



Developing LEADERS:

A Lifetime Investment for CALS, New York State *By Sarah Thompson*

At an Ivy League school like Cornell, leadership is the rule rather than the exception. But what is leadership? Is it one set of skills on a resume, skills with which some people are born, while others are destined to follow? Inside the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, faculty and staff believe great leaders are made, not born, and that leadership skills cross disciplines. This belief fuels the diversity of classroom training, internship, professional development and outreach opportunities CALS offers to help develop current and future leaders who can impact communities and lives.

In the classroom, alumni speakers, international study abroad programs and class projects are helping undergraduates get more exposure to the skills they need to lead and succeed after graduation.

“Almost every student at Cornell has leadership experience of some kind,” said Deborah Streeter, the Bruce F. Failing, Sr., Professor of Personal Enterprise in the Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management.

This means that many students need guidance to refine their leadership focus, and that often starts in business classes, which any CALS student can take as part of the new university-wide business minor or the Dyson Business Minor for Life Sciences. Regardless of major, these classes help prepare students for business leadership opportunities by giving them basic knowledge in management, marketing, finance and accounting, Streeter said.

Other departments have also recognized the need to foster leadership in the laboratory as well as the office. Freshman food science majors can learn career skills from Professor Bob Gravani M.S. '69, Ph.D. '75, while Department of Horticulture chair Marvin Pritts teaches graduate students personal and professional management skills in his course Leadership Development for Life Scientists (ALS 5100).

Laurie Gillespie, associate director of career and academic support in CALS Student Services, said it's equally important for students to develop their “soft skills”: communication, self-management, teamwork, decisionmaking, and analysis of information from diverse sources.

“These skills are in high demand by employers. While many agree that technical skills certainly help get you an interview, these soft skills may get you the job — and help you keep it,” Gillespie said.

This is where class projects, study abroad and alumni speakers can have the greatest impact. From food science to animal science, CALS faculty members are increasingly integrating alumni into their courses to provide context for case studies and

career insights. Gillespie and her team facilitate these connections, then help students plan how to integrate their academic and applied experiences into a career.

KNOW THYSELF

The leadership journeys of alumni speakers in the Entrepreneurship@Dyson one-credit entrepreneurship course can also help students in all CALS majors gain a deeper self-awareness and understanding that is critical in the cultivation of successful leaders, Streeter said.

The Dyson School's innovative Business Opportunities in Leadership and Diversity (BOLD) program takes self-awareness to a new level. It seeks to transform its undergraduate participants into ethical leaders who thrive in inclusive environments, by honing their communication skills, emotional intelligence and service learning experiences. One of the first tasks they undertake is a “strengths finder” assessment.

“Everyone has these strengths. We work on how to weave them into finding suitable professions, or using them in interviews,” said Cindy van Es, senior lecturer at the Dyson School and co-director of the BOLD program. “You have to understand yourself before understanding others; lead yourself, then lead others.”

Diversity is a central tenet of the program. BOLD hosts several affinity groups — Men of Color; Asian; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) — and its speakers come from a range of personal and professional backgrounds. Its new inclusive business certificate curriculum includes cross-cultural communications.

“Inclusion is a workforce challenge. You have to be able to work with other people, to maximize their strengths,” van Es said. “All kinds of studies show that diverse work teams produce more than other less diverse teams. In the business world, it's a bottom-line issue. At the university level, more diversity on campus increases all learning for students.”



Home and Away: Students learn to network at a 2011 Business Opportunities in Leadership and Diversity (BOLD) Connections reception (left), while members of the LEAD Class 12 travel to a private beef ranch near Madrid, Spain, as part of an international study trip.

PERSONAL GROWTH AND PUBLIC IMPACT ON THE JOB

In Debra Perosio's Marketing Plan Development course, student teams work together over a semester to develop marketing plans for organizations in the community.

"It's one of the few classes where a team project runs the entire semester. Students really learn to work in situations where resources are constrained. They learn that not all concepts work in real situations," Perosio '79, MPS '92, Ph.D. '95, said. "It's critically important for students to have applied knowledge and experience."

Summer internships and shorter externships offer many CALS students an in-depth opportunity to apply their coursework in the real world. It's also an important way future leaders start building confidence and professionalism.

"Assisting professionals has provided me with a better understanding of how a business operates, the urgency of deadlines, and exposure to a fast-paced work environment. Learning etiquette as simple as proper office attire and how to courteously interact with office professionals will aid my transition into the real business world," said Alexandra Gribbin '16, an interdisciplinary studies major and communication minor who interned with *Harper's Bazaar* this summer.

Internships also expose students to

careers they may not have considered. Angie Kamath '97 is eager to host CALS interns so she can expose them to the start-up culture of social entrepreneurship, while also helping her organization thrive. Kamath leads Per Scholas, a national nonprofit that provides technology education, access, training and job placement services for people in low-income communities.

"A lot of what I do is 'myth busting' — helping students realize that if they want to make an impact solving society's toughest problems, this is a sector that needs smart, talented people with business skills," said Kamath, a member of the Dyson School Advisory Board.

Two unique CALS internships also give students the opportunity to build skills while making a broader impact. Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) offers summer internships for CALS students, allowing them to work with faculty advisers and

extension educators across the state on projects ranging from developing communication materials for willow bioenergy crops, to conducting research trials on reducing herbicide use in *Vitis vinifera* grape varieties.

"The concept of getting interns into the field, away from campus and yet connected to campus research, has been a real winner," said Chris Watkins, Herman M. Cohn Professor of Horticulture and CCE associate director for agriculture and food systems.

The NYS Internship Program,

launched last fall, complements the CCE internships by connecting students to career development opportunities while tackling New York's continuing loss of young educated workers.

