join us as we celebrate the

Class of '54
Commitment to Teaching Fellowship Award Recipients

2020

The Amherst Careers in Education Professions program supports and motivates a growing corps of prospective teachers and welcomes those who wish to re-imagine education and its contribution to a democratic society.

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Through the generosity of the Class of 1954, which has established a Commitment to Teaching Fund, Amherst College is able to award stipends each year to a limited number of Amherst graduates who have been teaching for ten years or less and have committed themselves to teaching in underserved communities across the United States.

2020 Award Recipients

Rachael Abernethy ’16
Ashley J. Finigan ’08
Roshana Hercules ’16

John Mead ’09E
Anna Pietrantonio ’14
Gabriela Vieira ’16

Rachael Abernethy ’16 is an English teacher, advisor, dorm head and soccer coach at the Northfield Mount Hermon School in Massachusetts. In 2018, Rachael received her MS in Education through the Teaching Residency Program at the University of Pennsylvania. While at Amherst she was an inaugural Education Professions Fellow. During her final years at Amherst, Rachael studied the work of black feminist scholars like bell hooks and Audre Lorde. Their courage to speak truth and models of self-expression continue to guide Rachael in her work to create spaces for students to be their most authentic selves. In her first year at NMH, Rachael introduced a course called “Global Women’s Literature” (modeled after the course of the same name taught by Amherst Professors Amrita Basu and Krupa Shandilya) to provide her students with an elective that explores themes of gender, equity, nationalism, feminism and the complexities of binary thinking in a wide array of texts. Since arriving at NMH, Rachael has served on the Student Life Committee, Judicial Committee and co-led a NEASC Diversity, Social Justice, and Equity Standard working group. She has also co-advised Circle of Sisters, taught Diversity and Social Justice courses and received a NMH Faculty Fellowship in Residential Life for her efforts. Rachael credits her commitment to teaching to her mentors, students and friends who have challenged her thinking and encouraged her to focus on the moment at hand. She is honored to receive the Commitment to Teaching Fellowship and is inspired by recipients past and present to continue her work as an educator.

Ashley J. Finigan ’08 is an upper school History and American Studies teacher at the Berkeley Carroll School. In addition to teaching, Ashley is also a doctoral candidate in History at the University of Chicago, where she is currently at work on her dissertation – an organizational history of the National Council of Negro Women. While at Amherst, she double majored in Black Studies and History, worked as a Resident Counselor, served as a telementor, was a member of the Black Students Union...
and sang with the gospel choir. Building on her experiences in the Reading, Writing, Teaching program and Inside-Out Prison exchange, Ashley chose to pursue a career in education, and after graduation returned home to New York City to work as a high school global history teacher through the Teach for America program. She then moved on to earn an M.A in African American Studies from Columbia University and eventually relocated to Chicago to pursue further graduate study. While at Chicago, Ashley led summer arts education programs housed at the Smart Museum of Art, in partnership with the Chicago Housing Authority, and served as a mentor with the Minds Matter program. In her current position at the Berkeley Carroll School, Ashley has developed courses in African American and Caribbean history and served as a faculty advisor to the school’s A Capella Club and the Girls II Women student group. Through all her work, Ashley has come to think of herself as a knowledge producer and seeks to apply her skills as a historian to multiple venues as an educator.

Roshana Hercules ’16 is a native New Yorker who graduated with a degree in Psychology. Her desire to teach began early, in 4th grade, and was fostered by her involvement with various education nonprofits throughout high school and college, including Oliver Scholars, Shining Hope for Communities, Breakthrough New York and the Amherst College Education Profession Fellowship program. After employing the Five College Consortium to get certified in Middle School Mathematics Education at Mount Holyoke College, she completed an AmeriCorps year tutoring 6th graders at a charter school in Boston. Throughout this experience, she realized the importance of building strong student and family relationships and making space for middle schoolers to do identity work. She returned to NYC, where she has since taught math to hard-working and talented students in underserved charter schools in Harlem and Brooklyn. In her classroom, she works to create a sense of urgency and a love of learning in all students. She is interested in research around issues such as urban charter school development, school choice, and teacher retention. She will receive a master’s degree in Sociology and Education from Teachers College, Columbia University this Spring.

John Mead ’09E grew up in Boston’s outer suburbs. He majored in mathematics at Amherst and became a member of the first cohort of Rhode Island Teaching Fellows (RITF) in Fall 2009 and now is in his eleventh year in urban Rhode Island schools. He worked with RITF as a tutor, a selector and a teacher development coach. He has been an instructional leader since 2010 at Central Falls High School, and, since 2013, as an Elementary Math Coach and a Mathematics Specialist in the Providence Schools. A 2015 awardee of the Commitment to Teaching Fellowship, he has worked with school leaders throughout Providence to help them understand their accountability data and its implications on their visions for student learning in their schools. As a Rhode Island Learning Champion, John has advocated for radical innovation in public schools, rather than gradual improvement through incremental change, and has embraced ongoing distance learning as an opportunity to experiment with innovative approaches and rethink how we support our students.
Anna Pietrantonio ’14 grew up in the Washington, D.C. area and graduated from the Maret School. While at Amherst, Anna majored in chemistry and was a captain of the varsity swim team and a resident counselor. After college, Anna joined the 2014 Teach For America Milwaukee Corps. She taught high school math, chemistry and biology in Milwaukee for 3 years. During that time, Anna also earned her Masters in Education from Marquette University in Educational Policy and Leadership. Anna currently resides in Chicago, IL, where she teaches biology and advises a class of 11th grade students at Chicago Bulls College Prep. She serves as the 11th grade Advisory Coordinator and Biology Subject Facilitator, supporting other 11th grade advisors and leading collaboration among biology teachers. This summer she will be writing the biology curriculum for the Noble Network, the largest charter school network in Chicago.

Gabriela Vieira ’16 graduated from Amherst College with a degree in English and Sociology. While at Amherst, Gabriela participated in various education-related opportunities, including Reader-to-Reader, A Better Chance Tutoring, inaugural Education Professions Fellowship Cohort, and Reading, Writing, Teaching. These experiences led Gabriela to enroll in the New York City Teaching Fellows upon graduating. As a New York City native, she was thrilled to return home to the same public school network that she had once been enrolled in. She became certified in 7-12 Special Education and English, and she received a Masters Degree in Education from St. John’s University. In 2016, she began working as a special education teacher at I.S. 278, a middle school in South Brooklyn. She taught math, science, social studies, and ELA in 6th and 7th grade Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT) classrooms, though her specialty is 7th grade English. In 2019, she shifted roles slightly to become an English teacher; however, she continues to use her special education knowledge to support students with disabilities in her three ICT classes. Gabriela is an active collaborator amongst her staff, working with various co-teachers each year and, most recently, participating in a “core” group of staff members who are leading the school’s transition to a new online platform during COVID-19. In addition, she has been part of a pilot Specialized High School Admissions Test (SHSAT) test prep program at the school. She is particularly passionate about tutoring for this exam because she took this test to get into her alma mater: Staten Island Technical High School. Gabriela carries this passion into her tutoring at Smith Street Workshop in Carroll Gardens. She teaches SHSAT prep classes, tutors small groups, and provides one-on-one test prep and general academic support.

Thank You
Austin Kenefick ’54
George Watson ’54

Commitment to Teaching Award 2020
Selection Committee:
Sarah Frenette, Anisa Lacey ’21,
Bob Kuklis ’61, Robert Siudzinski

Fellowship Logistics & Support:
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