

**Program Summary 2007-2008: Synaptic Scholars**



- About**
- Mission**
- Goals**
- Year In Review**
- Strategic Direction**
- Meet The Members**

**About**

The Synaptic Scholars program was founded by Sherman Teichman, Director of the Institute for Global Leadership. The program serves as a social and intellectual community for Tufts students seeking to bridge diverse disciplinary interests through multi-year research and/or entrepreneurial projects. Students are invited to apply to the program at the end of their first year at Tufts. After being accepted into the program by sophomore year, scholars work with selected faculty and other mentors to develop immersive and rigorous internships, research initiatives and projects. Scholars meet weekly to examine a broad range of current events and global issues, organize community events, offer feedback and support for individual and group projects, and reflect on their evolving intellectual interests and personal goals. Scholars are paired with mentors from an array of backgrounds who advise scholars throughout their academic careers. Scholars organize community events, connecting the knowledge and expertise of Tufts' accomplished faculty with undergraduate interests and academic pursuits.

**Mission**

The Synaptic Scholars program is designed to encourage and enable students interested in creative, intellectual exploration to realize their potential in intensive, interdisciplinary settings. The program creates a framework in which intellectual juxtapositions, critical thinking and self-directed explorations are fully realized. The Synaptic Scholars program is a leadership program, meant to provide a forum for students to take risks, pursue passions, and challenge assumptions in an intimate, supportive and collaborative environment. It is designed to cultivate a strong sense of accountability and responsibility, while encouraging scholars to enrich the University's intellectual life and programming.

**Goals**

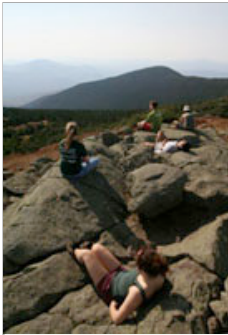
1. Generate a synergistic community of creative, supportive peers within the Synaptic Scholars network
2. Serve as a catalyst for innovative intellectual juxtapositions that help Synaptic Scholars understand or address pertinent global issues
3. Promote productive collaborations on the Tufts campus that unite diverse groups and communities in confronting cross-cutting issues
4. Foster and refine ethical, accountable leadership skills within Synaptic Scholars

## Year In Review

### Fall 2007

This year was a year of definition for the Synaptic Scholars. The group further refined its goals and framework. During the fall semester, the class of 2009 (the first class) welcomed the class of 2010 into the Synaptics community. They began their year with their retreat to the Moosilauke Ravine Lodge. For the new sophomore class, the first semester was a time to brainstorm and begin developing individual projects within the supportive framework of the smaller feedback groups. The juniors continued building on their projects, working to further focus and realize their passions through new initiatives. They also worked to help the new class develop their own projects, giving advice and support through the feedback groups and large group meetings. In the larger Tufts community, Synaptic Scholars further clarified their goal of increased presence and leadership, presenting campus-wide fireside chats, lectures, and a symposium - all organized by Synaptic Scholars.

#### Synaptics Weekend Retreat (Oct. 6-7, 2007)



The scholars took a group retreat to Mt. Moosilauke in New Hampshire at the beginning of the semester. An initial workshop session before departure gave the new members a chance to get to learn about the structure of the program and hear about the current projects of the class of '09. It also gave them a chance to brainstorm project ideas and hear, for the first time, each other's interests. The first night at Mt. Moosilauke, the group spent most of the time talking, bonding, and lying in sleeping bags under the stars. The next morning the group got up early and headed on a hike up Mt. Moosilauke. The hike was brilliant; perfect weather and great views of the New Hampshire fall trees. By the time the group made it down from the mountain, nobody wanted to go home. This trip was a really important bonding moment, solidifying the social connection between the members of the group, especially for the new scholars in the program.

