2014 Fellows on Women & Public Policy

Class Bios

Center for Women in Government & Civil Society
Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy
University at Albany
DIANA ABBAS  
CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Diana Abbas is a Fulbright Scholar from Lebanon, pursuing an MPA at the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs, University at Albany. Aiming to make a difference on a macro scale, Diana completed a BA in Public Administration and Policy with a minor in Psychology from the American University of Beirut (AUB), where she also served as President of the Lebanese Red Cross and co-founded the Junior Chamber International. She worked at the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies where she sharpened her skills in digital rebranding for non-profits. Additionally, she served as Digital Marketing Manager at Procter & Gamble Near East, where she led digital activations and developed Social Media, iMedia, and eCommerce strategies. Diana is deeply passionate about public policy and international development. She served as a Senior Research Assistant at the Center for Women in Government and Civil Society, where she researched the role of women in the Ugandan Parliament. She worked at the United Nations Development Program, with the Gender and Poverty Team, where she assisted in the preparation of the Strategic Plan, the assessment of the accountability framework of the Post-2015 Development Agenda, and the publication of reports on the Gender and Economic Policy Management Initiative. Diana’s research interests include economic development, wage gaps between genders, women’s access to commercial and micro credit, women’s entrepreneurship and small enterprises, unpaid care work, gender-responsiveness in economic policies, sustainable growth, globalization, and financing for development.

NUSRATH AINAPORE  
NEW YORK CSEA PARTNERSHIP

Nusrath Ainapore has an MBA and MA in Corporate Communication from Duquesne University, and a BA in Communication from the University of Pittsburgh. As a graduate student she completed several study abroad programs in Mexico, Ireland, Austria and Hungary. She traveled extensively across the globe and developed a strong sense of appreciation of cultural diversity and global connectedness. During the course of her professional career, she has worked in the private and non-profit sectors. Her expertise in communication was sharpened through her work in marketing and public relations, most notably as a media spokesperson and community liaison for a nonprofit organization. She served on a number of advisory boards including WQED and YWCA. She has done volunteer work with refugee women and homeless women’s shelters. She describes herself as a feminist who has a strong passion for women’s rights and for addressing the unfulfilled needs of underserved populations.
Samantha Baldock  
*Center for Economic Growth*

Samantha Baldock is an advocate for social justice, striving to make meaningful and lasting contributions in her future career as a public servant. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Economics and International Business, graduating Summa Cum Laude and Senior Scholar from the University of Nevada, Reno. After interning at the 2010 FIFA World Cup in South Africa, she worked as a research analyst in a private firm for several years. Reflecting on previous interning and volunteering experiences with nonprofit organizations, as well as feeling the need to affect positive change, Samantha decided to return to graduate school at Rockefeller College in Albany, NY. She is currently pursuing her Master of Public Administration with concentrations in Nonprofit Management and Finance. Upon moving to New York, Samantha has held positions as a graduate assistant for the Department of Public Administration and Policy, a development and communications intern in New York City with Primary Care Development Corporation, and a budget examiner at the New York State Division of Budget. At the Center for Economic Growth, Samantha is contributing to workforce development and education initiatives, as well as the transition of the organization’s strategic plan to an operational plan.

Kathleen Brady-Stepien  
*NYS Office for Children & Family Services*  
*Bureau of Strategic Planning & Policy*

A native of Buffalo, NY, Kathleen is passionate about providing enhanced access and opportunity to under-represented groups. Kathleen currently attends SUNY Buffalo, where she is in pursuit of a Master in Social Work. Her professional experiences have varied from managerial positions to clinical and direct practice roles. After graduating from Vassar College with a B.A. in English, Kathleen led after-school programs in the city of Buffalo for low-income students attending schools in need of improvement (SINI). She served as the director of the Southside Boys and Girls Club, where she created and executed programming designed to prevent summer learning loss. Most recently, Kathleen supervised parent-child visits as a social worker at Catholic Charities of Buffalo and taught a GED class of domestic violence survivors, through the Buffalo Public Schools Adult Education Division. Kathleen’s research interests include development of responsive public policy measures that alleviate poverty and have lasting and sustainable impact on underserved populations, particularly youth and children.
Victoria Graf  
NYS Office for Children & Family Services

