

Cornell Students Complete Advanced Degrees At Geneva

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by Peter Seem

GENEVA, NY: Other universities boast when their student to faculty ratio reaches 7:1. At Cornell University's New York State Agricultural Experiment Station, the student/faculty ratio is 1:2. In the last 10 years, Geneva, which has been quietly supporting graduate students and their research for years, has graduated 139 students with Cornell master's or doctoral degrees.

Photo coming soon.

Suggested caption:

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In May, a celebration at Anthony Road Winery honored 19 additional students who will be adding their name to that list. Honorees included: Cynthia Hsu, from the department of entomology; Cynthia Stewart and Kuo-Tan Li from horticultural sciences; Andrea Ficke, Frank Wong, Lisa Hoffman, Nathaniel Mitkowski, Gustavo Fermin, Cruz Avila and Diana Parker from plant pathology; and Christine Fleet, Kathryn Deibler, Kelly House, Kristine Gerard, Renan Bu-Contreras, Valeria Acquarone, Silvia Nakai, Grace Feng and Li Tang from food science and technology.

Each of these students, with the aid of their faculty advisors, has put in a great deal of work carrying out independent research and taking classes to earn their degree. What follows are brief profiles of a few members of the Cornell/Geneva class of '01.

One member of this year's class of graduate students has been an employee at the Experiment Station for 16 years. After earning her BA in Botany and Bacteriology from Ohio Wesleyan University and her MS in Biology from SUNY Brockport, Diana Parker intended to continue her career as a teacher but was offered a job at the Experiment Station, instead. She accepted and since then has worked in plant pathology, where she studies cutinase. Parker began taking extramural courses at Cornell through the Employee Degree Program after working at the Station for six years. The program, which Parker speaks very highly of, is an employee benefits program where Cornell Employees can take a limited number of courses each semester while working, toward earning a degree. Tuition and fees on the courses are waived. Parker expects to graduate in December.

"The student is only responsible for taxes on the value of the classes taken and all the hard

work!" said Parker. "Dr. Wolfram Koeller, my faculty supervisor, was very supportive of my desire to continue my education and was instrumental in making it possible for me to achieve this goal," she said.

Parker also cited the support of department chair Helene Dillard and Station Director Jim Hunter as essential for her success. "I really appreciate all the help and support that the Station community has given me in the pursuit of this degree." Although she admits it is more difficult when working on the Geneva campus, an hour's drive from any classes required in Ithaca, Parker said more employees should consider participating in the degree program.

To earn a degree through the Employee Degree Program, the student has to fulfill all the requirements of a full-time graduate student while taking only a limited number of courses and working full time for Cornell. "It's a lot of work but worth all the time and effort," she said. After 10 years of work, Parker has done just that, earning a Ph.D. in Plant Pathology, investigating the mode of fungitoxic action for cutinase plus Tween 20 in the protection of plants from disease.

Lisa Emele Hoffman, also in plant pathology, followed a more direct route. After completing her BS in Plant Sciences at the University of Delaware, she came to Cornell and began her Ph.D. work under the guidance of Wayne Wilcox. At the Experiment Station she worked on the epidemiology of black rot in grapes. Her thesis research determined the critical period for control of black rot with fungicides. For Hoffman, who did undergraduate thesis research at Delaware, one of the benefits of doing her graduate work at Geneva was the relaxed atmosphere. "I've found working at Geneva fantastic. The faculty are very respectful of their graduate students. I'll miss it."

One of Geneva's graduates was further honored at the 133rd Commencement Ceremony on May 27. Kathryn Deibler, working in food science and technology, was selected as one of two Ph.D. marshalls for the ceremony. Deibler came to Geneva six years ago, after earning a BS in Food Science from Clemson University. She received her MS followed by her Ph.D., both in Food Chemistry, working with Terry Acree. Her Ph.D. research was on flavor release in beverages and included a period conducting research for the Pepsi-Cola Company and the University of Nottingham, in England.