



Today's Student Honoraries:

# Academics, Leadership, Service

By **Christine Hanson McKnight**  
Photos by Mark Schmidt

**D**ara Stofenberg insists she's not a perfectionist. "I just do the best I can — whatever's necessary and appropriate for the class," she says.

On the other hand, she wonders, "Why would you hand in anything that's less than you're capable of?"

That kind of attitude explains why the 22-year-old public policy major graduated at the very top of her class last spring with a stellar 4.0 grade point average. She also claimed the coveted \$1,000 prize for academic excellence as the highest-ranking member of the University's Phi Beta Kappa chapter.

The awarding of the prize was the highlight of the annual Phi Beta Kappa initiation ceremony, a campus ritual that dates back to 1974, when PBK granted the University permission to establish a chapter. Since then, UAlbany has been electing an average of about 100 seniors a year to Phi Beta Kappa, the nation's oldest and most respected undergraduate honor society, dating back to 1776.

In a joyous ceremony kicking off Commencement Weekend, 51 seniors were inducted May 13 into UAlbany's Alpha Alpha of New York chapter (one of 270

PBK chapters nationwide), culminating four years of exceptional achievement in the liberal arts and sciences. President Kermit Hall, himself a PBK member, delivered the keynote address. The inductees included six Presidential Scholars, 20 members of the Presidential Honors Society, and recipients of seven Spellman Achievement Awards, five President's Awards for leadership and excellence, three Chancellor's Awards, two scholar-athlete awards, an Ada Craig Walker Award, and countless departmental honors.

Stofenberg's parents, Sue and Alan Stofenberg of Smithtown, Long Island, were among the family members and friends who filled the Campus Center Assembly Hall to capacity.

"We're extraordinarily proud," said Stofenberg's mother. "Dara's always given 200 percent-plus."

**U**nlike many of today's students, Stofenberg (center photo above) knew right away that being invited into Phi Beta Kappa membership was an honor. That's because her mentor, Professor David McCaffrey of the Department of Public Administration — another PBK



**Academic Stars:** The University inducted 51 seniors into Phi Beta Kappa, the nation's oldest and most respected undergraduate honor society, in May. From left, Row 1: French studies Professor Mary Beth Winn, chapter secretary; Stephen Pampinella, Michael Padovani, Holly Betros, Kristen McDermott, Lisa Sorrentino, Julie Johnson, Laura Nazzaro, Vanessa Flores, Kristen Bianchino, Bethany Walter, Dana Amorino, Kristen O'Brien, Daniel Coniglio, and chemistry Professor Paul Toscano, outgoing president. Row 2: Mary Wells, Isaac Samuels, Siqi Zhang, Elizabeth Akers, Ashley Heilmann, John McCullough, Stephanie LaFond. Row 3: Susan Perdomo, Michael Manasar, Sarah Waterman, Roberto Carmack, Steven Indovino, Nathan Tobin, Fang Yu, Marcia Persaud, Matthew Dellavalle, Megan O'Donnell, Gretchen Reeser, Kenneth Elliott. Row 4: Matthew Doody, Franco Rua, Martin Springfield, Adam Wellen, Michael Tselnik, Robert Elwell, Jennifer Marrone, Elizabeth Saultz, Heather Schiavone, Adam Salvatori, Gebrielle Frisbie, Rachel Feinman, Susan Spierre. Row 5: Joseph Bruno, Roman Dubiel, Melanie Hansen.

member — had encouraged her to set it as a goal. Another inductee, Roman Dubiel of Montreal, says he had “no idea” about Phi Beta Kappa when he received his invitation. His parents clued him in. Adam Salvatori, a double major in computer science and business with a 3.9 GPA, admitted during the reception following the induction that he ignored several invitations from the chapter’s secretary, French Studies Professor Mary Beth Winn, because he didn’t know what they were. He finally responded after his girlfriend, UAlbany senior Lisa Fund, explained what a prized credential it is. Andy Allstadt, a track star and biology major with a 3.64 GPA, hadn’t heard of Phi Beta Kappa either. “I didn’t know about it, but I asked my mom and some other people, and realized it was an honor. So I was excited to be invited,” said Allstadt, adding that he intended to put it on his resume.

Stories like those are no surprise to

Winn and Sue Faerman, dean of Undergraduate Studies and also a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Faerman said that, nationally, Phi Beta Kappa numbers are down, partly due to information overload. “Students get a lot of mail, and if they don’t know what Phi Beta Kappa is, they’re less likely to respond,” said Faerman. To assure strong numbers at UAlbany, Winn and other “resident members” of PBK — current faculty and staff who were elected to Phi Beta Kappa as undergraduates themselves — assiduously pursue the nominees with follow-up phone calls and e-mails. “We do it because we feel it’s such an important credential,” she said.

But at UAlbany, Faerman emphasized, Phi Beta Kappa “is not the only game in town.”

In fact, campus-wide honoraries are flourishing at UAlbany these days. Besides Phi Beta Kappa, they include

the 14-year-old Presidential Honors Society and the National Society of Collegiate Scholars (NSCS), which was founded four years ago. The University’s newest, Omicron Delta Kappa (ODK), inducted its first class last year. In all, Faerman estimates that between 400 and 500 undergraduates are members of one of those honor societies — each of them offering a different focus and set of opportunities. Countless other department and discipline-based honoraries offer students additional opportunities for recognition and service.

