

# HOLLERAN CENTER ALUMNI IN ACTION

## HC Spring Newsletter 2015

PICA students learn to effectively address contemporary pressing issues and challenges. Students develop intellectual, personal and professional knowledge and skills through holistic teaching and learning experiences. Through collaborative activism and public policy development, Holleran scholars work to make transformative change. They deepen a trans-disciplinary understanding of local/global community issues. Some of the Holleran Center PICA scholars share their stories here.



Laura Simmons-Stern '14 with the Operations Manager, Edward Mwale.



Laura Simmons-Stern '14 with teachers from the 10 schools engaged in teacher training.

### By Laura Simmons-Stern '14

I have just returned from working in rural Zambia as a Program Implementation Intern for Impact Network, an NGO that uses solar panels to bring E-learning to community schools in order to improve the quality of education. In March I am moving to Mexico for the Peace Corps. I will be working as an Environmental Education and Community Outreach Volunteer under the Environmental Awareness and Resource Management to Address Climate Change program.

My goal is to let new experiences shape my goals for the future. Currently I am hoping to go to graduate school

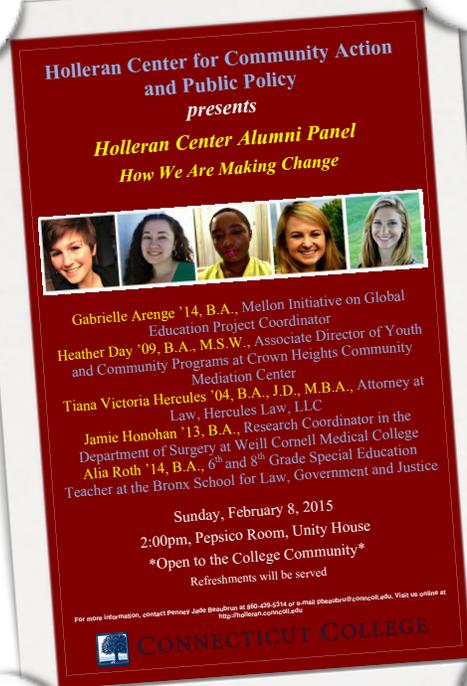
after the Peace Corps but know that this goal may very well change.

PICA played a major role in shaping where I am today. My PICA focus was based around sustainable practices in developing countries, specifically with NGOs dealing with climate change issues. By having the opportunity to concentrate my studies on this subject, my curiosity and drive have flourished.

PICA is a wonderfully unique experience. It is great to be a part of a cohort where everyone is passionate about usually very different subjects. We each can take advantage of that and learn all we can about them.

## Holleran Center Alumni Panel: Am I the Right Person for the Job?

By: Bridget Horan '17



### PICA CLASS OF 2017

Our new PICA scholars attended their PICA retreat on January 25th in downtown New London. There, they interacted with each other, learned facts on New London and met with the Holleran Center Team and the community partners that they will be working with.

It's a beautiful moment for everyone, professors and students alike, when a required event turns out to be meaningful and even life changing. That was the case of the 2015 Holleran Center Alumni Panel. I found myself incredibly inspired by all the five women panelists, but not simply because of the change they are making in the present, but because of the change they hope to make in the future. The panel featured recent graduates from '14 and '13, and some older graduates from '04 and '09. What was the common thread? They are not done trying to make a change. Alia Roth, 2014 graduate, is currently teaching special education to 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders in the Bronx. Though she loves her job and is absolutely passionate about making a difference in the lives of her students, she suffers doubts just like us undergrads. She wonders if she is the best person to be teaching her students, as a government and human development major fresh out of college, without teacher

certification. She reminded me that it is important to be self-reflective. I've always wanted to work at a clean water non-profit in Africa, but am I really the best person for that job? Who am I to enter a community that I am (so far) unfamiliar with and suggest a process of change? Is there somewhere I am more familiar with in my community where I could work to make a change? I'm considering changing my PICA project to the investigation of human trafficking in Connecticut. This is an issue that is present in the community I live in and is an issue I am much more educated about. I have been taking ANT 232: Anthropology of Security, Human Trafficking and Violence with Visiting Assistant Professor Joyce Bennett. I will continue to work on a research project with her this summer. These strong, resilient women reminded me that it is okay to be wrong, but you have to learn and keep trying. There is always a change to be made in the future.

## ERIC WILLIAMSON '02 SHARES HIS POST-COLLEGE EXPERIENCES



I am a nationally recognized keynote speaker and soft skills trainer, and life coach who works with professionals, students, and entrepreneurs. I established Tailored Training Solutions, LLC in January 2014. My business provides

keynote speeches and leadership development training such as Emotional Intelligence. The training I provide helps people manage their emotions in a professional and healthy manner and keeps them poised for professional success. I am a member of Toastmasters International, a public speaking and leadership organization. I recently advanced in the World Champion of Public Speaking competition and am gearing up for the next round. In November 2014, I was recognized in The Avenue News for helping young entrepreneurs achieve public speaking skills so they can participate in a "Shark Tank" style competition.

I am currently working on a book and my goal is to get it published soon. My book helps people succeed in today's work environment. I discuss effective and ineffective leadership tools employed in the work environment and how to leverage these tools based on personal experience and various leaders I have interviewed.

I will continue motivating people by delivering motivational and keynote speeches, and helping to improve other's public speaking skills, Emotional Intelligence, and other soft skills training needed to succeed in today's professional environment.

