the



GRO Forum

Environmental Protection Agency Greater Research Opportunities Undergraduate Student Fellowships

issue 2, 2010

where are they now? Catching up with GRO Alumni

Cynthia Williams

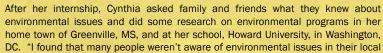
When 2007 GRO Fellow Cynthia Williams traveled to EPA Region 9 Headquarters in San Francisco, CA, for her internship, she expected to spend 8 hours a day in the office working on the Toxic Release Inventory (TRI) Program. TRI ensures that the public has access to accurate data on toxic chemicals made, used, and released

in their neighborhoods. Cynthia didn't expect that she would get to collect fish samples for mercury testing and assist in a drinking water inspection of chemical levels and regulations in a water tank and wells.

On the drinking water inspection trip to Arvin, CA, Cynthia attended a "town hall" meeting about water quality. During the question and answer session, Cynthia saw that residents weren't asking about scientific methods, data analysis, or molecular structure. "The community wanted to know that their families were safe and that the EPA and local water facility were taking the necessary steps to ensure their safety," she said. "This made me step back and realize that when I'm in the laboratory with my sample and the four walls, what I'm doing has a bigger significance than I could even imagine."

"I absolutely loved my internship with Region 9 in San Francisco," Cynthia said. "I was a part of so many other projects and programs along with my original project." She credits her EPA hosts, Nancy Levin and Russell Frazer, with ensuring that she was warmly welcomed and presented with many interesting opportunities in the office, field, and lab. Cynthia successfully completed analyses of TRI data and made recommendations to the TRI team during her internship

Her internship work with TRI and her interactions with the community influenced Cynthia's interest in increasing environmental awareness. "If you look on the news or Internet, you see environmentalists, government officials, and scientists all covering major issues, such as climate change, air pollution, and waste," she said. "However, there is little about awareness."



area," she said. "They were also not aware that changing a single lifestyle habit can make a huge difference, and that they have access to EPA, State, and local resources."

Finding that her own friends and family didn't have much information, Cynthia said, "made me wonder who else isn't aware of environmental issues." Subsequently, Cynthia coordinated an awareness meeting between a Region 9 Superfund specialist and her sorority, Phi Sigma Rho National Engineering Sorority. She also wrote to the mayor of Greenville about implementing recycling programs and expressing concerns about water quality.

Cynthia graduated from Howard in 2009 with a BS in chemistry. Howard, a Historically Black College and University, was founded shortly after the end of the Civil War. It is named for one of its founders, General Oliver O. Howard, a Civil War

hero and commissioner of the Freedman's Bureau. Cynthia maintained her focus on the human side of science while deciding on graduate school. One of her criteria for selecting a research direction was to be able to work on a project that focused on solving or improving an issue in society. As Cynthia put it, "What fuels me to continue research is knowing that I have the potential to help, protect, or better people."

Now, in her second year of PhD studies at the University of California-Davis, Cynthia is still working to raise environmental awareness, now with her chemistry students. "During lab, I teach them that pouring chemicals down the sink or being wasteful with materials negatively affects the environment," she said.

Cynthia credits many people and experiences for getting her to where she is today. "If I had to list in order," she said, "it would be God, confidence in myself, support of my family, academic and professional networks, good and bad experiences, and positive friends."



GRO Fellow awarded EPA STAR Graduate Fellowship

Jonathan McKinney

The Fellowship provides support to Jon as he pursues a Master's degree in chemical engineering at the Missouri University of Science and Technology (Missouri S&T),

Jon has already earned a Bachelor's degree in environmental engineering, and plans to pursue a doctorate in the same field. He explains the field like this, "A major the needs of people, while at the same time being environmentally friendly." He sees the Master's as a way to strengthen the theoretical underpinnings of his work: "I feel which involves designing chemical



A major portion of environmental engineering is using a process design approach to meet the needs of people, while at the same time being environmentally friendly.

to conduct interesting and relevant research, being a GRO Fellow was a learning experience. First of all, he said, "A Fellowship is actually of hard," he said. "I'm extremely picky about my work. I had to learn to let small difference go." During his GRO summer internship at EPA's Western Ecology Division, Corvallis social and regulatory priorities. "In my opinion, the EPA is doing its part to answer important environmental questions with enough detail to support a decision about regulation, but not