#### Lunch With Mort Rosenblum (Oct. 16, 2007)



The Synaptic Scholars met with long-time journalist and former editor of the International Herald Tribune, Mort Rosenblum, for an informal lunch at The Fletcher School. During the meeting, they discussed the challenges facing journalists in an age when many news sources have greatly reduced the number and quality of their foreign correspondents, as well as how such actions dangerously blind Americans to important changes taking place across the globe. Mr. Rosenblum addressed the need to keep experienced personnel in the field, and discouraged much of the outsourcing of foreign reporting, because it is the only way to ensure that what happens on the ground in Mogadishu, Beirut, or Lhasa is accurately and responsibly reported. He concluded with the reminder not to make blanket judgments such as "the media sucks," but rather to employ "suspended belief" by checking sources, inquiring about facts, and analyzing biases, not only in the media but also in all of life's interactions.

#### Dinner With Benjamin Pogrund (Oct. 16, 2007)



The scholars met and had dinner with Benjamin Pogrund, South African freelance journalist and the former editor in chief of South Africa's Rand Daily Mail. Mr. Pogrund discussed the Rand's position as the only South African newspaper to cover the experience of black South Africans during the apartheid. He also spoke about his often dangerous experiences documenting South African politics and race relations, and compared the political climate of South Africa to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict today. Mr. Pogrund concluded by engaging the scholars in a fascinating discussion about the media's use of the word genocide in describing the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and how media is generally used in political conflict.

#### Dinner With Matt Bai (Oct. 19, 2007)



The Synaptic Scholars met and had dinner with Matt Bai, an IGL alum and acclaimed journalist for The New York Times Magazine. Mr. Bai is an expert on the Democratic Party and has followed several campaigns during his time as a journalist. The scholars heard Mr. Bai speak on his new book, *The Argument: Billionaires, Bloggers, and the Battle to Remake Democratic Politics*, which illuminates the need for creating a new way of engaging American politics within the Democratic party. Mr. Bai asked the scholars to question the stagnation that has begun to occur as political argumentation takes on micro-issues rather than broad political frameworks and goals. He challenged the current view of our bipartisan system and provided an interesting context for the presidential campaign.

#### Health Disparities Symposium (Nov. 17, 2007)



This symposium represented a culmination of Morissa Sobelson's Synaptic Scholars project and research on health disparities. Featuring guest speakers, panel discussions, and interactive workshops, the symposium highlighted the disproportionate impact of poor health status and premature mortality on specific population groups, particularly in Boston. The symposium was attended by more than 300 students who heard from a variety of

local community health experts. John Auerbach, the Commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health offered welcoming remarks, while Dr. Joan Reede, Dean for Diversity and Community Partnership at Harvard Medical School, delivered the keynote address. The first half of the symposium featured panel presentations from other community health professionals and academics, while the second half was dedicated to break out sessions where everything from campus education to policy was discussed. Morissa used this event to help launch a cross-university student group that addresses the issue of health disparities in Boston. The group continues to meet regularly.

#### Fireside Chats

"Fireside chats" began last year, in the inaugural year of the Synaptic Scholars Program. At these informal events, faculty members are asked to speak - over a cup of tea - for five to seven minutes about the subject. The conversation is then open to all participants. The idea is to create a setting in which members of the Tufts community can interact in a way that avoids jargon, intimidation, and easy answers, hopefully leading to new questions and broader understanding for many of the participants.

#### Fireside Chat: Ethics Of International Travel For Undergraduate Learning (Dec. 5, 2007)

During the fall, one of the discussions at the scholars' weekly meetings evolved into a "fireside chat." During the meeting, the scholars questioned their own travel and research. The scholars recognized that with more than half of all Tufts students studying, volunteering, and conducting research abroad, it is extremely important to consider the ethics, impact, and value of these experiences. The purpose of this fireside chat was to start a meaningful dialogue exploring the goals and impacts of international travel taken in the pursuit of learning. The chat invited Dean James Glaser, who is in charge of the Undergraduate Research Fund, and Professor Rosalind Shaw, Chair of the Anthropology Department, to offer their experiences. The chat asked many important questions, designed to get at the heart of undergraduate travel, questions such as: what are the motivations for travel, and how do they intersect with the effects, value, and behavior of students abroad?; how do students interact with the communities in which they live or work?; what are the power dynamics? The discussion heightened awareness of these issues, with some participants staying late into the evening to continue the discussion.