“Together, all of these organizations help us create an intellectual community of students who are looking to do well academically, and at the same time to participate in the life of the campus community,” said Faerman. She pointed out that, while Phi Beta Kappa tends to honor students as they depart, other honoraries recognize students while they are still on their academic journey.

## UAlbany’s Honoraries

### Phi Beta Kappa

Chartered at UAlbany: 1974. Purpose: to recognize academic achievement in the liberal arts and sciences. Minimum requirements: 3.85 GPA to be inducted as a junior, 3.75 to be inducted as a first-semester senior, and 3.60 to be inducted at the end of the senior year, with a balanced distribution of courses in the sciences, mathematics, social sciences, humanities and a foreign language. One of 270 chapters nationwide; the nation’s oldest (founded 1776) and most prestigious honor society.

### Presidential Honors Society

Founded at UAlbany: 1991. Purpose: to promote academic excellence, personal and professional development, and community and campus service. Minimum requirements: 3.75 GPA and 15 hours of community service per semester. Open to second-semester freshmen, sophomores, juniors and seniors. Locally based.

### National Society of Collegiate Scholars

Founded at UAlbany: 2000. Purpose: to promote academic excellence, leadership skills, networking and career development. Minimum requirements: 3.4 GPA, rank in top 20 percent of class, freshman or sophomore status. One of 205 chapters nationwide. Nationally chartered in 1994.

### Omicron Delta Kappa

Chartered at UAlbany: Fall 2003. Purpose: to recognize and encourage scholarship, leadership and exemplary character. Membership: open to juniors, seniors and graduate students, faculty and staff, alumni and community leaders. Minimum requirements: top 35 percent of class; demonstrated outstanding leadership and commitment to campus and community activities. One of 289 chapters nationwide.

For more honoraries and honor societies at UAlbany, go to: [http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate\\_bulletin/academic/honors\\_wards\\_prizes.html#honoraries](http://www.albany.edu/undergraduate_bulletin/academic/honors_wards_prizes.html#honoraries).

## Myskania: UAlbany’s Original Honorary

It’s been more than four decades since Frances Cicero Shepherd, B.A.’62, was tapped for membership in Myskania, but she still remembers every detail.

“We were only 13 people out of a class of 250, so it was a profound honor,” says Shepherd, a retired high school librarian from Wappingers Falls, N.Y. “One of the current Myskania members would come down off the stage at Page Hall and stand at the end of the row of the person being tapped. The chairman of Myskania would call out a name, and the individual would be escorted up onto the stage. It was all very formal. We wore black robes. The women put their Myskania keys on black satin ribbons and wore them like a choker.” She still has her key — a silver one, though earlier versions were gold.

Membership in Myskania — the meaning of the name remains a well-kept secret even today — was at one time the highest non-academic honor at the New York State College for Teachers, UAlbany’s predecessor. The first Myskania members to serve for a full year were tapped on Moving Up Day in May of 1917. The 10 juniors, all selected for their leadership, presided the following year at compulsory weekly student assemblies and organized inter-class “rivalry” and Moving Up Day. Originally chosen by the faculty in response to a student request for self-governance, Myskania members by 1931 were choosing all of their own successors. Eventually, the entire student body elected Myskania members. The results were kept secret until the big senior assembly recalled by Shepherd. Membership settled at 13.



Philip and Fran Shepherd

In 1921, Myskania proposed establishment of a Student Association to the student assembly and then conducted elections. But it retained its role as a judicial body, continued to supervise rivalry events and maintained a kind of “elder statesman” role on campus. The honorary gradually lost power and purpose after World War II and ceased to exist in 1980 due to lack of interest and funding.

To rekindle the memories of her experience, Shepherd and her husband, Philip, B.A.’60, M.A.’61, organized a Myskania reunion in 2004, attracting 70 alumni from the 1940s, ’50s and ’60s. It has since become a fixture on the Alumni Weekend calendar of events.

The Shepherds, who are on the University’s Library Development Committee, have also initiated an endowment, “The Preservation of Tradition Fund for the University Libraries,” with a \$10,000 gift.

“There is so much to know about our past, as well as about one another,” said Fran Shepherd. “We wanted to ensure our shared history, and we realized that this desire was a great starting place for involving others in support for the Libraries.” The fund, which will support the M.E. Grenander Special Collections and Archives, has already been bolstered by a gift from the Class of 1960.

Two other Library Development Committee members, Matthew Ostoyich, B.A.’57, M.A.’61, and Sandra Bonesio Ostoyich, M.L.S.’71, have established a second endowment, the “Honoring Our Professors Endowed Fund for the University Libraries,” with a similar gift. This fund, recognizing outstanding professors, will support the libraries’ collections in the arts and sciences, said Matt Ostoyich. He cited Professor Harry Price of the Department of History as one of his exemplary teachers. The goal for each of the funds is \$100,000 by 2008.

For more information on the history of Myskania, go to: <http://library.albany.edu/speccoll/findaids/ua800.001.htm>.

For more information about either of the funds, contact Roberta Armstrong at (518) 442-3540, or [rarmstrong@uamail.albany.edu](mailto:rarmstrong@uamail.albany.edu).



Matthew and Sandy Ostoyich