Introducing the 2010-2012 GRO Fellows

Be	njar	nin .	Auc	h

St. Olaf College

Allison Baker

Northern Arizona University

Cailie Carlile

Missouri University of Science and Technology

Janique Cheesman Syracuse University

Stephen Cotter

Clemson University

Kelsii Dana

Western Oregon University

Ethan Degner

Gustavus Adolphus College

Frin Delman

Union College-NY

Ciarra Greene Arizona University

Alexander Guzzetta

California State University - Fresno

Melissa Haber

Lafayette College

Jessica Helgesen

University of Wisconsin -Milwaukee

Melinda Hopper

Virginia Wesleyan College

Rachel King

Scripps College

Rachel Lamb

Wheaton College

Thomas Langer

University of St. Thomas

Sarah Larsen

Florida Gulf Coast University

Phoebe Lewis

Langston University

Jillianne Matus

Southern Methodist University

Allison McAtee

University of Arkansas at Fayetteville

Jesyka Melendez

University of Puerto Rico at Cayey

Brett Murdoch

University of Arkansas at Fayetteville

Justin Paul

Juniata College

Brian Peacock

Lafayette College

Amy Prescott

Middlebury College

Robert Revnolds

Loyola Marymount University

Starlyn Robinson

NC A&T State University

Deandra Smith

Spelman College

Corina Solis

Saint Edward's University

Jessica Taylor

James Madison University

Michael Thompson

Lafayette College

Emily Thorpe

Salisbury University

Jonne Woodard Salisbury University

Chelsea Woodworth Clemson University

Fellows' reflections – summer 2010 GRO internships



pleasure to meet and work with at the Mid-Continent Ecology Division in Duluth, has made me who I am at the end of a short 12 weeks

Elizabeth Medlock

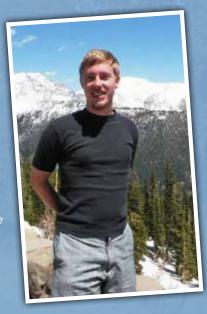
and knowledge I have over the three months interning here in the Region 2 Lab, I feel I have

Nikita Peperni



expected. I had worked in very structured and rigid office settings before. I had expected to find a similar situation in Denver but I was collaboration and synergy are strongly encouraged.

John Maravich





I really enjoyed being part of a team where I was depended on. I was trusted to be in charge of instrumentation and data know anything. It has helped my sense of responsibility and shown me what it is like to work in the real world.







The atmosphere of the EPA lab was always welcoming, which allowed an easy transition. The experience was invaluable because I developed contacts, increased my laboratory skills, and strengthened my career choice.

> **Matt Tancos Ball State University**

It was easy to become comfortable interacting and getting to know the people I worked with at the Atlantic Ecology Division, whether during a lunch break or while working on a project together. I also enjoyed getting to hear about the wide variety of projects being done among the different branches. It was a very rewarding place to learn, not to mention a great place to live for the summer.

Ellen Perkins

Wheaton College

Being at EPA this summer has entrenched me yet more deeply in my environmentalist views, and in believing that what EPA does is vitally important. I think that many people at EPA are working very hard for that mission.

Amanda Hayes

Calvin College



Environmental Protection Agency

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Fellows' reflections - summer 2010 GRO internships ... continued



I have learned to not underestimate myself and more fully appreciate the significance of my accomplishments.

Jarymar Arana St. Edward's University

I came to Boston with a vague understanding of how the federal government operated. My internship experience helped me to develop a greater understanding and respect for the EPA and its mission. The EPA tackles large national issues with limited resources and works efficiently to improve environmental issues across the United States.

Jessica Pulliam

Eastern Kentucky University

I have never been exposed to so many scientists working on environmental issues. Everyone at the EPA is environmentally conscious, which gave me a sense of belonging.



Angel Casanova University of Puerto Rico at Humacao



I have very much enjoyed learning how EPA employees fuse together science, technology, and policy to help preserve our Nation's most precious natural resources and hope to emulate their work ethic and prowess throughout my own future career endeavors.

Kristin Waller Syracuse University

The internship itself is an incredible opportunity that I don't think I could have had through other programs. I was able to do meaningful work that actually helped with ongoing projects; this is far superior to many internships that mainly involve making copies.

Kelsey Boyd

Lafayette College