

Upstate Institute Student Fellows

Volunteer Income Tax Program (VITA)

Colgate University partners with Community Action Partnership and the Department of Social Services to offer the Volunteer Income Tax Program (VITA), which helps



low-income families complete their income tax returns. Junior Carlee Leraris is the student coordinator of the VITA program, which is in its third year. Leraris says that “the program so far has been a great success. We have been able to expand to a third

location right in the village of Hamilton. It has been gratifying to see the local impact of this project.”

Many of the families served by the program this year received access to the Earned Income Credit, which is a generous tax credit issued to low-income working households by the federal government and the state of New York. In the last decade, the EIC has become the centerpiece of this nation’s anti-poverty programs.

Department of Social Services: A History

To help celebrate Madison County’s bicentennial in 2006, the Department of Social Services needed a history of its programs, projects and accomplishments. Senior Kevin McAvey, working with Professor Jill Tiefenthaler, has been creating this history. The history sheds an interesting light on the progress of the social support network in the county as well as on the local view about the role of government in supporting low-income families.



McAvey says that studying the history of Madison County’s welfare system taught him “a great deal about how national movements such as the New Deal wound up trickling down to the rural county level. It is truly fascinating to see the development of Madison County’s system, from one that operated a county farm to a modern organization that places a more direct focus on the individuals in need.”

Abolitionist Hall of Fame

In the middle of the 19th century, the Madison County village of Peterboro was a central point of the abolitionist movement. Noted philanthropist and abolitionist Gerritt

Smith made his lifelong home there. His house served as a stop on the Underground Railroad, and Peterboro was also the location of the first meeting of the New York Anti-Slavery Society.

Sophomore Kia King is working with the Smithfield Community Association to aid in the development of the Abolitionist Hall of Fame. King says she has “gained a great deal of insight and knowledge about the history of abolition in upstate New York” by working with the group.



“I have newfound respect for upstate New York, specifically the local historians and activists that reside

Director’s Column

This issue profiles the 2004-2005 Upstate Student Fellows. From working on a feasibility study for a local art organization to organizing the 29 student volunteers that prepared tax returns for low-income families, these students have done impressive work on a wide range of community-based research projects. These experiences build the skills highlighted in Colgate’s strategic plan – research, writing, and public speaking - and also give the students an opportunity to see how valuable these skills are to their community. Each of these students has been supervised by an Upstate Fellow, the backbone of the Upstate Institute.

Celebrating the Upstate Student Fellows in this issue is very timely as the Institute is kicking off the first Upstate Field School. The Field School, modeled on the Utica Field School run by the COVE a few years ago, offers fellowships to Colgate students who are interested in working with a community based non-profit or governmental organization in Upstate New York. Over the summer, Upstate Fellows work 30 hours a week for their partner organization and spend one day a week on campus discussing civic engagement and regional issues. Similar to the Upstate Student Fellows, the summer students will have the opportunity to build important skills and make valuable contributions to their community.

Thanks to a generous seed gift from Sandra and Doug ‘50 Campbell, we are able to support the applications of 12 student/organization pairs this summer. I hope that the Field School will grow to include 15-20 such partnerships in the coming years.

Jill Tiefenthaler
Director, Upstate Institute
Professor of Economics

here. I believe that it is important as a Colgate student to understand the history of this area and I have grown to admire this region for its integrity and boldness in issues of racial and gender equality,” says King.

King has been developing a PowerPoint presentation about the project that will help bring it to life for potential funders and other participants. The project will honor historical figures who played a role in eradicating slavery as well as current leaders fighting social injustice and promoting human rights causes. The Hall of Fame will induct its first members in the fall of 2005.

BRiDGES Teen Institute Study

The BRiDGES: Madison County Council on Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Teen Institute is targeted at 16-18 year olds who are identified as leaders in their communities. The goal of the Institute is to develop skills of high school students to educate younger students about issues related to substance abuse and healthy choices. Institute participants receive four days of training in developing prevention and resistance skills. Graduates then make presentations to middle school students with the goals of increasing knowledge about issues related to



substance abuse, increasing the age of onset of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use, and preventing drug related infractions by middle school students.

Seniors Kristin Coomber, Meghan VanHorn and Allison Yelton worked with psychology

professor Doug Johnson to evaluate the program. They used data gathered from student surveys taken before and after participation in the Institute. The Upstate Fellows final report was presented to the BRiDGES Board of Directors, and recommendations made in the report will help shape the future of the program.

Van Horn states that “the project was beneficial to the community and it was interesting to analyze real world data that is pertinent to the future of Madison County. I love statistics and it was great to apply statistical techniques that I have learned over four years at Colgate to this project.”

Creating A Regional Arts Center

Working in conjunction with The Exhibition Alliance, senior Nancy Miller completed a feasibility study on the possibility of creating the Hamilton Regional Arts Center. The Center would be a new home for The Exhibition Alliance and would provide a wide range of state-of-the-art storage options for art collections from across the region and state. The Center would also have space for curation, teaching, a learning lab and exhibition space.

