to showcase their individual stories, and expanded our presence to other floors of the hospital. In addition, I have worked to make ASEC's presence on campus more profound by enhancing student engagement and educating students about elderly issues. With the help of our executive board, I organized a panel discussion on the importance of staying involved for the aging population. The on-campus event featured a roundtable discussion involving Sociology Professor Janet Wilmoth, whose research focuses on aging; Moshe Marko, a physical therapist at State University of New York Upstate Medical Hospital; and Marva Cook, a recreation therapist from a local retirement community. The discussion was a remarkable success, drawing more than 50 people of diverse generations and sparking meaningful dialogue.

Other education efforts will continue at the end of March, when I will lead a group of students to the State Society on Aging (SSA) of New York's Student Conference on Aging, hosted by Ithaca College's Gerontology Institute. As the student representative for Syracuse's Gerontology Center Advisory Board, I will also participate in our University's Aging and Disability Conference in April. This conference will feature a variety of national and international scholars on aging and will be an excellent opportunity to share ASEC's experience and gain a greater understanding of aging in relation to disability.

Reaching out to a greater number of the elderly in Syracuse has also been a priority for me as president. Last semester, I enlisted ASEC to volunteer at The Nottingham, a local assisted living/independent living center. This new collaboration came through my experience in a Sociology of Aging course taught by Janet Wilmoth, which exposed me to hands-on service learning and public policy surrounding long-term care and Social Security. At The Nottingham, I assisted Professor Wilmoth with the implementation of intergenerational discussion circles, which allowed students from the class and residents of the Nottingham to come together and discuss critical issues facing the aging population. This semester, I continue to work with Professor Wilmoth to establish these discussions between Nottingham residents and members of ASEC, as well as interested members of the University community. I hope next year to extend these discussion circles to other long-term care facilities in the Syracuse area. Funding from the Swearer Foundation would help us

implement this goal, especially at those facilities that lack the financial resources to do so.

My concern for Syracuse's youth reflects the same passion that I have for the elderly. Youth are an incredibly vulnerable population in Syracuse, where more than one in three children are poor, and challenges such as hunger, school completion, delinquency, violence, and higher than average rates of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections (STI) are continually faced. I have been involved in direct programs for youth and behind-the-scenes analysis, both of which are crucial in evoking change for this population. Last summer, with the assistance of Syracuse's Robert B. Menschel Award for non-profit internships, I worked on one of the most important new initiatives in addressing youth issues, the Youth Resource Mapping Project. Led by Community Geographer Jonnell Allen, whose unique position (the first of any in the nation) is to oversee the use of geographic information systems (GIS) and spatial analyses to create maps for local nonprofits, this ongoing project aims to raise community awareness about activities and services available to young people, assist social service agencies in referring youth to appropriate programs and services, and investigate geographic access barriers that may hinder youth service utilization. My role over the summer was to assist in drafting the survey that was sent out to approximately 300 organizations that offer services to youth, conduct a literature review, and collaborate with influential community members on the implementation of the project.

In my current position as a leadership intern at the Mary Ann Shaw Center for Public and Community Service (CPCS), I have continued to work with the community geographer in collecting and analyzing survey data. This January, I helped present our survey results to more than 80 community members, which prompted discussion and generated collaboration amongst the attendees. Our work on the mapping project continues and will soon include focus group discussions with youth to gain their perspective and incorporate their ideas for change.

My responsibilities at CPCS also include coordinating the Hughes Mentoring Program, which is located at a nearby Syracuse city elementary school and allows a 4th-6th grader to pair up with an SU student for a few hours each week. My work with this program has allowed me to see the direct impact youth programs have, and has supplemented the analytical perspective I've gained from the mapping project. I have served as a mentor at Hughes since freshman year, and this past year took on the task of restructuring the program from a tutor to mentor-based model. I now supervise the twenty mentors that work at Hughes



and I am responsible for their recruitment and training. This semester will be the first that we bring the students to the campus for a day to experience college and to emphasize the importance of higher education.

My final responsibility at CPCS includes promoting the importance of community service and civic engagement to various student groups. In August, I presented to over 200 first-year law students on Syracuse demography and options for service, and throughout the year I have made similar presentations to first- and second-year students in the Renée Crown University Honors Program. It is a responsibility I take very seriously, for community service has been one of the most important experiences of my college career and I hope to impart this to other students and spark their interest in civic engagement.

