I never contemplated what Santa Claus did all year when it wasn’t Christmas. As a kid, I remembered him only during the holiday season as I awaited that big box beneath my Christmas tree. Despite the fact that we didn’t have a chimney in our small apartment, my mother reassured me he would find a way to reach me. And of course he did because, as I realized years later, my mother was Santa Claus.

These past few months, working for the Ron Brown Scholar Program (RBSP), I’ve come to much the same realization as my Santa Claus epiphany. Behind the benevolent entity that is the Ron Brown Scholar Program, there is so much more. By more, I mean what goes on during those 361 days that are not Selection Weekend.

I present to you a few items on the RBSP Project List, really gifts for all the Scholars that extend beyond Christmas.

◆ Civic Engagement Documentary

Working here over the past few months, I’ve been immersed in the program’s carpe diem spirit. In my second month, I worked with our sister office, the Council on African American Affairs (CAAA), on a civic engagement documentary. One day I woke up and was on my way to DC to interview Civil Rights activists. The next day, I reviewed the interview footage jotting down quotations from those luminaries. What Lawrence Guyot said still resonates with me today: “I learned that ordinary people can make astoundingly extraordinary things happen.” His words emphasize the possibilities for CAAA and the Ron Brown Scholars themselves.

◆ Coffee Table Book

The CAAA and RBSP staff met with Sybil Fix, a journalist and education researcher, to discuss the RBS Coffee Table Book. If you’re like me, your eyes widened at the mention of this exciting project. Yes, the office is putting together a coffee table book to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the program. It will include selected Scholar essays along with B&W portraits of essay authors, a directory of all Scholars and a special foreword. Currently, we’ve assembled a top-notch team of photographers, including a Pulitzer Prize winner. Sybil Fix, after reading all of the Scholar essays, will select those essays that are most appropriate for the project. Expect a sleek, professional final product that’s a fitting tribute to the program.

◆ Website (for RBSP, RBSAA, and Holland Scholar Program)

The RBS website (www.ronbrown.org) received 24,751 visits in November. Under the 

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Andrews, as a child, I had a love affair with Edgar Allen Poe. So captivated was I with the harmonic dissonance laid down when Poe’s pen breathed words to life, I bathed myself in Poe’s works and stole from him my youth’s mantra, a line from “Dream Within A Dream”: “Is all that we see or seem, but a dream within a dream?” With this phrase as my guide, I wandered through life, directing a queer and contemplative eye on all manifestations of being and philosophy that lingered, even momentarily, in my view.

As the years waned, my childhood obsession with the nature of reality dissolved from my rain-drizzled existence in Oregon’s Willamette Valley, and I became less concerned with scrutinizing life as a dream, and more with understanding living as survival.

Such a transfer in consciousness was predictable, ineludible really, because I grew up in a place with a history; a history documented upon bald-spotted mountaintops; a past still living, betrayed by frequent gatherings of mill smog, sitting heavy—dirty reminders of dead-end struggles clinging to the misty country air.

After all, I grew up on the periphery of an expansive countryside in a former mill town that could be described as a decidedly blue-collar settlement in a white-collar world. As in any city, where reality is characterized by families struggling to carve, out of little, a niche for themselves in society, my town knew its fair share of class restlessness and racial tensions.

One can hardly describe the subtle fracture of knowledge that occurs when one’s experiences fit awkwardly into the mold of one’s expectations.

As a Simmons student, I had been unknowingly inducted into a society where Tiffany wasn’t just a female name, purses were built to tote social status instead of wallets, and higher education seemed to be a 140 thousand-dollar show-and-tell for which wealthy parents footed the bill. However, the racial and social ignorance demonstrated by my classmates wore thin the already strained moiré of my nerves even more than the fantastical tales of wealth; in my schoolmates, I didn’t see peers: I saw privilege and miseducation. Many of my classmates nurtured the same aversion for me that I had for them, categorizing me as a crazy liberal and a Black woman bearing all the stigmatized attributes that benightedness has allotted to my race.

