

Student Receives Prestigious Scholarship

UA senior Allison Strom has been awarded the highly competitive Gates Cambridge Scholarship.

By Kristina Bui, University Communications March 19, 2010

Aspects of “active galactic nuclei” mean little to the average person, but Allison Strom’s education regularly revolves around work the average person would find perplexing.

Strom, a UA senior studying physics and astronomy, was recently named one of 30 students in the United States to earn the prestigious **Gates Cambridge Scholarship** in recognition of her intellect, leadership and service to others.

About 300 candidates are interviewed for about 100 scholarships, and only a fraction of those are offered to students from the U.S.

Strom first began seriously considering studying abroad after graduation with consulted with Karna Walter, the director of nationally competitive scholarships for the Honors College.

Walter suggested that she apply for the Winston Churchill Foundation scholarship. During the application process, Strom also applied for the Gates Cambridge program and was interviewed for both within the span of two weeks.

“When I went to Baltimore to interview for the Gates, I already knew I hadn’t gotten the Churchill. And when the interview for the Gates went poorly too, I had all but decided that I wouldn’t be going to England,” said Strom, who also is an **Honors College** student.

But Strom soon learned she was mistaken about the interview.

“The Wednesday after my interview, at about six o’clock in the morning, my phone made a buzzing noise by my ear and I picked it up to look at it, thinking my alarm was going off early,” she said.

“Incidentally, it was an e-mail from the Gates Foundation, letting me know I’d gotten one of the scholarships. I didn’t quite believe it,” she said. “I thought I was dreaming, so I forwarded the email to my parents, who live two hours behind us, and asked them to read it.”

At the University of Cambridge, Strom will work for one year with Scott Chapman, an astrophysicist. While there, Strom will study the populations of early galaxies in order to gain a better understanding of the universe’s history.

“As an undergraduate, I’ve been really lucky to have ended up here, where research is a big part of our education,” Strom said.

“The (UA) astronomy department does a good job, I think, of bringing us into the fold,” she said.



Allison Strom, a UA senior and Honors College student, also volunteers with Project ASTRO Tucson, an outreach effort that pairs amateur and professional astronomers with educators who are seeking a better understanding of astronomy and science. And when she returns home, Strom volunteers in individual classrooms in the Anchorage School District to encourage students to pursue higher education, particularly in science.

Et Cetera

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As a child, Strom was not interested in pursuing a career in science until her family's military involvement resulted in a move to Anchorage, Ala. As a high school junior in Alaska, Strom signed up for her school district's Gifted Mentorship Program.

She was assigned to Travis Rector, an astronomy professor at the University of Alaska, Anchorage, who took her to [Kitt Peak National Observatory](#) that spring.

That experience, along with Rector's guidance, inspired Strom to apply to the UA's astronomy program.

The UA department enabled Strom to participate twice in the [Arizona Space Grant Consortium](#) as a research intern and as a peer mentor. It also gave her the opportunity to network with a number of professional researchers, including Jill Bechtold, a UA astronomy professor and astronomer at Steward Observatory.

Strom currently works with Bechtold and Buell Jannuzi, the director of Kitt Peak National Observatory, researching the correlation between gas and galaxies along quasar lines of sight.

"Working with Allison has been a pleasure," Bechtold said. "She is one of the best undergraduate astronomy majors we've ever had."

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