Dear Scholars:

We know what a challenging year this has been, and we want to let you know how very proud we are of all of you for persevering through these difficult times.

On behalf of our Faculty Director, Dr. Brian Colle, and our Program Coordinator, Dr. Nancy Puchner, I would like to extend sincere thanks to the SCH 102 Instructors this semester, who helped to continue to foster a sense of community for our freshmen in the Scholars Program. Our newest cohort of Fellows also completed their training this semester, and we are very excited to work with them this upcoming fall. We have the utmost confidence that they will be a tremendous asset to our incoming freshman class.

While we were unable to host many of our annual events due to COVID, we were very pleased to be able to offer the “Medical School Panel” this semester via Zoom (you can read more about this event in this edition of The Torch), as well as our first-ever “Scholars Alumni Panel” so that our current students were able to benefit from the knowledge and expertise of some of our most engaged Scholars alumni.

We know this has not been an easy time for anyone, but please remember that you always have a support system for you here within the University Scholars Program, and many resources at the University to assist you. Take care of yourselves over the summer, and be sure to take some time to rest before the start of the fall term. Please also be sure that you are checking your Stony Brook email on a regular basis over the break for updates regarding the COVID situation, as well as any changes/announcements that may impact the fall semester.

To our graduating seniors (four of whom are the recipients of our Scholar of the Year Award, profiled in this edition), we wish you the VERY best as you begin this new chapter in your lives, and we are extremely honored to have been part of your journey during your time at Stony Brook. We know you are destined for great things, but remember, you always have a family here in the Scholars Program.

Be well, have a safe and happy summer.

Best wishes,
Jeremy, Brian, and Nancy

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1. **THE TORCH NEWSLETTER**
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According to a 2019 study, women account for 27% of workers in STEM-qualified industries. Women of color account for only 14%. Moreover, women in STEM are paid, on average, 19% less than men. The gender gap within STEM fields is quite obvious, and persists globally. This gap is perpetuated through education disparity, gender stereotypes, discrimination and lack of support/community within the field. As a result, women in STEM face intimidation, feeling “small” and out of place in their careers. Therefore, it is incredibly important to open a dialogue and show young women in STEM that they can hold a place within their chosen fields. In this community dialogue event, titled Inspiring Women in STEM Academia, the panelists made a point to emphasize that as women in STEM, we are not alone and we do belong.

This event, hosted on Wednesday, March 3, by the Society of Women Engineers, the Stony Brook Robotics Team, and Women in Computer Science, was organized entirely on Zoom and took place from 6:00-7:30 pm. It began with a discussion panel where panelists were asked questions and provided their individual insight based upon experiences they have had. Then, there were breakout room discussions, where everyone was encouraged to voice opinions, share thoughts, and engage with faculty in a small group setting. Finally, the event closed with quick reflections within the main room.
The panelists consisted of the following smart, successful and inspiring women:

Dr. Aruna Balasubramanian : CSE professor, WiCS Advisor, and WPhD Advisor
Dr. Xinwei Mao : Civil Engineering Assistant Professor, Mao’s Research Group
Urszula Zalewski : Director of Experiential Learning, Career Center Advisor (Healthcare)
Dr. Heather Lynch : Ecology and Evolution Professor, Lynch Lab for Quantitative Ecology
Karen Kernan : URECA Director, Simons Summer Research Program Director
Dr. Eszter Boros : Chemistry Assistant Professor, Boros Laboratory
Dr. Maria Nagan : Chemistry Lecturer, Nagan Research Laboratory

Community members who attended were encouraged to share their experiences, opinions and thoughts, fostering a strong environment of encouragement and support. The panelists, as leaders in STEM, were not only inspiring but also full of valuable insight and advice. Events like these allow Scholars and other Stony Brook students to come together as a community to discuss their experiences in a safe space. Having the opportunity to speak to such influential women was much appreciated by all who attended, and it was obvious that no one wanted this event to end. Thankfully, there will be other opportunities to attend similar events in the future, thanks to our various campus departments and student clubs.

