

# the GRO Forum

Environmental Protection Agency Greater Research Opportunities Undergraduate Student Fellowships



## Where are they now? Catching up with GRO Alumni



### Austin Kana

**M**oving to Washington, DC, is a natural choice for someone who wants to work at the heart of energy policy, like GRO alumnus Austin Kana. "I've been immersed in local energy policy initiatives from my GRO internship and independent studies at school," Austin said. "I wanted to dive into Federal policy issues and see the difference between the different levels of government."

Austin moved to Washington after graduating from Hobart College in 2009 with undergraduate degrees in environmental studies and public policy. Hobart is a small liberal arts school in the Finger Lakes region of New York State. In partnership with William Smith College, Hobart is committed to "going green" and to fostering a culture of sustainability.

After a short internship on clean energy issues with McBee Strategic Consulting, Austin was hired by New West Technologies, LLC, a Department of Energy (DOE) contractor. Austin now supports DOE's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy.

"We work to move clean energy technologies out of national labs and universities and bring them into the market," he explained.

Austin counts his GRO internship at EPA Region 1 HQ in Boston, MA, among the experiences contributing to his ongoing interest in energy issues. He supported the New England Community Energy Challenge, working with eight New England towns and communities to help local officials "benchmark" the energy usage of municipal buildings as a baseline for improving energy efficiency.

"The internship helped me see firsthand the intersection of energy science and policy at the local level," Austin said. He learned that perseverance and patience – recognizing that changes won't happen right away – are key to making important advances in sustainability

and clean energy. "Many towns and communities are struggling financially, and it's very challenging to convince them that, despite some upfront costs, an investment in environmental policy is necessary to long term sustainability," Austin noted.

Austin's travel around New England played a big part in his internship's success. "Being able to visit the towns and meet people helped me make personal connections," Austin recalled. "Some people seemed worried when I'd say on the phone that I was working with EPA, but meeting with them face-to-face really helped our work go much more smoothly." He liked the travel opportunities for another reason. As he put it, "It's hard to turn down a work trip to Martha's Vineyard during the week!"

**I'm contributing to efforts to move clean energy technologies out of national labs and universities and bring them into the market.**

- Austin Kana



As for now, Austin is having a great time being in the heart of things in DC. "I know I'll look back and remember working on DOE projects funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act," Austin said. "Being part of something this historic is one of the highlights of my time here." He's also learning more about other cutting-edge energy issues, like the "smart grid" approach to revitalizing the electric infrastructure in the United States. As Austin sees it, "Renewable energy and energy efficient technologies will only have a limited impact until we're able to implement a grid that's designed for these technologies."



# Love GROs for two alumni

How many of us give a second thought to being placed in alphabetical order for some reason? When the GRO Fellowship review panel met in Spring 2003 to review applications for the next group of GRO Fellows, new panel members and GRO alumni Sherita Bennett and Tahir Charles were given adjacent seats. They didn't guess at the time the lasting effect alphabetical order would have.

Sherita and Tahir remained "neighbors" at panel meetings, and quickly came to enjoy their yearly chance to visit while participating in a rewarding service to the GRO program. "We love being able to give back," Sherita said. "Someone gave us the opportunity, and it feels good to be able to give the same opportunity to worthy students." Sherita, a Registered Nurse in Greenville, SC, and Tahir, the owner of Allen Medical Services, Inc., in Katy, TX, soon became friends, and began to stay in touch throughout the year.

As time passed, Tahir and Sherita found that their friendship was turning more romantic. They started dating about 2 years ago. "We've racked up quite a few frequent flier miles, since we typically see each other at least once or twice a month," Tahir said. You'd think that would be enough of airports, but last November, Tahir proposed to Sherita at the Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta, GA! "Needless to say, he did **not** make his flight that evening," Sherita said. "Instead, we drove down to South Carolina and ecstatically told my family the wonderful news."

Sherita and Tahir are planning their wedding for this summer in Taylors, SC. They look forward to building a family and home together in Houston, TX, where they plan to use their combined talents to create a successful business that will be the pride of future generations of the Charles family.



## GRO Fellow invited to national conference

Congratulations to current GRO Fellow, Ciarra Greene, who has been invited to make a presentation at the annual meeting of the Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE) this June. SAIGE's "Youth Track" works to encourage Native American youth to realize their potential to become leaders, continue their education, and seek a career in civil service. Ciarra, a member of the Nez Perce Tribe, is interested in the interface between science and Native American culture, and in ways to reach out to Native students and communities.

Ciarra plans to present to SAIGE information on her GRO Fellowship research on rhamnolipid, a substance with possible application to heavy metal bioremediation. She also plans to talk about her experiences as a technical intern at the Department of Energy's Hanford Site, where she worked on a project to develop K-12 lesson plans and activities combining traditional Native American and Western knowledge for teachers in the Pacific Northwest.

A chemistry major at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, AZ, Ciarra is going to have a very busy summer! Her GRO internship is across the country in Edison, NJ. Ciarra will be working with the Helicopter Monitoring Program in EPA Region 2's Division of Environmental Science and Assessment, Edison, NJ, where she'll make observations of floating debris, collect water samples, and conduct chemical and biological analyses.