My volunteering and work with the elderly and youth populations have impacted me on a profound level and are preparing me for my future after college. This summer, I have applied to intern for the National Academy of Social Insurance in Washington, DC. Working with experts from organizations like the AARP or the Alzheimer's Association, I will have the opportunity to gain research experience in long-term care policy. I hope to eventually utilize my degree in Communication Disorders and work as a speech pathologist in a hospital or long-term care setting with elderly patients whose language has been affected

by debilitating strokes or other age-related traumas. Gaining an understanding of the policies that affect the elderly and the care options they have will be invaluable to me as a health practitioner who sees the manifestations of such policies every day. This internship will also enhance my research and analytical skills, which will benefit my work with the mapping project as well as my honors thesis, which incorporates both my majors in Communication Disorders and Spanish and is a comprehensive analysis of the challenges bilingual speech pathologists face in therapy with children.

I am deeply committed to both the youth and elderly populations in Syracuse and recognize the fact that the critical issues surrounding these groups are not going to go away without efforts to effect change at the policy and service provision levels. I am reminded of this constantly: when I am pushing a veteran back to his room after playing Bingo; when I listen to a child read a story at Hughes; when I watch a group of community members debate the merits of a particular program at a meeting. While I know that I am only one person, I believe that I am a part of the efforts for change, and more importantly, that those around me must be too.

Howard J. Swearer Student Humanitarian Award Nominee

*by M. Carmen Hernandez
Cornell University*

▶ Since the fall of 2005, I have dedicated my time to guiding, promoting, and serving Friends of Farmworkers, Inc. (FOF) in my position as Finance Chair. Beginning in the fall of 2007, I have deepened my involvement by assuming the position of Project Coordinator. FOF is a student-run organization sponsored by the Cornell Public Service Center that provides area farm workers with consistent, onsite English as a Second Language (ESL) tutoring. We are a non-partisan, non-political group whose mission is to provide service-learning opportunities to students and educational tools to farm workers.

Within the last five years, Hispanic immigrants have grown to constitute a significant minority group employed by vineyards and dairy farms in Tompkins and surrounding counties. Our English tutoring service provides these underserved individuals

with an essential tool for improving their quality of life, developing self-advocacy, and supporting integration into the broader community through improved English language proficiency. Without our efforts, these populations would have severely restricted or no access to free ESL instruction allowing them to gain these crucial skills.

Student volunteers have assisted workers in preparing for citizenship, driving, and GED tests. Workers have learned English vocabulary and phrases essential to their job requirements that they now use in the work setting. Most importantly, over the course of this year, our tutees have demonstrated an increased comfort in practicing and using their English skills in everyday conversation.



Furthermore, through both tutoring and training sessions, our group has raised students' awareness of the conditions of migrant workers within our community. Students formerly unaware that Hispanic farm workers lived in the Ithaca area, and who had little or no background in immigration issues, are now learning more about the subject. Many have sought to deepen their knowledge and public service by completing related coursework and summer internships in the field. Additionally, volunteers with little or no previous interaction with poor Hispanic populations have quickly found common ground and developed unlikely friendships with their tutees. Friends of Farmworkers has therefore served as a forum for cross-cultural exchange, promoting interracial understanding and harmony in an atypical environment.

Since its creation two years ago, our organization has experienced impressive growth increasing our membership from 11 to 50 student volunteers and expanding our reach from three to eight farms within the Ithaca community. In my previous role as Finance Chair, I worked diligently to research and apply for funding necessary to support this growth and sustain the organization. I was responsible for securing a budget of about \$1,000 every semester to cover our total expenses. Our most crucial expense is gas reimbursement for student tutors who spend two hours commuting to farm sites where they provide ESL instruction on a weekly basis. Due to heightened gas prices and limited student income, a large number cannot afford this gas travel expense and would thus be prevented from tutoring without gas reimbursement. Since the organization's inception, I have successfully obtained the funds necessary to cover these expenses,

thereby allowing our volunteers to provide their invaluable community service.

Our second largest expense is purchasing tutoring materials. Our tremendous growth, as well as the diversity of the population whom we serve, has required us to purchase more resources geared towards different language levels and learning goals. In the past four semesters I, in collaboration with our six-member student executive board, have secured funding to purchase English-Spanish picture dictionaries, workbooks, tutor training manuals, dry erase boards, and notebooks in order to improve the quality of tutoring. These measures have not only allowed students to personalize curriculum to meet their tutees' needs, but have increased volunteers' satisfaction with their service experience.

In assuming the role of Project Coordinator in the fall semester, I intend to sustain, expand, and improve the services provided by Friends of Farmworkers. With the support of our student executive board, Cornell faculty advisor, Public Service Center advisor, and Community Partner, we are working on building an English as a Second Language tutoring library as well as hiring a professional ESL instructor to provide consistent training throughout the semester. As I take on this greater leadership, I am inspired by the past efforts of students, faculty, staff, and community members in addressing this community need, and will devote my best efforts to deepening our impact in the future.