PICA shaped my current work and world view immensely. It has helped me recognize the

importance of investing in the future of inner city youth. During my PICA summer internship, I had the opportunity to work with public defenders at a local courthouse in New Haven, CT. I witnessed the challenges facing inner city youth and their families, and how mistakes can prove costly when you don't have a good support system. My PICA experience was the catalyst that helped me recognize my passion to help others improve. My success as a public speaker has helped me realize how valuable communication is for youth. I enjoy helping people improve their communication skills, public speaking skills, and Emotional Intelligence. The training I provide helps people have successful professional careers and working relationships with their colleagues.

I gained a deeper appreciation of diversity and how integral it is to your professional development and career success. During my professional career, I have leveraged diversity when working in teams, collaborating on assignments, and receiving feedback. The program provides the professional and diverse experience that you can build on throughout life. Current PICA students should appreciate the opportunity to be a PICA scholar. It is a wonderful, humbling, enlightening, and life changing experience that builds leaders and keeps you poised to face future challenges.



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## THOUGHTS FROM THE HOLLERAN CENTER PICA SCHOLARS ABOUT THE CERTIFICATE PROGRAM

BY: SOPHIE SHARPS '16



As a junior sociology major and government minor, my interests lie at the intersection of policies implemented by various levels of government and the social implications of these policies on the lives of different communities, groups and individuals. As I have learned through many of my courses as well as what I saw in my own Brooklyn neighborhood growing up, public policies too often reflect the priorities of a select few while excluding the voices that need these policies the most. My PICA area of interest is public education and school finance, specifically to understand how the use of local property taxes as the main source of public school funding in the United States produces immense disparities before children even enter the classroom.

I am currently enrolled in the Junior Community Learning Seminar, in which I am learning practical future skills such as grant writing and press releases. This Seminar

encourages constant discussion and critical thinking among a small group of passionate individuals learning to be agents of change. We push each other to analyze, understand, and most importantly to question everything. For my community placement this semester, I am working with Professor John Nugent, the Institutional Researcher at the College. I have worked on numerous College data projects that have helped me to understand how numbers can come together to form a meaningful and persuasive story. Additionally, on campus I am a member of the Women's Rowing Team, an assistant at the Office of Student Life, and have been very involved in Relay for Life as the Co-Chair last year.

While I have no clear roadmap for my future, I intend to carry the lessons PICA has taught me into the work that I will hopefully do to implement and inform education and social policy. Last semester during my time abroad in Valparaíso, Chile, I was able to experience and study the ways in which policies implemented during the country's recent dictatorship have cast a long shadow on current policies and have permeated all facets of Chilean life. Specifically, during a month-long independent project, I conducted research to understand the consequences of the profit-based market approach to education on various stakeholders in education—teachers, school owners, and students themselves. PICA continues to challenge me to use an equally critical lens to examine the reasons domestic policies look the way they do, and how these decisions shape the lives of every American community and individual. While public policies have the power to ensure equity and improve quality of life, community action builds the groundwork to address social injustices and ultimately to create meaningful positive social change.

By: Eilis Klein '17



Currently, I am in the PICA Gateway Course, participating in a community project at the Dual Language And Arts Magnet Middle School in Waterford, CT, and hopefully spending more time at the Connecticut College Children's Program as a volunteer. When I think about my future, I hope to work with people face to face everyday.

My current thought is that I would love to be part of a support system for the emotional and social development of children and families. I think one possibility is to work in schools, but I am still exploring other sites and paths to do the sort of work I want to do. To me, the purpose of community action is to create alternatives to systems that don't work. I am learning about forms of oppression and resulting deep suffering. Community action can be a powerful way to channel the initial "what can I do to help" feeling. It is an intentional, productive way to right wrongs. PICA has already introduced me to a more intellectual, outside the box way of thinking about many topics that are thrown around in political discourse or church community service groups without much critical thought or context. PICA is fostering my abilities to be intentional with all I do in the future. I will be more informed about the causes, options for change, and effects of a lot of the social problems that we, as a society, must address. My worldview is being shaped by my PICA education because I am learning about connections. I am seeing how social problems are my personal problems as well. Nothing going on in the world around me is too far removed that I don't have a stake in it. My expectation for PICA is that it will provide me experiences for bringing together all that I am learning in my other classes and helping me integrate that knowledge. I will be better prepared to connect with what truly matters and is bigger than just me or academia.

## CONGRATULATIONS!

### THE HOLLERAN CENTER FOR COMMUNITY ACTION AND PUBLIC POLICY

would like to congratulate

#### **Sunil Bhatia,**

Professor of Human Development and former Holleran Center Director on receiving the American Psychological Association's 2015 International Humanitarian Award

#### **Molly Hayward '10,**

on being named the Entrepreneur of the Year Under 40 by the National Association of Women Business Owners

## Calendar

### **Saturday, April 11**

Holleran Center PICA Class of 2015 Conference and Banquet

### **Friday, April 17**

Senior Citizens' Prom  
New London Senior Center

### **Tuesday, April 21**

Dual Language And Arts Magnet Middle School Field Trip

### **Wednesday, April 22**

Four Centers Certificate Program Project

### **Sunday, April 26**

8th Annual Walk to End Homelessness and Health Fair  
New London Homeless Hospitality Shelter

### **Saturday, May 16**

Holleran Center PICA Certificate Ceremony

### **Saturday, June 13**

Holleran Center Boston Networking Event



# CONNECTICUT COLLEGE

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