

Leaders and scholars: Three SUNY Broome students receive Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence

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Wherever their career paths take them, Michelle Brunschmid, Ashley Cable and Spencer Nagle will make a difference – most likely in the realm of health and science.

The trio of SUNY Broome students was among 256 students from across the State University of New York System to receive the 2015 Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence. The award was created in 1997 to recognize students who have best demonstrated and have been recognized for the integration of academic excellence with accomplishments in the areas of leadership, athletics, community service, creative and performing arts, campus involvement or career achievement.

"These three outstanding students are among the most accomplished not only here at SUNY Broome, but throughout the SUNY system statewide," said SUNY Broome President Kevin E. Drumm, who noted that less than one percent of SUNY students receive the Chancellor's Award. "They are accomplished both academically and as leaders. These three exemplars are great role models for all our students, both present and future."

In April 2, the three – accompanied by Dean of Liberal Arts Michael Kinney – went to Albany to receive the award from SUNY Chancellor Nancy Zimpher. Each recipient received a framed certificate and medallion, which is traditionally worn at commencement.

"It is my highest honor to recognize the achievements of SUNY students who have excelled not only academically but as leaders on their campuses and in their communities," Zimpher said. "Students receiving this award are to be commended for their excellence as role models, artists, scholar athletes, and civic volunteers. Their leadership can serve as an inspiration to all SUNY students and a tremendous point of pride for the entire SUNY family."

A love of science, a desire for service

In addition to being high achievers, the three share a number of qualities in common: all are strong in the sciences, with Michelle and Ashley majoring in Individual Studies with a health science focus, and Spencer finishing his Liberal Arts Associates in Science degree. They hail from Broome County, with Michelle and Ashley both coming from Endwell and Spencer from Windsor.

They're also heavily involved in Phi Theta Kappa, the campus' two year international honor society – Spencer as president and Ashley and Michelle as vice presidents. They have organized events, such as Student Activities

Day, induction ceremonies and new member orientation, and attended conferences near and far, including one recent international PTK conference in Texas. Earlier this year, Spencer and Michelle were both named to the 2015 All-New York Academic Team.

Spencer also played for two years on the Hornets soccer team, while Ashley was involved in Science Club and Michelle did supplemental instruction and tutoring to aid her fellow Hornets.

“You get out of it what you put into it,” Spencer said of his time at SUNY Broome. “Being an active member of the honor society and being involved with events on campus, I was able to do a lot with my time here.”

All three also will likely wear, at some point in their chosen careers, a white coat: Michelle as a physician’s assistant and possibly a pediatrician, Ashley as an occupational therapist and Spencer as a researcher specializing in neuroscience.

Michelle – who plans to transfer to Binghamton University as a biological sciences major and later to Upstate Medical – had early experiences in a medical setting that helped shape her future. Patients don’t always feel that they’re heard or well-treated by physicians, she noted.

“When I was little, I was sick all the time. I had a lot of medical issues,” she explained. “I want to go to school to be that difference (for patients).”

During her time at SUNY Broome, she and Ashley both shadowed medical professionals to learn more about their career options. Michelle was inspired by a physician’s assistant she shadowed in the local Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, and plans to work at least a few years as a PA herself before deciding whether to become a physician.

Ashley – who is looking to transfer to the occupational therapy programs at either Thomas Jefferson or Utica College, and ultimately earn her doctorate – followed practicing OTs at Homer Brink Elementary School and Maine-Endwell Middle School, as well as UHS Wilson Medical Center.

“Being able to help people regain their everyday movement and mobility is really cool,” she said.

Spencer – who hopes to transfer to Cornell and major in Human Biology, Health and Society – became interested in neuroscience after reading the complete works of Sigmund Freud in high school. He found Freud’s approach too abstract and philosophical for his tastes, and wanted instead to see scientific evidence – the real workings of the mind.

Soon after, his grandfather’s struggle with Alzheimer’s disease spurred him to learn more about neurodegenerative ailments. “I went on a binge of peer-reviewed articles,” he said.

Although neuroscience may seem like a very specific major, it draws on the expertise of many fields, Spencer

noted: biology and chemistry to understand the workings of the brain; physics and computer science to understand the technology; math to interpret reams of data; psychology and even philosophy. The complexity appeals to the Windsor resident, who did a stint as a Binghamton University “lab rat” for neuroscience research into dyslexia. (Even a small electroencephalogram cap can take nearly an hour to put on, he remembers.)

At SUNY Broome, he has participated in research under the tutelage of [Biology Professor Tracy Curtis](#), extracting DNA from ticks to determine the prevalence of Lyme disease. He’s not sure whether he wants to go into clinical or neuroscience research, but will determine his path after gaining more experience in the field.

“I just want to increase my capacity to positively affect the world around me,” he said.

The path to SUNY Broome

The three took different paths to SUNY Broome, although they all cited its affordability and high quality as factors.

“There are so many professors who care about what you’re doing,” said Michelle, whose father, uncle and aunt attended the college.

For Ashley, it was a chance to prove herself. In high school, she found that Utica College only accepted 35 students into their OT program and feared she wouldn’t make the cut. After studying biology and physiology at SUNY Broome, she regained confidence – and renewed her determination to pursue her dream job.

“It was great to be able to prove myself,” she said. “It’s a great place to build your resume and build yourself up.”

Spencer had long dreamed of a different kind of challenge: the Navy SEALs. In high school, he spent time physically training for the SEALs – only to have his plans permanently thwarted by injuries requiring back-to-back surgeries. By that time, he was well past the date for most college applications, he said, and opted for SUNY Broome. It turned out to be a rewarding choice.

The three said they were honored to be recipients of the Chancellor’s Award for Student Excellence.

“Just knowing your potential is recognized is really great,” Ashley said. “We just like to volunteer our time.”

Left to right: SUNY Broome President Kevin Drumm, Michelle Brunschmid, Spencer Nagle, Ashley Cable, ZUNY Broome Executive Vice President and Chief Academic Officer Francis Battisti

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