Howard J. Swearer Student Humanitarian Award Nominee

*by Kate Otto
New York University*

▶ The sticky humidity of late afternoon in Ghana only further drained my energy as I approached the bright blue gates of the local AIDS clinic. Studying abroad in Accra, I was eager to begin volunteering at the West Africa AIDS Foundation (WAAF) and set off on my own to find it. My futile attempts to navigate the city, however, not yet knowing enough local language to explain my destination, only augmented my feelings of uselessness and isolation as an 'oburoni' or foreigner. Hours of lost driving had led me to closed doors and I plopped down onto the cement, tears welling behind my eyes.

Unexpectedly, Jesse, a middle-aged, small-framed and soft-spoken Ghanaian man, emerged from behind the gate. I

quickly explained my presence and desire to volunteer and he introduced himself as a patient. I learned within a few minutes enough about Jesse to feel ashamed for having been frustrated by slow transport and my own impatience. Upon disclosing his HIV status to his landlord and employer, Jesse had been kicked out of his home, fired, and was now unable to pay his children's school fees. Returning the next day I met Adwoa, a 5-year-old who had been abandoned by her mother and rejected by her village because of her HIV status and sickness. Holding her tiny frame, a malnourished balloon of a stomach protruding, and stroking her flaking, splotched skin, I could not imagine how intense a social stigma must be to cause the abandonment of this beautiful child, this vibrant human life.



Oftentimes in Ghana, the social stigma I observed grabbed my hand and led me back to high school, where I worked at an AIDS hospice cooking with, cleaning for and spending time with HIV-positive residents. Through my work at the hospice, in Ghana, and my present work with the HIV/AIDS non-governmental organization Keep a Child Alive (KCA), I have learned that the problem is not HIV, but social indifference and injustice.

In Ghana I created a program called Freedom for the Future as an HIV/AIDS education initiative. I drew on experiences working with young adults in orphanages in Tijuana, Mexico and Guatemala City, Guatemala, noting the incredible leadership potential of active teens to positively influence their peers. My immediate thought was to address stigma before it became an embedded bias, and so I designed the workshop curriculum and poster competition for Ghanaian high school students in an effort to empower generations of future leaders. I recruited and retained 40 American and Ghanaian student volunteers to staff the workshops and host two celebratory events for the participants and for sponsors. Together we brought the program to over 2,000 Ghanaian public school students and nearly 300 students participated in the Poster Competition. In between long days with students and patients, I deliberately enlisted the support of 11 local corporate partners to sponsor the competition for a total of \$10,000, which benefited the clinic's HIV education services.

Upon my return to New York, I sought funding for my KCA unpaid nonprofit work through my school's career center and secured a research grant through my college, both of which allowed me to travel back to Ghana for two weeks over winter break. I spent days interviewing young people of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and studying the development of the clinic's education services to evaluate sustainability, the effect of the program, and the best design for a peer education framework. The program and competition will run again this spring with two new member schools and I am continuing to explore the potential for institutional support through my school.

Although people not directly affected by AIDS may feel like 'oburonis' to the tragedy, I believe our response to AIDS is a reflection of our potential as global citizens. The 40 million death toll from a completely preventable and treatable disease, although oftentimes overwhelming, continues to motivate me in my work. Jesse is on track to, but does not have to, become one of the 40 million. Neither does Adwoa, who is being raised in a world where medical treatment exists and social justice has the potential to thrive. The difference between 40 million and 40,000,001 is me, is my peers, is the way we interact with and treat each other. I believe that service is not a burden but rather something we can incorporate into our daily lives so that it becomes so normal, we can individually do more, and together work miracles.

Frank Newman Leadership Award Nominee

by *Christina Muscatello*
Binghamton University

▶ “Anyone can memorize facts and figures. The real way to learn anything is to get out and experience it and let your curiosity lead you.” These words are spoken by the Man in the Yellow Hat in the movie *Curious George*. The Man makes this remark after his rigid lifestyle is put on trial by his new monkey, George. George teaches him to view academia with innocent eyes. His message is that it is better to be actively involved in life and to learn from experience, than to passively listen to a lecture about it.

From a very young age I have tried to follow this approach, and to find ways of going beyond traditional education to learn from exploration and experience. My youth was filled with creativity and encouragement. While I couldn't run to my mother for money, I could always run to her for interesting ideas to keep me occupied. After my father left when I was very young, my mother, my older sister and I moved into my grandparents'

house. My grandparents and mother worked as a unit—an imperfect but solid one—that provided my sister and me with all the nurturing and stimulating activities two young girls could ask for.