Confronted with such dissonance between my past and present realities, I couldn’t help but reflect on the fuzzy mantra of my youth: “Is all that we see or seem, but a dream within a dream?” As this thought tiptoed through the wait-rooms of my mind, I found myself questioning the correctness of my own experiences.

Slowly, at such a pace as truth is always revealed to the unwilling, I realized that my contrived conceptions of my schoolmates were based no more on any fault of my schoolmates themselves, than on my own conditioned distaste for privilege and my personal ignorance of the lived experiences of different classes of people. I began to understand that by seeing in my classmates only what I chose to see, I was assigning, to an entire group of people, the partial characteristics of only a few.

Odd as it seems, my time at Simmons has shown me what I thought I knew all along: that ignorance knows no color gradient and prejudice exists without the parasol of white skin.

With such an environment as the backdrop of my adolescent years, I inevitably developed a consciousness of my social and racial identity. Compounded with the nurturing of my family, my environment encouraged me to defy the kismet of which experience had made me increasingly aware. I forged an identity based on everything – my class, my race, my gender – that society invokes to tear people like me down. This identity was the prism through which the workings of the world were projected onto the blue-screen of my mind. I exalted struggle over privilege and earnings, both social and monetary, over inheritance.

I was comfortable; then I came to Simmons College.
Research as a Process
By KORYSE WOODROOFFE, RBS ’01

Nelson Mandela recently said, “We are called to join the war against HIV/AIDS.” I took up his call for action this past summer as an intern at the Institute of Human Virology, a research center dedicated to understanding and developing treatments for fighting HIV. The molecular mechanism of HIV infection has been one of my scientific interests and I have always been eager to aid in researching possible ways to curb the HIV/AIDS epidemic. When Mr. Mallory informed me that the Institute of Human Virology was interested in hosting Ron Brown Scholars as summer interns, I knew that this would be the perfect opportunity for me to gain experience in HIV research.

I was drawn to the Institute of Human Virology because of its multilevel approach to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Located in Baltimore, MD, an area with one of the largest rates of HIV infection in the United States, the Institute of Human Virology is dedicated to conducting basic science research to better understand the HIV virus, developing vaccinations for HIV, and delivering these treatments discovered at the benchside to the bedside of HIV/AIDS patients. All of the facilities necessary for accomplishing these goals are located within the Institute of Human Virology. I thought that theirs was a unique approach to helping to solve the HIV/AIDS epidemic and I wanted to be part of the experience.

After visiting the Institute of Human Virology and learning about their different divisions of research, I decided to intern in Dr. David Pauza’s laboratory in the Basic Science division. I worked with researchers studying the TAT protein, a candidate target protein for an HIV vaccination. There is still much to discover about the TAT protein and its exact role in cells infected with the HIV virus, but the prospects for its use in fighting HIV infection are great. My role in the lab was to assist in experiments aimed at dissecting the exact function of the TAT protein by determining whether TAT protein made in cells manipulated to express TAT can be exported from these cells and cause the transactivation of cells infected with TAT deficient HIV virus.

In working with TAT researchers to unravel the secrets of the TAT protein, I learned how to use many different laboratory tools in molecular biology to decipher the TAT protein’s interactions. I had the opportunity to perform many of the laboratory techniques that I was taught in my biology classes. It is one thing to learn the basis of these techniques in class, but to actually use them to seek the answers to research questions forced me to understand and execute these techniques in another dimension. I especially enjoyed learning how to design experiments to test a hypothesis and further one’s research. The best part of this internship was experiencing the ups and downs of research and learning that research is a continuous process that requires patience and dedication.