# Summer 2011 GRO Internship Projects

**Alex Guzzetta**

Genomic Endpoints for Environmental Effects of Nanoparticles  
Narragansett, RI

**Ali McAtee**

Ecological Effects of Biofuel Crops  
Corvallis, OR

**Allison Baker**

Carbon Sequestration in Forests and Ecosystem Services  
Corvallis, OR

**Amy Prescott**

Pharmaceuticals and Personal Care Product Support  
Denver, CO

**Benjamin Auch**

Microbiological Treatment of Drinking Water for Pesticide, Nitrate and Ammonia Removal  
Cincinnati, OH

**Brian Peacock**

Microbiological Treatment of Drinking Water for Pesticide, Nitrate and Ammonia Removal  
Cincinnati, OH

**Cailie Carlile**

Global Climate Change and Its Effects on Terrestrial Ecosystems  
Corvallis, OR

**Chelsea Woodworth**

Dungeness Crab Production as a Final Ecosystem Service of Pacific NW Estuaries  
Newport, OR

**Ciarra Greene**

Helicopter Monitoring Program  
Edison, NJ

**Corina Solis**

Community Energy Challenge - Helping Towns Reduce Energy Use  
Boston, MA

**Deandra Smith**

Children's Environmental Health  
San Francisco, CA

**Emily Thorpe**

Global Climate Change Effects on Coastal Wetlands  
Narragansett, RI

**Erin Delman**

Baseline Water Quality Study in Marcellus Shale Drilling Area  
New York, NY

**Ethan Degner**

Spatially Explicit Population Model for *Cyprinodon variegatus* in Estuarine Systems  
Gulf Breeze, FL

**Janique Cheesman**

Green Building and/or Integrated Design Analysis  
Denver, CO

**Jess Helgesen**

Evaluating Planning and Assessment Tools to Apply to Wetland Mitigation Site Selection  
Portland, OR

**Jessica Taylor**

Green Chemistry  
Washington, DC

**Jesyka Melendez**

Responses of Marine Crustacean Populations to Human Stressors  
Narragansett, RI

**Jonne Woodard**

Integrated Toxicological Approaches for Assessing the Ecological Risks of Pharmaceuticals  
Duluth, MN

**Justin Paul**

Analysis of Rare Earth Minerals Deposits and Mining  
Denver, CO

**Kelsii Dana**

Mixed Ownership Mine Site Support  
Denver, CO

**Melinda Hopper**

National Wetland Condition Assessment and National Aquatic Resources Survey  
N. Chelmsford, MA

**Melissa Haber**

The Role of Microbial Enzyme Activity in Peatland C, N, and P Dynamics  
Duluth, MN

**Michael Thompson**

Global Climate Change Effects on Coastal Wetlands  
Narragansett, RI

**Phoebe Lewis**

qPCR Capability Development  
Houston, TX

**Rachel King**

Nutrient Removal by Wetlands in Pacific Northwest Estuaries  
Newport, OR

**Rachel Lamb**

Climate Change Best Practices in Region 10  
Seattle, WA

**Robert Reynolds**

Effects of Environmental Regulation on Economic Performance of US Manufacturing Sector  
Washington, DC

**Sarah Larsen**

Region 4 "Reduce Your Environmental Footprint" Campaign  
Atlanta, GA

**Starlyn Robinson**

Evaluation of the Jacksonville Environmental Justice Showcase Community Project  
Atlanta, GA

**Tom Langer**

Carbon Sequestration in Forests and Ecosystem Services  
Corvallis, OR

**Tradd Cotter**

Assessing Chemical Exposure and Toxicity by NMR-based Metabolomics  
Athens, GA

**Ty Murdoch**

National Wetland Condition Assessment and National Aquatic Resources Survey  
N. Chelmsford, MA

## Learn more about EPA's undergraduate and graduate grant programs

Are you or do you know a student interested in the environment? Find out more about EPA's Science to Achieve Results (STAR) Graduate Research Fellowships and Greater Research Opportunities (GRO) Undergraduate Research Fellowships at our website.

**[www.epa.gov/ncer/fellow](http://www.epa.gov/ncer/fellow)**





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## Making the most of your internship

How do you make an internship memorable? Here's some advice from last year's GRO Fellows on how they did it.

"Say yes! When you're offered a chance to work on another project, to receive additional training, or to meet other interns, take it."

"Keep in mind how fast the summer goes by. While it may seem like a long time at the beginning, the internship flies by. Make sure you get to experience everything you want to experience!"

"Be energetic, be interested, and be personable."

**Go outside of your comfort  
zone and do things you  
haven't ever done before.**

"Take the initiative and get to know as many people as possible: not just their job title but why they're in the field they're in and even where they're from and where they went to school."

"Have some fun! Ask your coworkers about the area and events. There are always places to go and things to do; someone who's familiar with the area can give you the best pointers."