Victoria became determined to play a more active role as an agent of positive change while working as a legal assistant in a small general practice firm in Albany, N.Y. She enrolled at Albany Law School of Union University in the Fall of 2012, where she has researched the expansion of women’s rights through litigation and policy reform. As a 2013 Dean’s Global Summer Fellow, Victoria studied international human rights at the Université de Paris, and interned at a prestigious litigation firm in Paris where she researched, translated, and drafted legal memoranda. Victoria returned to Albany after accepting a position with the Domestic Violence Prosecution Hybrid Clinic at the Albany Law Clinic and Justice Center. She was admitted to practice law under a Student Practice Order by the Third Judicial Department of the New York State Supreme Court, Appellate Division. In the clinic, Victoria helped prosecute sex offenders with the Saratoga County District Attorney’s Office Special Victim’s Unit, where she researched, drafted motions, and spoke on the court record on behalf of the People of the State of New York. As a Fellow, Victoria is focused on expanding her knowledge of how statutes and regulations are shaped by policy in New York State.

Heidi Iyok  
NYS Office of Children & Family Services

Heidi Iyok is a doctoral student in the school of Public Health, University at Albany with a concentration in Health Policy, Management & Behavior. She holds an MPH from UAlbany and a B.S. from the College of St. Rose. She is an avid supporter for the rights of women and children. As an intern at Planned Parenthood, she worked on an NIH-supported research study aimed at bridging racial and ethnic health disparity gaps. She engaged African American women in low-income communities and raised awareness on basic knowledge of health topics. She also worked at NYS Department of Health on the newborn screening program. Born and raised in Cameroon, she has used her intimate knowledge and understanding of both western and African cultures to build partnerships and collaborations for sustainable healthy communities. She currently serves on the board of directors of In Our own Voices, which serves the LGBTQ people of color communities. At the NYS Office for Children & Families, Division of Juvenile Justice, she will be working on developing standards and policies for Juvenile and youth who have been placed in detention facilities.
Sable Lynch  
NYS Department of Transportation

Motivated by the health disparities she witnessed in minority communities, Sable sought to deepen her education about the intersection of race and class with gender in the lives of women of color and to broaden her knowledge about the role of policies in bridging the disparity gap. She completed a B.A. in Political Science and an MA in Africana Studies from the University at Albany. She worked at a reproductive health program for three years and interned at UAlbany Chapter of NYPIRG as Project Leader for the Hunger and Homelessness campaign. She describes herself as an advocate for social justice who brings an interdisciplinary approach to addressing social and economic disparities. She conducted fund raising for women in Haiti and volunteered in service of our homeless community members throughout the Capital Region. Her research interests include reproductive justice, poverty, and racial/ethnic disparities.

MWAKA NACHILONGO  
NYS OFFICE FOR THE AGING

Mwaka is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in cultural anthropology at SUNY Albany. She is originally from Zambia and at age 13, her family moved to Namibia where she eventually completed high school and earned her undergraduate degree in Biology. At an early age she became aware of social injustices through her father’s work with Namibian refugees living in Zambia. Her research focuses on refugees living in Lusaka, Zambia and Albany, New York. It examines the social, economic, and political conditions refugees live in and explores intersections with forced migration, gender, and citizenship. She worked as a women’s health intern at the United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants where she conducted research on domestic violence prevention, and conducted workshops to raise awareness about domestic violence. Mwaka’s dedication for working with, and on behalf of underserved communities has been cultivated in early childhood by her parents whose inspiration fueled Mwaka’s passion.
Elise Puzio, Esq.
NYS Office of the State Comptroller

Elise is a graduate of the Benjamin N. Cardozo School of Law, where she served as a Notes Editor of the *Cardozo Law Review* and specialized in the study of Intellectual Property and Constitutional Law. In 2008, Elise graduated *summa cum laude* from SUNY Geneseo, where she studied Political Science, Sociology, and Saxophone. Elise has a strong unwavering commitment to public service. Through the Cardozo Center for Public Service Law, Elise worked for the San Francisco District Attorney's Office, NYC Law Department, NYC Consumer Affairs, and the United States District Court for the Northern District of New York. Additionally, she works with teenage girls in underserved communities to improve their confidence and creativity. She has written and published several manuscripts on cyberbullying, social media law, the First Amendment, and the rights of students and teachers. At the Office of the New York State Comptroller, she will examine the classification of information assets to ensure compliance with privacy and information laws. She will also develop internal social networking policies and procedures.