Spring  
2008

Second semester, Synaptic Scholars reified many of their initial pursuits from first semester. From conferences in Toronto, to projects in western Africa, Central America, and New Orleans, the group's members traveled the globe. The group also put into place greater accountability in the form of mid-semester and end-of-semester presentations and further implemented the feedback group framework with bi-weekly meetings. The Synaptic Scholars also hosted two additional fireside chats during the second semester and launched the IGL's new publication, *Discourse*. This broadened Synaptic Scholars unification with Tufts' intellectual community, professors and administrators, and civic-minded volunteer organizations. Finally, the group welcomed the class of 2011 into its ranks through an extremely competitive application process. As the semester came to a close, the scholars continued to further define and pursue their individual projects and group goals, and to foster growth with this new class of rising Synaptic Scholars.

#### "Coordinating Chaos" Conference, University Of Toronto (Feb. 8, 2008)

Six Synaptic Scholars traveled to the University of Toronto to attend "Coordinating Chaos", a conference with a focus on creating lasting peace and justice in transitional times. At the conference, the scholars listened to many speakers and participated in many roundtable discussions. The speakers included Canadian generals, UN Major Generals, Ambassadors, and other dignitaries. The conference presented an opportunity for scholars to connect their research to the larger international aid community, providing context and focus. Scholars gained valuable insight into anti-corruption tactics, transitional justice, the utility of force in maintaining peace, and the general role of the UN in international conflict situations.

#### Artsience Discussion (Feb. 18, 2008)



Over winter break the scholars read *Artsience: Creativity in the post-Google Generation* by David Edwards. Edwards presents an innovative argument for the creation of a new education and cultural environment that transcends the traditional boundaries between art and science. The Synaptics got together in February to discuss and reflect on group implications of Edwards' provocative ideas. The conversation focused particularly on the role and possibility of undergraduate university education facilitating 'artsience' education, and the degree to which expertise is needed before collaboration is possible. The discussion was stimulating and was complemented wonderfully by the cooking and hospitality of Synaptic Scholar Mie Inouye.

#### Mid-Semester Presentations (Mar. 1, 2008)

These presentations served as an interactive opportunity for the group to share their own progress while learning about others' experiences and goals. Each scholar presented his or her own work for twenty minutes and then received questions and feedback from their peers as well as from the Institute's Director. This process served as both a celebration of the group's hard work and as a way for individuals to explore and challenge their own intellectual and personal goals. This helped to highlight individuals' contributions and reinforce collective commitment to the program, as well as to solidify the building blocks that the program has established.

#### Global Healthcare Lecture (Mar. 27, 2008)

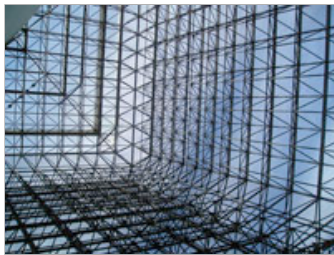
Four Synaptics Scholars - Kai Andrews, Margaret O'Connor, Talya Peltzman and Mae-ling Lokko - organized a lecture and discussion with doctors from two world-renowned nonprofit healthcare organizations: Partners In Health and Emergency. The purpose of the event was to spread awareness about the cutting edge medical and humanitarian work of PIH and Emergency and to convey the importance of their collaboration with the field of global healthcare. Dr. Hilarie Cranmer of Emergency and Dr. Gene Buckman of PIH discussed their collaborative efforts in Emergency's hospital in Khartoum, where their world-class facilities for advanced surgery in the region has welcomed PIH's patients from

Rwanda. Through this event, the Scholars explored a chapter of international NGO collaboration where political neutrality, non-discriminatory patient policies, sustainability and accountability were paramount. Building on a relationship Mae Lokko had been fostering with Emergency Boston for over a year, the Synaptics team founded an Emergency chapter at Tufts.