As I reflect on my summer interning experience, I am most grateful for the opportunity to experience biomedical research on a disease that has ravaged our world. I enjoyed becoming familiar with the challenges of medical research and at the same time I was inspired by researchers who knew that their work was needed to save the lives of millions across the globe. My summer at the Institute of Human Virology has motivated me to continue my quest to become a researcher with the goal of furthering our understanding and treatment of HIV/AIDS. With recent advances in HIV research and the promise of future developments in treatment, I believe that the global community can recover from the devastation of the HIV/AIDS epidemic.
Time Banking: Creating Community Exchange Networks

By MORGAN HARPER, RBS ’01

When I received an e-mail Mr. Mallory had sent early last summer, I did not initially read the entire message or the attached letter. I observed the length of the letter and decided to postpone reading it until I had more time. About a month later when I finally returned to the letter written by Mr. Edgar Cahn, I regretted having not done so sooner. Mr. Cahn’s impassioned and persuasive letter to Charles Ogletree, Jr. articulated his concern over the deterioration of America’s urban communities. He described an area in DC where his late wife had grown up that once flourished with people committed to its success, but now struggled to even find cohesion among its members. Beyond highlighting a problem, he also proposed a potential solution with a theory he had developed called Time Banking.

Reading Mr. Cahn’s descriptions of his late wife’s birthplace reminded me of certain areas in my own hometown: Columbus, Ohio. His Time Banking theory seemed like a viable method to rebuild communities and I wanted to know more. I responded directly to Mr. Cahn with some thoughts and eventually attended the International Time Banking Congress in Toronto later that summer to learn more about projects that had already proven to be successful. Time Banking relies on the principle that “We have what we need if we use what we have.” Using this philosophy, Time Banking projects create community exchange networks to match members’ assets and needs. For example, if an elderly person without a car were to live in a community with a Time Bank, she could perhaps solicit the network to get a ride to a medical appointment from someone who owns a car. In turn, she could provide childcare since she already spends many days at home. Time Banks seek to reestablish the reciprocal living that should inherently exist in communities, and frequently did, but has often been lost.

Attending the conference and talking to people who had successfully implemented these projects worldwide only increased my desire to get involved in a Time Banking project during the upcoming academic year. I talked to other conference attendees from the Boston area to strategize about how to introduce the concept to the area. I returned to Tufts knowing I wanted to make my yearlong project as part of the Citizenship and Public Service Scholar Program focused on Time Banking.

Since I returned to campus this fall, I have been working to create a Time Banking network in Somerville, the city outside Boston where Tufts is located. I have been fortunate to have Joel Nitzberg, a longtime Somerville resident and community activist, serve as a mentor throughout this process. Early in the year, I also recognized the significant workload entailed in starting a community project from scratch. Luckily, two other Tufts students learned of the project, wanted to learn more and eventually signed on to form our Time Banking team. We have been working hard not only to decide what form the project should take in Somerville to best meet the community’s needs, but also to sell the idea to community members unfamiliar with the concept. We have decided to focus on Somerville’s elderly residents who typically become isolated as they age and who we think would most benefit from the existence of such a network in Somerville.

To see the progression from the beginning of the summer when I sat at my computer reading Mr. Cahn’s letter to now trying to realize the creation of a Time Bank in Somerville with two other students has been exhilarating. Although we are still in the early stages, our team is dedicated to starting a project that could make positive change in the community we have called home during our college experience.
To Be or Not to Be . . . a Doctor:
My Experience at Stanford’s Health Careers Opportunity Program

By TAMIIKA BAILEY, RBS ’02

MCATS, personal statements and interviews are all things premed students dread on their path to medical school. This summer, through my participation in Stanford’s Health Careers Opportunity Program (HCOP), I learned that there is much more to beginning a medical career than tests and essays; it requires honest introspection, asking yourself tough questions such as “Why medicine?,” “Do I have what it takes to be a doctor?,” and “What will I bring to the field of medicine?”. I cannot say that I have a complete answer to all of these questions at this time, but HCOP has planted them firmly in my mind and has given me the tools, knowledge and confidence that will help me find the answers.

