

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

the GRO Forum

Environmental Protection Agency Greater Research Opportunities Undergraduate Student Fellowships



Where are they now? Catching up with GRO Alumni



Austin Kana

Moving to Washington, DC, is a natural choice for someone who wants to work at the heart of energy policy, like GRO alumnus Austin Kana. "I've been immersed in local energy policy initiatives from my GRO internship and independent studies at school," Austin said. "I wanted to dive into Federal policy issues and see the difference between the different levels of government."

Austin moved to Washington after graduating from Hobart College in 2009 with undergraduate degrees in environmental studies and public policy. Hobart is a small liberal arts school in the Finger Lakes region of New York State. In partnership with William Smith College, Hobart is committed to "going green" and to fostering a culture of sustainability.

After a short internship on clean energy issues with McBee Strategic Consulting, Austin was hired by New West Technologies, LLC, a Department of Energy (DOE) contractor. Austin now supports DOE's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy.

"We work to move clean energy technologies out of national labs and universities and bring them into the market," he explained.

Austin counts his GRO internship at EPA Region 1 HQ in Boston, MA, among the experiences contributing to his ongoing interest in energy issues. He supported the New England Community Energy Challenge, working with eight New England towns and communities to help local officials "benchmark" the energy usage of municipal buildings as a baseline for improving energy efficiency.

"The internship helped me see firsthand the intersection of energy science and policy at the local level," Austin said. He learned that perseverance and patience – recognizing that changes won't happen right away – are key to making important advances in sustainability

and clean energy. "Many towns and communities are struggling financially, and it's very challenging to convince them that, despite some upfront costs, an investment in environmental policy is necessary to long term sustainability," Austin noted.

Austin's travel around New England played a big part in his internship's success. "Being able to visit the towns and meet people helped me make personal connections," Austin recalled. "Some people seemed worried when I'd say on the phone that I was working with EPA, but meeting with them face-to-face really helped our work go much more smoothly." He liked the travel opportunities for another reason. As he put it, "It's hard to turn down a work trip to Martha's Vineyard during the week!"

I'm contributing to efforts to move clean energy technologies out of national labs and universities and bring them into the market.

- Austin Kana



As for now, Austin is having a great time being in the heart of things in DC. "I know I'll look back and remember working on DOE projects funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act," Austin said. "Being part of something this historic is one of the highlights of my time here." He's also learning more about other cutting-edge energy issues, like the "smart grid" approach to revitalizing the electric infrastructure in the United States. As Austin sees it, "Renewable energy and energy efficient technologies will only have a limited impact until we're able to implement a grid that's designed for these technologies."

Love GROs for two alumni

How many of us give a second thought to being placed in alphabetical order for some reason? When the GRO Fellowship review panel met in Spring 2003 to review applications for the next group of GRO Fellows, new panel members and GRO alumni Sherita Bennett and Tahir Charles were given adjacent seats. They didn't guess at the time the lasting effect alphabetical order would have.

Sherita and Tahir remained "neighbors" at panel meetings, and quickly came to enjoy their yearly chance to visit while participating in a rewarding service to the GRO program. "We love being able to give back," Sherita said. "Someone gave us the opportunity, and it feels good to be able to give the same opportunity to worthy students." Sherita, a Registered Nurse in Greenville, SC, and Tahir, the owner of Allen Medical Services, Inc., in Katy, TX, soon became friends, and began to stay in touch throughout the year.

As time passed, Tahir and Sherita found that their friendship was turning more romantic. They started dating about 2 years ago. "We've racked up quite a few frequent flier miles, since we typically see each other at least once or twice a month," Tahir said. You'd think that would be enough of airports, but last November, Tahir proposed to Sherita at the Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport in Atlanta, GA! "Needless to say, he did **not** make his flight that evening," Sherita said. "Instead, we drove down to South Carolina and ecstatically told my family the wonderful news."

Sherita and Tahir are planning their wedding for this summer in Taylors, SC. They look forward to building a family and home together in Houston, TX, where they plan to use their combined talents to create a successful business that will be the pride of future generations of the Charles family.



GRO Fellow invited to national conference

Congratulations to current GRO Fellow, Ciarra Greene, who has been invited to make a presentation at the annual meeting of the Society of American Indian Government Employees (SAIGE) this June. SAIGE's "Youth Track" works to encourage Native American youth to realize their potential to become leaders, continue their education, and seek a career in civil service. Ciarra, a member of the Nez Perce Tribe, is interested in the interface between science and Native American culture, and in ways to reach out to Native students and communities.

Ciarra plans to present to SAIGE information on her GRO Fellowship research on rhamnolipid, a substance with possible application to heavy metal bioremediation. She also plans to talk about her experiences as a technical intern at the Department of Energy's Hanford Site, where she worked on a project to develop K-12 lesson plans and activities combining traditional Native American and Western knowledge for teachers in the Pacific Northwest.