If you are interested in resources shared during the event, you can check out:
• https://www.presentyourscience.com/meet-melissa
  Melissa Marshall provides information on how to present STEM information to a non-STEM audience.

  Written by Greg McKeown, the book emphasizes how to focus on the essential, and stay productive.

• The Molecular Science Software Institute: https://molssi.org/
  The link contains information and resources for those looking to gain/improve coding skills, specifically in terms of chemical or interdisciplinary studies.

• Explorations in STEM Program: https://www.stonybrook.edu/commcms/ureca/summer/ExplorationsinSTEM.php
  The link contains information regarding URECA-related summer opportunities.

Source:
Pre-med culture contains many misconceptions; misconceptions that lead to self doubt, comparing yourself to others, and ultimately not feeling confident. This can, at times, be perpetuated by our peers having this uncanny ability to make it look effortless. They can exude confidence on the surface, but in actuality we’re all in the same situation. We all can fall victim to self doubt and insecurity. Especially with classes moving online in the last year, it’s been incredibly difficult to feel unified and supported. Attending the University Scholars Medical School Panel was a reminder that we are all human and real, and we are not alone. It reminded students of the humanity behind education - that we aren’t just names and numbers. That regardless of what comes our way, the Scholars community will always hold strong.

The virtual Zoom event began with Director, Jeremy Marchese, introducing the distinguished panelists: Andrew Kumpfbeck (of NYU School of Medicine), Ashneel Raj (of Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University), Alisa Rybkin (of Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University), April Slamowitz (of Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra University), Bryan Szeglin (of Albert Einstein College of Medicine), and James Vassallo (of Renaissance School of Medicine at Stony Brook University). The panelists discussed three main topics: preparation for medical school, individual experiences throughout their academic lives, and advice or tips for success. After the panelists spoke, the Provost of Stony Brook University, Dr. Paul M. Goldbart, thanked Jeremy Marchese, Dr. Brian Colle and Dr. Nancy Puchner for organizing the event, as well as the panelists for their inspiring words and wisdom. He remarked how the Scholars community serves as a reminder as to why he became the Provost and encouraged everyone to continue to work hard and find what brings ultimate fulfillment.
The topic of mentorship was greatly emphasized when discussing the recommended preparations for medical school. Rybkin mentioned finding “champions of your journey” that can guide you, utilizing the knowledge they have gained through their own experiences. Faculty mentors are incredibly helpful for this reason, as they can help you find positions and opportunities within the university and beyond. Slamowitz reflected on how she served as a mentor for her peer, Rybkin, demonstrating that even your own classmates can function as mentors. Mentorship creates a community of support and guidance, which is essential throughout a journey that could, at times, feel isolating and overwhelming. However, mentorship is meaningless without the drive that is necessary for success. Panelists reflected on the importance of being a diverse student and seizing opportunities. Raj highlighted the idea that students are not just numbers and grades, and how you should “do things that make you a person.” While positions within research and shadowing are important, it is essential to also be involved in things that truly bring fulfillment. Panelists reflected on their time as Scholars Fellows, student leaders, and athletes on sport teams at Stony Brook, and how these experiences provided them with a unique perspective and transferable skills they now use in the work they do today. Szeglin fondly recalled his time in the marching band and joked that it is what got him into medical school. While the experience made him a more diverse student, and looked good on paper, it provided genuine fulfillment. It is quite easy to lose track of yourself, and become someone who mechanically completes the list of what to do to get into medical school. What is truly important is dedicating time to yourself and using the opportunities presented to you to find what brings actual happiness. By ignoring yourself to fit into the box of a “perfect student” is to neglect what truly makes you unique and what ultimately is valued not only when applying to medical school, but throughout life.