Through my family, I learned to see the many facets of an argument or a person. I am a firm believer that it is not fair to pass judgment before looking at every angle of an argument. The same applies to society. When I look at society, I see the bad that people are quick to point out, but I also see the good, and how that good can be magnified. I firmly believe that the magnification of good can start in an individual and domino into the rest of society.

As a result of this philosophy, I pay frequent visits to two elderly women, one for whom I work part-time and one who is a friend. The first woman has Alzheimer's disease. I work one



night a week at her house providing in-home care. However, my friendship with her extends outside of my work schedule; for example, I take her out to movies and plays, out to dinner, and over to my house for a family visit. The other woman, a retired school teacher, has been my neighbor for my entire life. My grandmother sent me to her for gardening advice when I was eleven and she was ninety-one, and we have been friends ever since. I have seen her through a case of gout, a bout with cancer, and now emphysema. Regardless of her health, however, her mind remains sharp. We continue to discuss our mutual interest in literature. She also seems interested in all I have to tell her, from the big stories of my life to my commentary on the daily minutia.

It is because of her and my grandfather, who taught me by example both how to be patient with a pupil and how to be a patient pupil, that my desire to learn has evolved into a desire to teach. My mother, who put on a Civil War reenactment with Barbie dolls the night before one of my history tests, taught me how to learn and have fun while doing it. When I graduate, I intend to apply for a Teach for America fellowship, which will provide me with an opportunity to spark the curiosity of urban students in New York City and encourage them to learn more about history. I plan to attend Columbia University's Teachers College and pursue an M.A. in secondary education.

My work with several service organizations has supplemented my personal relationships and has been a crucial influence in my life. These include the New York Public Interest Research Group (NYPIRG), Habitat for Humanity, and International Student Volunteers. This spring I am the liaison between campus groups and NYPIRG as well as the local coordinator of the Homeless Awareness Day and associated "Sleep Out." At functions like this, it is my job to actively recruit new members. Although it was not associated with NYPIRG, I interned for the Mayor of Binghamton last spring. In the Mayor's office, I learned about efforts that are underway to strengthen relations between the city and the University. I will continue my work in the community next year when I pursue a position on the board for the Off Campus Community.

I joined Habitat for Humanity during my sophomore year at Binghamton University and immediately became involved with fundraising and obtained my current position on the executive board. We are currently raising money for a family of eleven that immigrated to the United States from the Ukraine and was forced to move into two small apartments while their house is being renovated due to the recent flooding in Greater Binghamton. In addition to assisting this family, our campus chapter of Habitat has been organizing weekly flood clean-outs. Almost

every weekend we send car loads of students to offer relief to flood victims living in FEMA trailers. I have also been working to raise on-campus awareness for Habitat for Humanity.

Our campus chapter has also been instrumental in creating a bond between the community and the University. When I recruit student members, I know they will not only benefit from their service work, but that they will also gain a greater appreciation for Binghamton. At these "builds," we work closely with local residents and have opportunities to meet people with similar interests but different backgrounds. This is especially important to me because of my roots. My family has lived in Binghamton since they immigrated to the United States from Italy three generations ago. On a personal level, my experience with Habitat has humbled me. I never fully appreciated my upbringing and how fortunate I was until I compared myself to other Binghamton residents who are less fortunate. This has motivated me to help others, to become more involved in my city, and to encourage other Binghamton University students to participate.

One other project I am currently managing links Binghamton University, the City of Binghamton, Habitat for Humanity, and International Student Volunteers (another organization that is dear to me). Last summer I spent a month in Costa Rica with International Student Volunteers. For two weeks my group worked in a small community on an organic farm and community center called El Yue. My tasks ranged from clearing banana trees with a machete to teaching English to the local children. Our group formed close bonds with the families of these children, and encouraged their parents to join the classes.

This community's lack of resources was something I could not ignore. I became determined to use my knowledge of fundraising, my connection with Habitat for Humanity, and my community ties to fund and help build a library for them. In the winter of 2008 my goal is to send twenty people from Binghamton University and the Greater Binghamton community, along with the necessary \$7,000, to Costa Rica to spend two weeks building and furnishing a library. We currently have nearly \$1,000 raised, and have several more fundraisers planned to obtain the rest.

When I see an opportunity to make a positive impact, I feel compelled to act. To have a lasting effect on an individual or group encourages that person or group to reciprocate with others. I will always be motivated to make the world a better place, starting at home and expanding to wherever I find myself in the future. Helping others creates a powerful influence not just on those we help but on ourselves. As Abraham Lincoln once said, "When I do good, I feel good; when I do bad, I feel bad, and that is my religion."