A chemistry major at Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, AZ, Ciarra is going to have a very busy summer! Her GRO internship is across the country in Edison, NJ. Ciarra will be working with the Helicopter Monitoring Program in EPA Region 2's Division of Environmental Science and Assessment, Edison, NJ, where she'll make observations of floating debris, collect water samples, and conduct chemical and biological analyses.



Summer 2011 GRO Internship Projects

Alex Guzzetta

Genomic Endpoints for Environmental Effects of Nanoparticles
Narragansett, RI

Ali McAtee

Ecological Effects of Biofuel Crops
Corvallis, OR

Allison Baker

Carbon Sequestration in Forests and Ecosystem Services
Corvallis, OR

Amy Prescott

Pharmaceuticals and Personal Care Product Support
Denver, CO

Benjamin Auch

Microbiological Treatment of Drinking Water for Pesticide, Nitrate and Ammonia Removal
Cincinnati, OH

Brian Peacock

Microbiological Treatment of Drinking Water for Pesticide, Nitrate and Ammonia Removal
Cincinnati, OH

Cailie Carlile

Global Climate Change and Its Effects on Terrestrial Ecosystems
Corvallis, OR

Chelsea Woodworth

Dungeness Crab Production as a Final Ecosystem Service of Pacific NW Estuaries
Newport, OR

Ciarra Greene

Helicopter Monitoring Program
Edison, NJ

Corina Solis

Community Energy Challenge - Helping Towns Reduce Energy Use
Boston, MA

Deandra Smith

Children's Environmental Health
San Francisco, CA

Emily Thorpe

Global Climate Change Effects on Coastal Wetlands
Narragansett, RI

Erin Delman

Baseline Water Quality Study in Marcellus Shale Drilling Area
New York, NY

Ethan Degner

Spatially Explicit Population Model for *Cyprinodon variegatus* in Estuarine Systems
Gulf Breeze, FL

Janique Cheesman

Green Building and/or Integrated Design Analysis
Denver, CO

Jess Helgesen

Evaluating Planning and Assessment Tools to Apply to Wetland Mitigation Site Selection
Portland, OR

Jessica Taylor

Green Chemistry
Washington, DC

Jesyka Melendez

Responses of Marine Crustacean Populations to Human Stressors
Narragansett, RI

Jonne Woodard

Integrated Toxicological Approaches for Assessing the Ecological Risks of Pharmaceuticals
Duluth, MN

Justin Paul

Analysis of Rare Earth Minerals Deposits and Mining
Denver, CO

Kelsii Dana

Mixed Ownership Mine Site Support
Denver, CO

Melinda Hopper

National Wetland Condition Assessment and National Aquatic Resources Survey
N. Chelmsford, MA

Melissa Haber

The Role of Microbial Enzyme Activity in Peatland C, N, and P Dynamics
Duluth, MN

Michael Thompson

Global Climate Change Effects on Coastal Wetlands
Narragansett, RI

Phoebe Lewis

qPCR Capability Development
Houston, TX

Rachel King

Nutrient Removal by Wetlands in Pacific Northwest Estuaries
Newport, OR

Rachel Lamb

Climate Change Best Practices in Region 10
Seattle, WA

Robert Reynolds

Effects of Environmental Regulation on Economic Performance of US Manufacturing Sector
Washington, DC

Sarah Larsen

Region 4 "Reduce Your Environmental Footprint" Campaign
Atlanta, GA

Starlyn Robinson

Evaluation of the Jacksonville Environmental Justice Showcase Community Project
Atlanta, GA

Tom Langer

Carbon Sequestration in Forests and Ecosystem Services
Corvallis, OR

Tradd Cotter

Assessing Chemical Exposure and Toxicity by NMR-based Metabolomics
Athens, GA

Ty Murdoch

National Wetland Condition Assessment and National Aquatic Resources Survey
N. Chelmsford, MA

Learn more about EPA's undergraduate and graduate grant programs

Are you or do you know a student interested in the environment? Find out more about EPA's Science to Achieve Results (STAR) Graduate Research Fellowships and Greater Research Opportunities (GRO) Undergraduate Research Fellowships at our website.

www.epa.gov/ncer/fellow





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Making the most of your internship

How do you make an internship memorable? Here's some advice from last year's GRO Fellows on how they did it.

"Say yes! When you're offered a chance to work on another project, to receive additional training, or to meet other interns, take it."

"Keep in mind how fast the summer goes by. While it may seem like a long time at the beginning, the internship flies by. Make sure you get to experience everything you want to experience!"

"Be energetic, be interested, and be personable."

**Go outside of your comfort
zone and do things you
haven't ever done before.**

"Take the initiative and get to know as many people as possible: not just their job title but why they're in the field they're in and even where they're from and where they went to school."

"Have some fun! Ask your coworkers about the area and events. There are always places to go and things to do; someone who's familiar with the area can give you the best pointers."