Laura Salkowe
NYS Office of Mental Health

Laura is currently completing a Masters of Public Administration through the Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy, University at Albany. Laura discovered her passion for healthcare policy when she interned at the Health Care Association of New York State where she analyzed policies, and advocated for hospitals throughout New York State. Her work at the New York State Department of Civil Service has provided her with a unique understanding of the organizational structure and critical functions of state agencies. These experiences have solidified her interest in pursuing a career as a public servant with a focus on health policy and delivery of services. At the New York State Office of Mental Health, Laura will work on the Medicaid to Managed care transformation.
Mary Sharif
NYS Department of Labor

Mary Sharif holds an MBA from the University at Albany and a B.S. in Business Administration Cum Laude from Strayer University. She is currently completing a Graduate Certificate in Information Security at the University at Albany. Her business background shaped a professional career in the banking industry where she was promoted to leadership positions. Mary knew that she needed to make a shift in her career path to fulfill her passion for public service and advocacy for the underserved. She is particularly passionate about educational access and reforms, having lived and attended schools in 3 different countries. At the NYS Department of Labor, she is using her experiences in the business world and her multi-cultural and multilingual background to inform the development of responsive workforce development programs.

Kari Siddiqui, MPA
NYS Department of Transportation

Kari Siddiqui completed her bachelor’s degree in Romance Languages, focusing on Spanish, from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She earned her Master’s in Public Administration, with a specialization in Nonprofit Management and Global Leadership from Portland State University, Oregon. Kari’s background is in the nonprofit sector, where she has worked in the arts, community development, and education. Prior to beginning her graduate degree, she worked for a community foundation on the Arizona-Mexico border, serving as a liaison to the Foundation’s Mexican programs. While pursuing her graduate degree, Kari participated in a field research project focused on women’s empowerment and microfinance in Pune, India. Additionally, she has volunteered with several immigrant and refugee community organizations conducting youth and development programs. Recently, she was involved in the development and implementation of a Promise Neighborhood program in Hudson, NY. Kari’s research interests include international development, women’s access to credit, and education as a tool for empowerment and poverty alleviation.
Wanling Su is pursuing a Master in Public Administration from Rockefeller College of Public Affairs & Policy, University at Albany with a concentration in policy analysis and health policy. She holds an MA in national development from the National Taiwan University and a B.A. in social work. Wanling attributed the academic and career path she undertook to the inspiration she received from her activist aunt who fought for the rights of domestic violence victims and survivors, and advocated for more responsive policies in Taiwan. Her social work background and her work with several social welfare organizations heightened her sensitivity for the critical needs of vulnerable populations. However, she changed her academic path to a macro level focus when she recognized the importance of holistic, systemic and sustainable change. At the Department of Transportation, Wanling is examining Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Supportive Services. She is contributing to the development of training curricula designed to increase participation of DBEs in the construction industry.
Center for Women in Government & Civil Society

The Vision of the Center for Women in Government & Civil Society (CWGCS) is a world where women and men of all backgrounds participate equally in shaping the future.

CWGCS seeks to deepen and broaden political access and economic opportunities for women by strengthening the capacity of government, nonprofit and business sectors to implement gender-responsive, inclusive and equitable policies, practices and services.

Guiding Principles

- Participatory decision-making and mutual respect
- Recognition and celebration of diversity among women
- Sensitivity toward boundaries, including those of geography and identity
- Engagement with the community to inform our practices and work
- Continuous evaluation of our work towards achieving gender equality
- Readiness to embrace challenge as an agent of growth
- Proactive conflict resolution

Women & Leadership

Leadership education for aspiring, emerging and senior women leaders at critical career junctures. Research to fill the knowledge gap on the status of women leaders and institutional climates locally, nationally and globally.

Economic Security

Awareness-Raising on occupational segregation issues and issues that have a disproportionate and/or adverse impact on women. Research to fill the knowledge gap on education and workforce-related issues adversely affecting women.

Health Systems & Gender-Based Disparities

Evidence-based approaches to strengthen healthcare system response and service structures to diverse populations including culturally and linguistically diverse patients.

Safety & Wellbeing

Research & Education to systematically eradicate gender-based violence and increase protections for women.