The practice MCAT and analysis workshop helped to demystify the MCAT and showed me what areas I need to focus on when preparing for the test in the spring. Finally, mock interviews were conducted and I was fortunate enough to have a veteran Stanford University interviewer. You would think after an interview for $40,000 and a chance to be a part of the most presti-

HCOP brings a diverse group of educationally and economically disadvantaged students together for an intensive six-week premedical program. The core curriculum is aimed at giving us our first exposure to medical school classes, offering both cell biology and anatomy courses. The instructors were medical students who not only made class interesting by integrating quiz games, clinical correlates and computer simulations, but also by sharing their personal histories with us, imparting knowledge that could not be found in any premedical guide. These medical students became our mentors, giving us invaluable advice and encouragement. Seeing that they were not only successful, but also happy (gasp!) helped me to realize that medical school may not be the prison that many have made it out to be.

Another major component of the curriculum was our research class, in which my partner and I compared prevention strategies for reducing pregnancy rates among minority adolescents. This brought together many of my passions; sociology, psychology and mental healthcare.

The final component of the curriculum was designed to meet the needs of first-generation college students, who might be unfamiliar with the intricacies of the medical school application process. We had an admissions workshop which addressed the basics, such as a timeline of the process and the deeper aspects of why we wanted to apply in the first place. I will never forget our tarot card exercise during which we had to choose an image that represented what drove us toward a health career. I found out that the themes of justice, family, scientific knowledge and community service were important in my decision—all of this from one little card! We also had a personal statement class, which helped me to express on paper the reasons I wanted to become a doctor. A

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To Be or Not to Be . . . a Doctor:
My Experience at Stanford’s Health Careers Opportunity Program (continued from page 5)

The mock interview taught me that I need to prepare extensively for my medical school interview and the importance of a good interview in the admissions process.

HCOP went way beyond its core curriculum to prepare us for our future in health care. On top of giving us the knowledge of how to navigate the process, it gave us the self-confidence and motivation needed to succeed. We had weekly mentor nights that introduced us to people on different stages of the medical journey: incoming medical students, seasoned medical students, residents and practicing physicians from dermatologists to surgeons. Listening to the challenges they faced, the decisions they made, and their successes was an inspiration to a group of students with many fears and doubts about entering a field where they would constitute a distinct minority. These mentors were a testament to the opportunity for the success of minorities in the medical arena. Because of their wisdom, now I am not afraid to take time off before entering medical school to teach, to apply to private medical schools and to keep my career options open. My motivation to pursue a career in medicine was deepened by our discussions on racial disparities in healthcare. Before HCOP I knew they existed, but it was always as a vague concept. Workshops on these disparities made the problem more concrete and apparent to me not only by giving me statistics, but also by identifying the illnesses that disproportionately affect minority communities and the types of doctors needed most in underserved populations. Racial disparities in healthcare have become more than a media blip to me, rather a problem that I and others like me have the potential to solve.

Not all of the memorable experiences of this summer came from the scheduled HCOP programming; dorm life and weekend events had their fair share of excitement and personal insights. For a while, I felt like I was not making a connection with my fellow HCOP participants, but things picked up towards the end of the program and I can honestly say that I have made a few friendships that will last way beyond the program. We enjoyed nights of dancing, movie outings and playing volleyball with our enthusiastic residential coordinators. The most memorable bonding experience was our talent show, which featured cross-dressed dancers, impersonators, poets and much more; the highlight of the show was the HCOP Ensemble’s performance of “Lean on Me” in which we were all united in voice to express many of the lessons we had learned from our time together. In my free time, I visited friends in San Francisco and LA and even found time to coordinate a RBS dinner for Scholars in the Bay Area. It was great to see familiar faces and to meet some new Scholars; some of us were living in neighboring dorms the whole summer without even knowing it!

