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First Hassenfeld Fellows Are Making a Difference in Local Communities

Part of the Hassenfeld Projects initiative, seven students are leading a variety of community-focused projects from Providence to Fall River, Mass.

The first cohort of Hassenfeld Fellows — from left, Laura Vincent, Emma Guillot, Nick Cmaylo, Angelina Ferrari and Kelsey Rogers (and Virginia Albert, who is not pictured here) — offered a glimpse into their individual community-based projects at RWU’s Community Engagement Celebration. Image Credit: Andrea Hansen

April 24, 2017  |  Jill Rodrigues ’05

BRISTOL, R.I. — Each semester, RWU faculty and students go beyond the classroom to work within the community and help provide solutions to local and global issues. These collaborations fulfill the needs of community partners while also building the practical skills and leadership experiences graduates will require to be successful in the workforce.

Now, thanks to a $500,000 gift from Hassenfeld Family Initiatives LLC, a group of dedicated undergraduate and graduate student leaders will take a leadership role at several projects across Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts. The Hassenfeld Student Leadership Fellows are supported through the grant establishing the Hassenfeld Projects – a three-year initiative to expand and enhance the university’s innovative work in experiential education.
Selected for their outstanding academic scholarship and passion for working on community issues, the inaugural group of Hassenfeld Fellows feature seven students who have been trained to lead their own interdisciplinary community project. As Fellows they will provide over 840 collective hours of project-based work throughout the spring semester; for the next group of Fellows starting in the Fall semester, a full cohort of 10 students will provide over 300 hours each and a collective 3,000 hours leading community projects. Here’s a look at the first Fellows and their projects:

**Virgina Albert ’17**  
*Psychology & Philosophy*

Her sights set on one day becoming an attorney, Virgina Albert is working with the Immigration Law, Education & Advocacy Project in Fall River, Mass., where she assists lawyers in translating Haitian Creole (she also speaks French) and in preparing refugee and asylum cases for low-income families who cannot afford to pay for legal help. A double major in psychology and philosophy, she is also an Intercultural Leadership Ambassador, an officer of the Multicultural Student Union, a Resident Assistant and an Admissions Ambassador.

“This work positively impacts the lives of the individuals and their families by helping them get the proper legal documents together that are necessary to get a job, a license, and many other basic needs to properly start a new life in the United States,” Albert says. “I’m very excited to be a Hassenfeld Fellow and have this opportunity to help.”

**Mikayla Barnwell ’18**  
*Marine Biology with Mathematics minor*
What better fit for the marine biology major than to work with Save The Bay, a nonprofit dedicated to protecting and improving the health of Narragansett Bay? As a volunteer management intern, Barnwell plans and facilitates the organization’s multiple shoreline cleanups at various locations. But she also gets to tap into her scientific skillset while working with aquatic exhibits and educating the public on life in the local waters at Save The Bay’s Exploration Center & Aquarium in Newport.

“As a marine biology student, it’s very important to me to help educate the community on their surrounding environment, and hopefully influence their decisions to make more environmentally-aware choices,” Barnwell says. “With this fellowship, I want to be able to share my ideas with others and learn from what they have to offer. Immersing myself in community issues gives me a chance to better understand the people around me, as well as to learn how to take the proper steps when contributing as an active citizen.”

Nicholas Cmaylo ’17
Public Health with minors in Anthropology + Sociology and Biology
Nicholas Cmaylo took this fellowship-based opportunity to dive deeper into his work with the Bristol Health Equity Zone initiative, which continues from last semester. He’s applying his education as a public health major to the town-wide effort to improve access to nutrition information and healthful food via community events that provide health literacy classes, health screenings and preventative programs. The experiences he’ll take away from this project will serve him well when he launches into the public health field upon graduation in May.

“Serving my community has helped me find my voice, and now through the Hassenfeld Student Leadership program I have the perfect opportunity to delve in fully and commit the best parts of me to a cause bigger than myself,” Cmaylo says. “It’s helping me further develop my networking skills and increase my knowledge of issues facing communities and how those problems are addressed.”