#### Fireside Chat: Efficacy Of Volunteerism In New Orleans (Apr. 1, 2008)

The Synaptics sponsored a fireside chat, "The Efficacy of Volunteerism in New Orleans," on April 1. The event brought Nancy Wilson of the Tisch College, Betty Allen and Calvin Gidney from the Child Development Department and Edith Balbach from Community Health Department together with over 50 students to discuss past experiences in New Orleans and future steps in the student volunteer culture. The scholars put together an e-list of those interested and resolved to create a better interface on campus for student volunteers. The event was co-sponsored by the Tisch College, LCS, the National Collegiate Volunteers, and the Tufts Christian Fellowship.

#### Visit To The Institute Of Contemporary Art, Boston (Apr. 11, 2008)



The Synaptic Scholars met with David Henry, the Director of Programs at the Institute for Contemporary Art, who discussed the founding, history, and goals of the Institute, and how it is a part of and interacts with the Boston landscape. He guided the Scholars on a tour of the Institute, highlighting diverse work including the installations "Sun-sneezers blow light bubbles" by Ranjani Shettar, "Street Level" featuring work by Mark Bradford, William Cordova, and Robin Rhode, and "The World as a Stage" from a variety of artists redefining the roles of spectator and participant in the museum experience. Henry challenged the scholars about their perceptions of art,

provoking scholars to consider the implications in their own work.

#### Hip Hop For Social Change (Apr. 11, 2008)



The Synaptic Scholars Program, led by Synaptics Ikenna Acholonu and Erin Baldassari and Tufts junior Breese McIlvaine, in collaboration with Sol Productions and Nomadic Wax Productions, and with co-sponsorship of more than 15 Tufts groups and organizations, coordinated a full-day event revolving around the theme of Hip Hop for Social Change. The event included a panel discussion on the evolution of hip hop and its historical, social, and global impacts. Students were given the

chance to engage in an informal discussion with artists, activists, professors, and members of the music industry about the role of hip hop as a tool for social movement and political action along with its global influence. This discussion was followed by a movie screening of the documentary, "Democracy in Dakar" (produced by Sol Productions and Nomadic Wax) that centers on the emergence of a socially-conscious hip hop culture in Dakar, Senegal. The documentary was followed by a panel discussion where artists from the movie along with the creators explained the emerging hip hop culture in Senegal and its influence over the Senegalese youth. These discussions were later followed by a performance featuring local artists, Tufts groups, and hip hop groups representing five different countries around the world.

### Incoming Class Of Synaptic Scholars (Apr. 19, 2008)



In March, the scholars embarked upon the selection process for the Synaptic Scholars class of 2011. Due to growth in the size of the program a new, systematic process was clearly a must. All Scholars helped streamline an application that reflected the three main components of the program: commitment to the Tufts community, desire for intellectual

community, and ability to conduct rigorous individual work. After two informational sessions and a campus publicity blitz, by March 24 the program received a total of 53 applications for eight spots. Every scholar read all 53 applications and gave a numeric score to several different aspects. Based on these scores and group discussion, the scholars decided to offer 24 applicants interviews with current scholars and Tufts faculty. After the interviews (in which all Scholars again participated, and again numerically scored the applicants), an eight-person selection committee held a second round of interviews with seven applicants, before submitting a list of eight proposed Scholars for the class of 2011. This list was accepted by the larger Synaptic community, and the scholars began the process of informing applicants of the decisions.

### Visit To John F. Kennedy Museum And Library (Apr. 25, 2008)

During the scholars' visit to the J.F.K. Library, CEO John Shattuck presented the challenge of reflecting on what he called "one of the most important times in all of American history." The library, designed by I.M. Pei, presented scholars with an opportunity to experience the process of the elections J.F.K. won, as well as the Oval Office, aspects of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Civil Rights movement, and other key events during his presidency.