I have chosen medicine because I am passionate about the workings of the human body and by providing compassionate healthcare, I can enhance people’s quality of life, allowing them to pursue their many goals.

My HCOP experience has helped me begin to answer the questions all premedical students must one day ask themselves. I have chosen medicine because I am passionate about the workings of the human body and by providing compassionate healthcare, I can enhance people’s quality of life, allowing them to pursue their many goals. HCOP has shown me that I have the intellectual capacity, resources and drive needed to become a physician. Finally, I will bring my particular interpersonal skills and cultural sensitivity to the field of medicine in order to serve diverse and underserved populations. Now more than ever I am excited to begin the life-long career of being a health care provider.
Recollections From Costa Rica

By DAVID WILLIAMS, RBS ’03

I am not a morning person. At home and at school I typically press the snooze button on my alarm a dozen times. I need to take a fifteen-minute shower before I can create cogent sentences and am still not very friendly until I have completely digested a full breakfast.

Unfortunately, Costa Ricans love the morning. Before the sun reaches the horizon, the call of the family rooster breaks the night’s silence. Feeling left out, all the neighborhood dogs chime in and contribute to the daily morning symphony that, without fail, broke my peaceful slumber every day I spent in Central America. My host mother was always scurrying around the house at what I considered the wee hours of the morning, preparing for the day. My host father was usually working in the coffee and sugar cane fields before I even groggily realized the day had begun. Daily, while I struggled to stay awake eating my breakfast, my host sister was typically already leaving for school with her classmates. This, however, was especially problematic because I was usually the person teaching her first hour English class.

Despite my loathing of early mornings, my teaching schedule in Costa Rica was the easiest adjustment I needed to make. Simply getting to my home in Pacayitas de La Suiza, a tiny town in the central highlands of Costa Rica, was an adventure in and of itself. I remember struggling in the dust and heat of a blazing Central American afternoon, trying to find my bearings while dragging around an unnecessarily large suitcase. I darted in and out of speeding cars through streets and alleys seemingly unregulated by traffic lights and signs. I asked for directions in halting Spanish and then feigned understanding when their responses came either too quickly or in an incomprehensible accent. I worried that I may never find my bus stop and might become an American casualty forever lost in the confusion of the Costa Rican streets.

Finally, like all my travels in Costa Rica, I made it to my destination. I became more confident with my Spanish and eventually learned to move to the rhythm that embodies life in the small nation. This typified my experience this summer. As my American sensibilities began to wear off and I let myself become immersed in my environment, things began to make sense. I no longer worried if all my students fully comprehended object pronouns and verb conjugation. Late buses or forgotten appointments did not get under my skin. My daily thirty minute walk through mountainous terrain became customary and the morning crow of the rooster actually became comforting in its regularity.

Costa Rica made me adaptable. I learned how to traverse new cultural guidelines and societal standards while still being myself. I became flexible, understanding and appreciative of all the little pleasures of life in a tiny rural village. Soon I forgot about the long lines at the lone public phone in the town. The constant buzzing of insects began to fade into the background. To the slight chagrin of my supervisor at school, I even began to personify the extremely laid back sensibility that defines life for most in Costa Rica.

Slowly but surely, I became more than just the American in town. I became a fixture at town bailes (parties) and was a regular in the daily mejingas (soccer matches) in the plaza. Students began to solicit my conversation for more than just naughty English words or help with their assignments. As I grew in tune with the daily flow and gossip of the town, I was treated as a confidant and as an equal. I was involved in everyday life in the community and at brief instances, I feel many people almost forgot I was a foreigner.