It is a frequent misconception that there is one specific formula to follow to get into medical school. Hearing the individual experiences of the panelists demonstrated the human aspect of this process and emphasized the normality of a non-linear path to success. Kumpfbeck reflected on his time studying engineering in Stony Brook and how this unique background provided him with a different perspective as a student. It allowed him to contribute a “different role in medical school,” and a new way of approaching problems. Vassallo spoke about pursuing a Masters in Public Health before going to medical school. His unique journey provided him with a new perspective within medicine. It allowed him to pursue involvement not only in medicine but within hospital administration. Raj highlighted his time during his gap year after college, where he worked as a medical scribe for an orthopedic surgeon. He emphasized how the experience allowed him to grow, specifically how making mistakes is what turned out to be of most value. The concept of making mistakes is almost feared, as it is associated with a sense of failure and defeat. However, mistakes can be used as a learning tool to improve and develop as an individual. Thus, the non linear path is not one of failure, but one that allows reflection and development of oneself. The differing paths of the panelists showed that this box of a “perfect student” does not exist. While each panelist was unique, what was shared was their obvious motivation and passion for what they do.

The overall theme of the panel was humanity. When the panelists were asked about the motivations behind their work, Slamowitz jokingly mentioned how she works in pediatrics to “hang out with kids all day and watch cartoons.” When speaking to “champions of our journey” it’s easy to solely see their intelligence and accomplishments, forgetting that they, too, are people with complex lives and unique stories. Szeglin mentioned “imposter syndrome” and how once in medical school, his peers and himself “couldn’t even understand how they all got here.” The imaginary box of a “perfect student” looms over the heads of pre-med students, causing them to feel insufficient in their work. However, the panel demonstrated that being true to yourself, dedicating time to find things you enjoy, and working out of a passion and love for what you do is what will ultimately make a difference. Working in medicine does indeed change the world. This change isn’t due to a high MCAT score or a 4.0 GPA. This change is perpetuated through the genuine passion and desire to help others and to make a positive impact.
It was an excellent day for the University Scholars Field Day, run by the Social Committee. The sun was out, accompanied by a gentle breeze, and a wonderful group of Scholars was ready to play some games. The Social Committee prepared games of ladder ball, frisbee, cornhole, soccer, and cricket at the bottom of the Staller Steps.

It was refreshing to see students come together after the lack of socialization during the pandemic. Faces (or masked ones, I should say) were an exciting sight. Not only were there participants for the field day, but many students were observing from the sidelines as well. Whether in groups, or sitting alone, they had a view from the steps to see the action. And plenty of students nearby partook in their own sporting activities throwing frisbees, playing ball, and skateboarding.

Being full of energy, the participants of the field day event enjoyed themselves in the warm weather. Chatter, laughter, and stray soccer balls could be seen and heard everywhere. At one point, a stray soccer ball almost hit some Scholars, but luckily they turned out just fine. Cornhole seemed to be the most popular among the group.
I spoke to the Social Committee co-chairs, Hrithika Paul, a junior, and Scott Boyd, a junior, for their insights on the event.

What made you come up with the idea for a field day?
“We just wanted to make an event where a lot of people could join in and have some fun, you know; especially since the weather is getting warmer,” Hrithika said, “and we thought, since it could be on the Staller Steps, why not just have a game day and have everyone release some steam from the midterms? Finals are coming up.” “Yeah, especially because last semester, we had the ‘Among Us’ virtual event,” Scott added. “We thought now that COVID is being somewhat contained, we might as well capitalize on it and offer an opportunity for people to get back together somewhat. The weather’s better than the fall, so we might as well be outside,” he said.

Do you feel excited that people are able to come together even with the COVID restrictions?
Scott said, “100%,” and then Hrithika said, “Yeah, I’m so glad to see everyone having fun; especially since I’ve seen on social media sites that people are somewhat depressed because of almost everything being online. They’re losing a bit of the connection to everyone else because they can’t go out - they can’t do anything. So seeing people come together and being able to have fun like this -- it’s really nice.” Scott said, “Yeah, I definitely miss being, not necessarily in crowds, but just knowing that there are other people around. Like, walking through campus most days, is so different compared to past years. I don’t think a lot of students on campus, particularly the freshmen, know what it was like before COVID, but Stony Brook during a nice day, like now, had so many people all across campus.” Hrithika chimed in and said, “Staller would be filled.” “Packed,” Scott agreed. “Like, literally packed. Literally, like a festival most days. So, we were trying to recreate some of that to the extent possible while following University guidelines and policies.”