### End Of Semester Presentations (Apr. 26, 2008)

This daylong gathering featured presentations of tangible outcomes from the semester. This final gathering also highlighted program successes, such as fireside chats or other events. It was open to prospective applicants for next year's class of Synaptic Scholars to help applicants better understand the program and begin to reflect on possible projects.

## Strategic Direction

Over the course of the past year, the Synaptic Scholars have engaged in various discussions to hone and clarify the future direction of the program. These dialogues were both evaluative and directive, and ultimately resulted in the following strategic elements:

#### 1. Three-level operating structure:

**Individual Scholars:** Rigorous projects, research initiatives, or internships challenge scholars to take intellectual risks and integrate their passions.

**Synaptic Scholar Community:** Weekly meetings, collaboration, and a formal system of peer review/feedback enhance the scholars' work. This community also aims to bridge the gap between intellectual and social life through various group events (trips to museums and art exhibits, special meetings with visiting speakers, etc), discussions, and shared readings.

**Tufts Community:** Synaptic Scholars are committed to bridging intellectual and social life on campus. This is achieved through programming that brings faculty and students of various disciplines together in candid, informal settings for dialogue and reflection over critical issues. "Fireside chats" grew out of this goal.

## 2. Project check-ins:

Small group check-ins: several times each semester Synaptics meet in small, informal groups to bounce ideas off one another and receive feedback from their peers

End/mid semester evaluations: formal presentations of projects and progress have an evaluative component that helps monitor and guide each student's work

## 3. Program Details:

Each of a Synaptic Scholar's three years in the program should build toward a coherent and cumulative whole to present at the end of their time at Tufts.

Prospective Scholars apply in the spring of their freshman year so they can enter the fall with project ideas and an understanding of the program's structure and expectations.

Creation of sophomore/senior mentoring model: With a spring application process, the group can take advantage of the end of freshman year and the following summer to begin project development. Each rising sophomore that joins the community is paired with a rising senior to help them brainstorm project ideas and then begin to refine and hone them. This model helps the rising sophomores in their focus and will enable them to begin their projects at the beginning of their sophomore year.

## Meet The Members

**Morissa Sobelson** ('09), *Community Health*  
Co-Coordinator

**Eyal Amit** ('09), *Psychology*

**Hannah Flamm** ('09), *Political Science*

**Mie Inouye** ('09), *Internat'l Letters & Visual Studies*

**Maya Karwande** ('09), *Political Science*

**Padden Murphy** ('09), *International Relations*

**Ikenna Acholonu** ('10), *Community Health*

**Kai Andrews** ('10), *Psychology, Clinical Studies*

**David Gainsboro** ('10), *Sociology*

**David Mou** ('10), *International Relations*

**Duncan Pickard** ('10), *History*

**Austin Siadak** ('10), *Peace & Justice Studies*

**Alison Coffey** ('11), *Undeclared*

**Lindsey Dono** ('11), *Undeclared*

**Nnenna Okoye** ('11), *Undeclared*

**Nick Stratton** ('11), *Undeclared*

**Rachel Bergenfield** ('09), *International Relations*  
Co-Coordinator

**George Denfield** ('09), *Biology, Psychology*

**Laura Fong** ('09), *Political Science*

**Sam James** ('09), *Plan of Study*

**Aliza Lailari** ('09)

**Alex Taylor** ('09), *International Relations*

**Raoul Alwani** ('10), *Political Science*

**Erin Baldassari** ('10), *Child Development*

**Mae-ling Lokko** ('10), *Architectural Studies*

**Margaret O'Connor** ('10), *Political Science*

**Talya Peltzman** ('10), *Sociology*

**Kelsi Stine** ('10), *International Relations*

**Charles Cushing** ('11), *Undeclared*

**Nadia Nibbs** ('11), *Undeclared*

**Sean Smith** ('11), *Undeclared*

**Ayda Wondemu** ('11), *Undeclared*