The program, developed by a team of CALS administrators and extension educators in Cornell's Community and Regional Development Institute, places interns in companies, nonprofits and government agencies across the upstate region. Once there, interns work nearly full time in positions related to their coursework but spend one day per week on a community engagement project to assess their communities and identify ways to improve them.

This summer, eight interns were placed with hosts, including Chobani in Norwich, N.Y., Beech-Nut Nutrition Corporation in Amsterdam, N.Y., and the Tompkins County Department of County Administration.

"Suddenly we have the opportunity to explain to students what exists here," said Joseph Vinciguerra, director of corporate and foundation relations for CALS and co-developer of the internship program. "We can expose them to these opportunities, help them build affinity to these regions or attract local graduates to stay."

CAREER DEVELOPMENT: SHAPING THE FUTURE

Right out of college, most new graduates are focused more on earning money and credentials than adding leadership responsibilities. But once they're ready, many alumni come back to CALS for LEAD NY, a two-year leadership development program for professionals with any affiliation to the food, agriculture

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and natural resource industries.

“We’re training people from a ‘servant leadership perspective.’ We’re developing leaders who will step up into leadership roles in industry and their communities,” said Larry Van De Valk ’87, MAT ’90, Ph.D. ’10, executive director of LEAD NY. “Because our cohorts are so diverse, our grads come out with a much broader, worldly perspective on the challenges facing the state and industry. The blinders are off.”

This is exactly the experience that Christian Yunker ’02 wanted when he decided to get back into the family farming business after spending six years working at an agricultural bank in New Jersey — a job that resulted from the internship Yunker had there after his junior year.

“I always had it in the back of my mind to go back to farming. For me, it took a little more perspective and leaving school to recognize the opportunities. The LEAD program made me recognize the importance of getting involved, becoming active in business, and developing myself personally,” said Yunker, who now owns and operates CY Farms in Batavia, N.Y., alongside his father Craig ’72, a Cornell trustee and LEAD alumnus.

Since graduating from LEAD, Yunker has taken on advocacy, policy-making and leadership roles in his county, its Farm Bureau, and through his local Cornell Cooperative Extension office. LEAD also motivated Yunker to get reinvolved with Cornell. In 2011, he joined the board of the CALS Alumni Association.

CALS: LEADING BY EXAMPLE, A LIFETIME RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The investment of time, energy and resources that CALS puts into developing leaders through these programs is immense, but its return is substantial.

For alumni like Yunker, that return is realized when fellow alumni become leaders in their fields and raise the value of a CALS degree. Keeping alumni leaders engaged — by speaking in classes, participating in educational programs, mentoring students or hosting interns — reinforces that value and helps CALS attract top students and faculty.

“You also hope to get some financial support to keep CALS strong and vibrant.

It’s important for alumni to be proud of where they’re from, to promote CALS to their own communities. We need the best and brightest from all over,” Yunker said.

Classes like Perosio’s, as well as CCE and NYS internships, also provide local organizations, communities and CALS faculty with a tangible return. CCE interns help speed research in the field, while Perosio’s undergraduate teaching assistants gain leadership experience mentoring and coaching her project teams.

By helping its private and public sector partners succeed, through cooperative internships and outreach, Vinciguerra said CALS is better able to deliver on its land-grant mission.

“There are regional companies like

Beech-Nut with a long history with CALS and our alumni, which have made contributions to CALS and Cornell. But they’re facing challenges. They’re concerned about attracting and retaining talent. We’re trying to help them with that problem,” Vinciguerra said. “We’re putting

students in places that are of strategic importance to New York, and to CALS, its partners and its mission.”

This long-term perspective comes full circle at the highest levels in state government. Earlier this year, Governor Andrew Cuomo appointed Patrick Hooker ’84 as Deputy Secretary for Agriculture and Markets. Hooker, an agricultural education major, has been a champion of New York agriculture — and CALS — since he began his career in the New York State Assembly.

From Hooker’s vantage point as a leader and very active alumnus, the return on CALS’ leadership development opportunities and programs is the validation of what’s being taught and studied there.

“For the people of New York, it is nothing less than the maintenance and improvement of food safety, quality, and steady forward progress on a very long list of other quality-of-life issues,” he said.

To that end, CALS programs are a proving ground for aspiring leaders, providing the infrastructure they need to create support networks and companies, serve their communities, and give back as coaches and mentors.

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This summer, bioengineering major Bryan Chan ’15, worked at Beech-Nut Nutrition Corporation in Amsterdam, N.Y., as a quality technologist intern through the NYS Internship Program.

Four days each week, he tested finished products against quality standards for the international company and occasionally worked on independent projects. The fifth day was spent in the community, doing activities and asking questions to help uncover what Amsterdam has to offer and how it can improve.

His eight counterparts across the state also engaged in community

immersion, and they shared their experiences in real time via Cornell’s online Mahara ePortfolio System.

“What’s really cool is that even though we

were all in other places, we were able to see what’s going in these other communities,” Chan said.

For Chan, who’s from Fishkill, N.Y., the internship also offered another opportunity to create, which was the same aspect that attracted him to combine his love of biology with engineering when he came to CALS.

“The program aims to seek out what each community has and what it is lacking, so that the communities can assess and potentially grow,” Chan said. “I wanted to help steer them in the right direction.”

Chan isn’t new to community outreach. He interned last summer in Ulster and Dutchess counties with Cornell Cooperative Extension, working with Susan Hoskins, senior extension associate, to create new geospatial educational materials to help communities better understand coastal change over time in the Hudson River Estuary and its environmental impact. He kept a video blog about the experience, which can be viewed at blogs.cornell.edu/ccesummerinterns2012/author/bc333/.