Do you expect more events to come when the pandemic is under control?
“For sure, definitely,” Scott said. “Yeah, I think this semester we haven’t been able to do as much, unless it was all virtual,” Hrithika said. “We were planning something like a carnival, with popcorn, snow cones...stuff like that. We can’t really have food because of COVID restrictions, but we’re looking forward to trying to do something like that hopefully within the next year.”

Hrithika and Scott both said they aren’t sure whether they will be on the Social Committee next semester, as positions rotate each year depending upon student interest in leading the groups. If that is the case, they will entrust their ‘ideas file’ to whoever fills their shoes. Maybe we will see another event like this in the future!”

It is great seeing more student events pop up around campus, and there are many more exciting ones to look forward to as well. Thank you to the Social Committee for planning such a fun event for everyone, and thank you to Hrithika and Scott for sharing their thoughts.
In my freshman year, I joined the University Scholars Outreach Committee in my first semester and later served as a co-chair, where I helped conduct biweekly meetings and organize volunteer events for Scholars. I am a Forever Fellow and helped instruct the SCH 101 class for incoming freshmen. I am a Student Ambassador where I assist in University and admissions events. In my freshman year, I was a part of Benedict Hall’s Ad Hocs where I helped assemble hall events. I also served as public relations officer in Tubman Hall’s executive board during my sophomore year and Vice President in my junior year. Additionally, I will be attending Cooper Medical School of Rowan University in the Fall of 2021.

Over the years, I have worked as a general chemistry and physics lab teaching assistant. Ever since my sophomore year, I have been a skills-based tutor for the Academic Success and Tutoring Center where I work with students on their note-taking, study strategies, and time management. I also am a tutor for Tutor Me Education where I work with students ranging from elementary school to college in science and math courses.

During my summer and winter breaks, I have worked as a receptionist and medical assistant in a primary care physician office. I also have shadowing experience in an ENT office and a group practice for cardiology. In the summer of 2019, I embarked on an independent volunteer trip in Santa Catarina, Guatemala where I worked as a medical assistant in a family clinic. Before the pandemic hit, I was involved in microbiology research of the nicotinic effects of e-cigarettes on oropharyngeal bacteria.

I joined SBU Blood Drive Committee in my freshman year and have been a part of the organization all four years. Here, I help organize the canteen and also assist donors once they have finished donating. I currently have been volunteering for the SBU Food Pantry and volunteer with Caregivers of Monmouth and Ocean County in New Jersey where I conduct weekly phone calls and grocery shop for elderly receivers who live alone. During my senior year, I have been a part of the Blended Learning and Study Center where I first began as an instructor and worked on social media for the company; for my final semester, I am assisting in the process of creating grant proposals.

My favorite experience would be serving as a Fellow. I really enjoyed taking this initiative to be a mentor to incoming freshmen students. Jeremy [Marchese] was my instructor, and I could not have asked for a better one. The 101 class was so fun to help instruct, and it was very meaningful for me to share my past experiences and connect with students in Scholars. The experience really helped me grow as a leader as I instructed classes and organized check-ins with students.
I am graduating with a degree in biochemistry and a minor in Ecosystems and Human Impact (EHI). Throughout my time at Stony Brook, I had the opportunity to get involved in the University Scholars program as a Scholars Fellow and a Peer Assistant Leader (PAL). I also spent two summers working as an Orientation Leader (OL). I really enjoyed these positions because they were a chance to help the next class of students entering the university.

I also explored several types of research throughout my undergraduate career. My first research experience took place at the World Trade Center Health and Wellness Clinic, which serves 9/11 first responders and conducts a large scale epidemiological study of the effects this disaster had on survivors. Then, I spent almost a year conducting wet lab research studying the effects of Fatty Acid Binding Protein 5 (FABP5) on chronic pain. Later, I entered a lab studying bats and am currently working on a project to assemble ultra-conserved elements (UCEs) to construct a phylogeny based on maximum-likelihood criterion. Exploring different types of research helped me narrow down what I enjoy and factored into my decision to apply to graduate school.