And inevitably, as I was readying myself to leave, I realized that I had built genuine relationships in my community. Now that I feel at home in both the United States and my small community of Pacayitas, where am I going to explore next?
A Lot Like Christmas: Working in the RBS office (continued from page 1)

guidance of Vanessa, a newly designed website will be launched early next year. Included will be links for the RBS, the RBS Alumni Association (RBSAA) and the Holland Scholar Program at the University of Virginia (UVA). The Holland Program, also started by the Pilaro Family, awards scholarships to African Americans at UVA. This year, our office is administering this program in addition to running the Ron Brown Scholar Program. Part of my job is working with the Holland Alumni and undergraduate Scholars. Interacting with another group of impressive students and seeing a group of Alumni so dedicated to the program inspires me. I’ve also worked with the RBSAA who gave back to the community this year through a successful book drive.

Video

Finally, I am reviewing all the video recordings of RBS at Selection Weekends, the Aspen Conferences and other events. From this footage we will cull together a 5-7 minute introductory video about the program and its impact on the Scholars.

In addition to these projects, there’s the business of selecting new Scholars. With our early deadline this year (November 15), we’ve received a slew of applications already. I’m eagerly awaiting Selection Weekend and the next group of RBS. In the meantime, I enjoy working in the office with Fran, Vanessa, Kelly and Mr. Mallory, meeting and mingling with both Ron Brown and Holland Scholars and of course, tracking them on thefacebook.com (your secrets are safe with me). My friends now ask if the RBS office is hiring after hearing me, week after week, talk about our exciting projects. I nod and confirm: “Yes, I do in fact have an awesome job.” –as rewarding as being one of Santa’s little helpers.

CAAA Releases Its First Documentary (continued from page 1)

and advance efforts to bolster participation among African American youth in the electoral process and to provide opportunities that will allow Black youth to positively impact their communities through civic engagement.” Since the premiere screening, the film has been shown at the Office of Early Childhood Development in Washington, DC—eliciting a decidedly positive reaction—and will soon be shown at the Smith Roberts Museum in Jackson, Mississippi. Lawrence Guyot, a long time activist and educator commented, “I have seen a lot of documentaries. I was in Eyes on the Price. This is one of the most powerful and engaging documentaries I have ever seen.”

In regard to the documentary’s purpose, Mr. Guyot noted that it “will make the identification and inculcation of new leaders much easier. My only regret is that I didn’t do it first.”

Not an organization to rest on its laurels, the CAAA staff is also hard at work finishing up CAAA’s inaugural healthcare initiative and getting started with preliminary research in the newly selected education initiative. The former initiative, Barriers to Preventive Healthcare for Children Prenatal to Age Five, is nearing completion. During the past few months, CAAA has conducted focus groups with African American mothers in several of its communities, including those in Philadelphia, PA, Talbot County, GA, Jefferson Davis County, MS and Jackson, MS. In addition, the phone survey on barriers to preventive healthcare is expected to be completed by year’s end. Once this quantitative data is collected, it will be used in conjunction with the qualitative focus group data to write one large report, summarizing CAAA’s findings, as well as smaller reports that will be specific to each community’s unique needs. CAAA would like to recognize the invaluable participation of Jade Craig (RBS ‘02) and Ghideon Ezaz (RBS ‘02) in helping with aspects of CAAA’s research in Mississippi.

On September 18, at CAAA’s 3rd Annual Policy Selection Board Meeting, a group of 20 people composed of ’99 Ron Brown Scholars, CAAA board members and staff, and RBSP staff, gathered at CAAA headquarters to select the third research initiative. After presentations on three topics and deliberations by the ’99 Scholars, the topic of “Improving Education for African Americans” was chosen. Currently, CAAA staff are conducting background research on the topic in order to narrow its scope and focus.

Also discussed at the Annual Meeting were upcoming changes in the topic selection process. A steering committee headed by Maleka Gramling made recommendations detailing strategies that could be instituted in order to make the process more inclusive and effective. The CAAA Board agreed to the changes and the CAAA staff is already in full swing in the implementation of them. From now on, all Scholars will be able to submit their ideas for possible topics and Scholars will work together to refine each topic and present them to the CAAA Board at the annual meeting.