Angelina Ferrari ’17
Public Health and Spanish double major with a minor in Anthropology + Sociology
As a student leader in the university’s chapter of Health and Wellness Educators (HAWEs), Angelina Ferrari helps promote healthy lifestyles to her peers on campus. Now she’s taking that passion and bringing it to the greater community. Working with the Healthy Communities Office at Providence City Hall, the public health and Spanish double major is developing maps identifying transportation routes to 10 of the capital city’s recreation centers, and educational brochures in English and Spanish on the types of services and programs the centers offer. Maps will be placed at RIPTA stops around Providence and brochures will be distributed through the recreation centers to help increase access to the city’s recreation centers and provide information to the populations they serve. In addition to serving the community as a Hassenfeld Fellow, she’s also one of RWU’s Civic Scholars.

“Over my last four years at Roger Williams, I have tried to be involved in every possible service opportunity and club event,” Ferrari says. “Being a Hassenfeld Fellow is giving me the opportunity to broaden my horizons and make an impact in a larger community. I hope that with these maps and brochures, more citizens of Providence will have access to a healthy lifestyle.”

Emma Guillot ’18
Architecture major with minors in Construction Management and Sustainability Studies
Inspired by a meeting with a young autistic rider when she was just a girl herself, Emma Guillot – an equestrian since the age of 6 – has taken on a two-fold project that’s dear to her heart. As an assistant therapist in-training at Greenlock Therapeutic Riding Center in Rehoboth, Mass., she works with students ranging in age from 3 to 45 years old on therapeutic horseback riding while also teaching them sensory, motor, cognitive and social skills. While she’s immersed in this work within the community, she’s also drawing from it what would be the needs and challenges of such a facility in order to design her own therapeutic riding center as her senior capstone project for the University Honors Program.

“The opportunity to be a Hassenfeld Fellow is unlike any other endeavors I have been a part of because it goes beyond the concept of helping while partaking in a service-learning adventure,” Guillot says. “The students and my other coworkers at Greenlock have taught me so much about myself and helped to motivate dreams for my future career. I plan to create my own community after I graduate and this program will make me more aware of the possibilities and needs of this growing community.”

**Kelsey Rogers ’17**

*Graphic Design major with a minor in Film Studies*
Closing time for the RWU Dining Commons on some evenings means it’s time for Kelsey Rogers and her fellow members of the university’s Food Recovery Network to get to work. The student organization collects the day’s uneaten food, packages and delivers the edible chow to local homeless shelter, feeding those in need while also reducing food waste that could have ended up in a landfill. The graphic design major has been doing this work for about three years at RWU, and is now helping to raise the issue of food recovery within the greater community. With her fellowship, she is engaging the public through educational events that celebrate the role of food in the local community, address the issue of food waste and collaborate on a plan to reduce the volume of food waste generated in Rhode Island.

“This fellowship is exactly what I wanted to cap off my work at RWU,” Rogers said. “While I had already learned many lessons in leadership from other academic experiences, there is plenty more to learn before transitioning to the workforce. I hope to form relationships with community leaders who can help me prepare the Food Recovery Network for success when I am gone, and to help me learn ways to apply my skills in meaningful ways in my career and community.”

Laura Vincent ’17
Psychology and Public Health double major
As family and community liaison for Bradley Hospital in East Providence, Laura Vincent is using her fellowship to help parents make informed decisions about the program and resources available to their children at the psychiatric hospital and national research center. As a psychology and public health double major, she’s already conducted clinical work at the hospital as part of her academic coursework. This fellowship is giving her the opportunity to work on the administrative side of the mental health field, including the redesign of the hospital’s family resource room as an inclusive space for everyone and to plan public events and professional conferences that raise awareness of mental health issues.

“Being a Hassenfeld Fellow means that I have the unique experience of completing an independent project while simultaneously my peers are completing projects of their own,” Vincent said. “This is an exciting opportunity to share our experiences and collaborate with one another.”

At RWU, we develop Civic Scholars who believe in community-engaged work. That’s why we commit to providing every student an opportunity that empowers them to put their knowledge and skills to the test solving real-world problems and creating meaningful change with community partners. Learn more about the Civic Scholars program and how to help us reach our goal of every student participating in civic scholarship.