Another major factor in my decision to apply to graduate school was my study abroad experience at the Turkana Basin Institute in Kenya. This experience diverted my interest from public health within the United States to global health. For that reason, I will be attending National Taiwan University this fall to pursue an MS in Global Health.

Finally, I volunteer for Camp Kesem at Stony Brook, which hosts a free weeklong summer camp each year for children whose parents have cancer. I volunteered as a counselor for two summers and as a member of the coordinator board my senior year. Since we hold Camp Kesem at no cost to families, I helped plan our largest annual fundraising event to raise funds to cover the cost of camp. Ultimately, I am very grateful for the Scholars Program because it helped my experience at Stony Brook get off to a great start. It formed a smaller community within the university, and I like that you get placed to live with other Scholars your freshman year because I got very close with some of my suitemates!
My journey at Stony Brook University started in 2018 as a Marine Vertebrate Biology major and Ecosystems and Human Impact minor within the University Scholars program. During this time I’ve held leadership roles as University Scholars Fellow (now a Forever Fellow), Marine Science Club Founder & President, Teaching Assistant for SUS 201, and FSA Sustainability Committee Chair. My University Scholars involvement continued in Scholars Council, Outreach Committee, and constructing the first University Scholars boat for Roth Regatta. Throughout my three years at SBU I’ve constantly sought research opportunities such as interning in the Padilla Lab, the Mote Marine Laboratory Elizabeth Moore International Center for Coral Reef Research and Restoration, and the Central Caribbean Marine Institute in the Cayman Islands.

When not busy with academics, I focused on community involvement through interning and volunteering at the NY Marine Rescue Center and continuing to run my sustainable apparel company, Tidal Tees Apparel, which donates 100% of profits to ocean conservation non-profits. In recognition of my undergraduate work and community involvement, I was honored as a Long Island Business News 30 Under 30 Honoree, recipient of the Stony Brook Alumni Association Entrepreneur Scholarship, recipient of Stony Brook Student Leadership Award, and recipient of the Bergman Family Award for Student Initiatives for Social Good. All of these experiences have culminated in my decision to pursue a Masters of Science degree from Florida Atlantic University while researching the effects of disease on Caribbean coral species.

The Scholars community always felt like a home on campus and I was so lucky to have this support group while starting at Stony Brook. One of my favorite parts of Scholars was meeting and working with all of the inspiring, driven University Scholars students. Specifically, my Fellows experience was a memorable part of my time at SBU not only because I got to mentor the incoming Scholars but because I came out of my TA class with 14 new, amazing friends. Being a member of University Scholars has without a doubt shaped me into a better person both professionally and personally.
My Stony Brook experience was enriched through the Scholars Program. I am so grateful for the opportunities it has provided me with, including the people it has introduced me to. Being involved in such a supportive environment always encouraged me to experience as much as I could during my time at Stony Brook. I entered Stony Brook as a Linguistics major on a pre-speech pathology path, and later on added a TESOL certification, allowing me to teach English as a new language to grades k-12. The past semester, I have had the privilege of student teaching, allowing me to explore aspects of my future career. I have recently been accepted into the speech pathology program at Iona College, where I will be furthering my education. The Scholars Program has contributed to my accomplishments, and I will always be appreciative of being part of such a wonderful team.

Throughout my four years at SBU I was co-chair for the Outreach Committee, providing me with the opportunity to enhance my community involvement and leadership. My co-chair and I hosted an event at the Atria, a local nursing home, hoping to provide a sense of comfort to the community. I also had the opportunity to work as an English PAL, helping non-native English speakers learn conversational English. In the athletics department, I was a member of game day staff and facilities manager, welcoming the opposing teams and encouraging school spirit. My experience as a member of the Stony Brook community has made such a memorable impact on my life that I will forever be grateful for.
All University Scholars are encouraged to make use of their Advisors. From academic planning to research to general advice, the University Scholars Advisors are an invaluable resource to students. Please feel free to contact any of your advisors by email.

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For the most up-to-date information please visit the Scholars Website at: www.stonybrook.edu/uscholars

Congratulations on another great year, and from the entire Torch staff, have a wonderful summer!