

# Mortar Board

National College Senior Honor Society

*Scholars...Chosen for Leadership...United to Serve*



**MEDIA RELEASE**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:  
September 8, 2014

## **MORTAR BOARD FELLOWS NAMED FOR 2014-2015**

COLUMBUS, Ohio – The Mortar Board National Foundation proudly announces that more than \$30,000 has been awarded to eight outstanding Mortar Board members to support their graduate education during the 2014-2015 academic year. Mortar Board National Foundation president, Denise Rode, Ed.D., observed, “With these fellowships, the Mortar Board National Foundation plays a significant role in the development of eight members who possess undeniable talent and drive; they will make a difference in their spheres of influence. Mortar Board is proud to contribute to their success.”

Every year, the Mortar Board National Foundation awards fellowships to assist members in financing their graduate studies. Since the establishment of the fellowship program in 1941, more than \$720,000 has been granted to help members pursue graduate or professional school. Annually, members are chosen to receive these competitive fellowships based on a demonstrated record of academic excellence, strong recommendation, scholarship promise and Mortar Board involvement.

This year’s Mortar Board Fellows:

**Marissa Alfano** is the recipient of a Mortar Board Fellowship in honor of Diane Selby. A 2014 graduate of Ohio Wesleyan University with baccalaureate degrees in journalism and politics and government, Alfano’s career aspirations were shaped by a summer internship in Washington, D.C., working for the Speaker of the House. She explains, “I discovered that I love not only our legal system, but also the legislative branch of our government. Now I hope to combine the two by working to impact public policy.” As an undergraduate, Alfano served as editor-in-chief of the student newspaper and earned several prestigious news writing awards. She also participated in a 10-day travel learning course in London. Alfano is enrolled at The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law with plans to pursue a Juris Doctorate, specializing in public policy.

**Meghan Borz** aspires to “explore challenging and highly-specific engineering problems...to resolve real-world issues with innovative solutions.” To reach that goal, she began conducting scientific research as an undergraduate. Funded by a NASA New Jersey Space Grant Consortium Fellowship, she conducted two projects involving materials and biofluid dynamics, which resulted in an international symposium presentation and an article currently in press. Borz earned her baccalaureate degree in mechanical engineering in 2014 from Rowan University in Glassboro, N.J., where she served as president of the Gamma Tau Sigma chapter of Mortar Board. A passionate long-distance runner, she captained Rowan’s varsity cross-country and track and field teams. Borz is currently studying for her master’s degree in mechanical engineering at The Pennsylvania State University as the Ramier-Coleman Fellow.

**Ryan Cross** is pursuing a career in neuropharmacology with an ultimate desire to “contribute to the prevention and treatment of debilitating neurological diseases through a lifelong scientific career of cellular and molecular neuroscience.” Cross is already an established researcher, having conducted undergraduate studies in the field of avian visual ecology at Purdue University, from which he earned his baccalaureate degrees in 2014 in neurobiology and physiology, and also in genetics. In addition to a heavy academic course load and work as a teaching assistant, Cross held numerous leadership roles in his co-curricular activities, including serving as president of several major student organizations. As the Zelma Patchin-Oklahoma State/Washington State Fellow, Cross will continue his academic pursuits at Purdue University to earn his doctoral degree in medicinal chemistry and molecular pharmacology.

**Margaret Cupit’s** desire to become a pediatric oncologist has deeply personal roots. As a 19-year old first-year student at Rhodes College in Memphis, Tenn., Cupit was diagnosed with cancer and took a year off from her studies to receive treatment at St. Jude’s Children’s Hospital. Upon returning to school, she gained research experience in several scientific laboratories, clinical research projects and scientific writing endeavors. She also devoted countless volunteer hours to local children’s hospitals and community organizations, in addition to serving as president of the Torch chapter of Mortar Board. Although at one point she “doubted [she] would ever be healthy enough to return to college or pursue medical dreams,” Cupit earned her baccalaureate degree in chemistry in 2014 and is now working toward her M.D. at the Mayo Medical School as the winner of the Barbara Cook Fellowship.

**Katherine Genzink** describes the study of medicine as an “exciting field of creativity, innovation and leadership.” Currently in her second year of medical school at the University of Michigan, Genzink plans a career in pediatric endocrinology. She earned her undergraduate degree in biology in 2013 from Hope College in Holland, Mich., where she served as president of the award-winning Alcor chapter of Mortar Board. An accomplished violinist, she also participated in the Hope College Orchestra and Symphonette. Several key undergraduate research opportunities in laboratory and clinical settings, in addition to community work mentoring at-risk children and volunteering at a local hospital, shaped her future aspirations. Genzink has continued to balance academics and volunteerism as a participant in the MedArts program at the University of Michigan Medical School, where she returns this year as a Mortar Board Fellow.

**Emily Issler** is an aspiring social worker whose goal is to “encourage people to reach out for services and help make those services more accessible to all.” A 2014 graduate of San Diego State University with a major in psychology and a minor in Spanish, Issler learned about the importance of understanding different cultures and backgrounds through participation in a semester-long Spanish immersion study abroad program in Madrid. She also traveled to Ghana to teach math and English at a school for orphaned or impoverished West African children. In addition to her experiences overseas, Issler co-authored a scholarly research paper that was presented at two undergraduate research conferences. Named the Ruth Weimer Mount Fellow, Issler is working toward a Master of Social Work at San Diego State University.

**Nicole Perry** is “excited to continue pursuing a career in scientific research” as a Mortar Board Fellow. While a student at Wittenberg University in Springfield, Ohio, Perry had the opportunity to participate in extensive undergraduate research, including a study on marine biology in The Bahamas and a project in microbial ecology at the University of Tennessee. In addition to her scientific research, Perry was extremely active in co-curricular leadership activities, serving as president of the Arrow & Mask chapter of Mortar Board, principal chair violist in the Wittenberg Chamber Orchestra and community advisor for Residence Life. Perry earned dual degrees in biology and chemistry in 2014, and she is now enrolled in the Interdisciplinary Graduate Program in the Biomedical and Biological Sciences at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tenn., pursuing a Ph.D. in the biomedical sciences.

**Taylor Sutcliffe** aspires to earn a medical degree as this year’s Ellen North Dunlap Fellow. A 2013 graduate from the University of Denver, Sutcliffe holds degrees in both biology and psychology. While an undergraduate, Sutcliffe conducted a three-year independent research project to better understand the pathologies and treatment of neurodegenerative diseases, culminating in an award-winning senior thesis and lead authorship on a publication currently in press. Sutcliffe has also traveled internationally since the age of four, visiting 18 countries, including New Zealand, where she studied abroad for a semester. Witnessing global and economic disparities overseas has inspired her goal “to relieve some of these inequalities by serving others in a medical capacity.” Sutcliffe recently commenced pursuit of her M.D. at the Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago, where she plans to specialize in neurological surgery.

#### **About Mortar Board**

Mortar Board is the premier national honor society recognizing college seniors for outstanding achievement in scholarship, leadership and service. Since its founding in 1918, more than a quarter of a million members have been initiated at 231 chartered chapters across the nation. Mortar Board provides its members with opportunities for continued leadership development, promotes service to colleges and universities and encourages lifelong contributions to the global community. Some notable Mortar Board members include professional football player and philanthropist Drew Brees, former United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and award-winning actor Marion Ross. Learn more about Mortar Board at [www.mortarboard.org](http://www.mortarboard.org).

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