Miller’s feasibility study shows that not only is there a need for this type of storage in the region, but that there is growing interest in such a facility from institutions, artists and collectors. Development of such a center has the potential to create a hub of artistic work and exhibition in the area. Working with The Exhibition Alliance, Miller created a survey for regional galleries and museums that assesses the need for storage space and other services.



Miller says “the survey results will help us recognize that current art storage facilities are largely inadequate and it is of particular significance that work be done to rectify this situation in order to properly preserve collections of art for the continued benefit of our communities.”

Further development of the project and potential funding will be sought in the coming months.

Oneida Indian Nation Economic Development Study

Senior Chris Brown and Professor Jill Tiefenthaler recently completed the first in a series of studies about the economic impact of the Oneida Indian Nation Enterprises. Results of the study suggest that Oneida Indian Nation enterprises have generated more than 7,000 new jobs in Oneida, Onondaga, and Madison counties since 1992, the year in which development began on the Turning Stone Casino. The study found that, of 7,155 full-time positions created, approximately 97 percent of them were held by non-Nation employees.

Future segments of research will examine what effect the Nation’s operations might have on several other measures of the region’s well-being—including tax revenue, bankruptcies, crime, and social service costs—and the impact its vendor spending has on local output.

“With so many political, social, and economic issues surrounding the Oneida’s Turning Stone Casino, I never believed I would be able to produce a study that could help shape future debate,” said Brown. “After receiving several calls



concerning our initial employment study from political groups in Ohio, I am more amazed than ever at the significance of the research I have been able to conduct with the Upstate Institute, and grateful for the opportunities its close ties with surrounding businesses provides.”

Madison County Department of Health

Senior Sabah Rabbi has worked with the Madison

The Center for Outreach, Volunteerism and Education

When Barbara Moore, Director of Career Services, and I sat down to brainstorm areas for possible collaboration, we never quite envisioned what has come to be—a packed grants writing class with fifteen different community based projects in the works. Twenty-four Colgate students, two nearby residents, 10 community groups, and 6 grant writing specialists have been pooling their talents to find funding for a variety of initiatives, from establishing smoking cessation programs to the creation of the Abolition Hall of Fame in Peterboro.

The students have been coming together for the past two months to learn the ins and outs of the sometimes mysterious grant writing process. Peggy O’Shea, president of the Community Foundation of Oneida and Herkimer Counties, opened the weekly series with an overview of the philanthropy field and from that point, the students were sold. They have learned about researching foundations, compiling community data and statistics, forming solid partnerships with not-for-profit groups, creating a comprehensive budget plan and writing a polished proposal. By the end of the class, student teams will have completed grant proposals for each of the projects, with the hope that some of them will hit the mark and be accepted.

The class has been so successful that we anticipate offering it again next spring. Community groups who would like to participate in the class or partner with a student team are encouraged to contact the COVE.

*Marnie Terhune
Director, COVE*

County Department of Health to complete a state mandated Community Health Assessment. Rabbi says that “the document I worked on as an Upstate Institute fellow served as an important empirical source both for the Department of Health and the

Priorities Council to determine what areas need extra attention.”

The objective of the Community Health Assessment was to evaluate the health status and resources of Madison County in order to identify the priority areas for the next five years. The background data collected included

demographic and social indicators, environmental health indicators, behavioral indicators, maternal and child health indicators, infectious disease indicators, data on

access to health care, and an inventory of health resources in the community. Local data was compared to similar state and peer county indicators, as well as to data from a similar 1998 Madison County survey.

Rabbi also notes that “in addition to being a comprehensive document, the Community Health Assessment report enabled me to enhance my analytical and research skills...I also learned to eyeball any anomalies in data and survey results which will benefit me in any future research.”

Expansion of the Chenango Summer MusicFest

In its ninth season this summer, the Chenango Summer MusicFest presents chamber music concerts for strings, winds and piano by internationally acclaimed classic and popular musicians in the village of Hamilton. The festival includes the ever-popular Village Day that showcases Hamilton with music, food and events for all ages. This year, Daniel Prial will be working on adding a new element to the Festival. In conjunction with MusicFest Director Laura Klugherz, Prial will be augmenting the festival with events and exhibits on alternative and complementary health techniques.

Prial says, “My work on the Chenango Summer MusicFest through the Upstate Institute has been one of the most rewarding activities of my time at Colgate. Not only am I learning directly about the community I’m living in, but I’m exposing myself to a side of arts administration that is completely new to me.”



WIC Study

Jenn Vivyan is researching why families eligible for WIC in Madison and Herkimer counties do not participate in the program. WIC targets low-income, nutritionally at-risk pregnant and breastfeeding women, as well as infants and children up to their fifth birthday. Benefits provided through WIC include supplemental nutritious foods, nutrition education and counseling, and screening and referrals to other health, welfare and social service agencies.

“Hopefully, my project will give policy makers insight into how to make the program more effective to the entire target population,” says Vivyan. “The research has allowed me to learn more about this area and hopefully find a way to better help low-income families in Madison and Herkimer counties who need a supplement to their income.”



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