

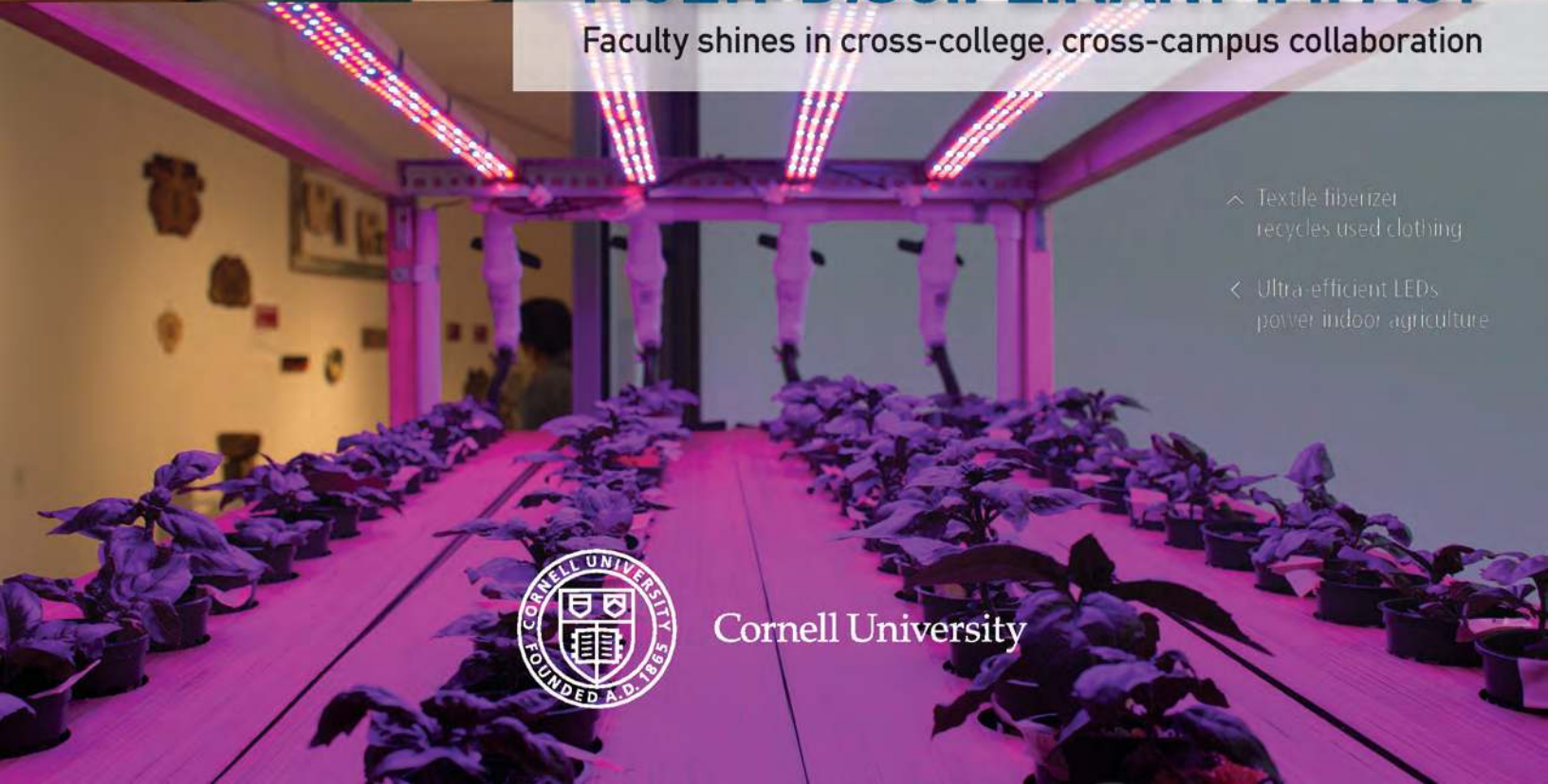
HumanEcology

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MULTI-DISCIPLINARY IMPACT

Faculty shines in cross-college, cross-campus collaboration



- ↳ Textile fiberizer recycles used clothing
- ↳ Ultra-efficient LEDs power indoor agriculture



Cornell University

Growing LEADERSHIP

CHE's Urban Semester Program turns 25



The Urban Semester Program immerses Cornell students in New York City life.



The College of Human Ecology's Urban Semester Program (USP) is celebrating its twenty-fifth anniversary. This unique, academic field-based experience draws students from across the University to explore their career interests in New York City.

"When the program was founded, it was felt that students needed exposure to the real world, the world of work and the world that poor working people of color inhabit," says anthropologist Sam Beck, Senior Lecturer and Urban Semester's director since 1993. "It was an opportunity for students to think about who they are and why they are studying their chosen major."

While the Urban Semester – which grew out of the Field and International Studies Program of the 1970s – began with a pre-professional focus, it has constantly evolved to

meet the changing needs of its students. Over the past few years, its health track has moved to the forefront as more pre-med students have joined to participate in medical rotations. With some 70 students per year, the intensive summer option has overtaken the academic semester in numbers of participants.

What has stayed the same is an integrated learning experience rooted in research and ethnographic fieldwork – and Human Ecology's long history of connecting theory and practice. "Human Ecology has had a commitment to experiential learning since its founding as a women's college, educating strong, well prepared women for the work of professions," Beck explains. "I take particular pride in supporting this effort."

Students spend four days a week at internships in various

companies or shadowing medical professionals at NewYork Presbyterian/ Weill Cornell Medical Center, in addition to completing coursework on professional perspectives and practices, participating in community service, and simply living in the city itself.

Such outside engagement is by no means an afterthought. It connects students directly to Cornell and CHE's public engagement mission.

Nutritional Sciences major Sarah Lam '17 spent her spring 2016 Urban Semester volunteering with the non-profit organization Churches United for Fair Housing, conducting health outreach through the Diana Jones Senior Center, and taping interviews for the podcast Cafecito Break. She also found time to take cooking, improv, and dance classes and explore the city's museums,

restaurants, and nightlife.

"I was excited to become a New Yorker – whatever that meant – and grow as a person," says Lam, whose older brother Hansen Lam is a USP alumnus finishing medical school this year. "I loved the holistic and flexible nature of the program. It's quite rare on campus that you get to make your own schedule or find time to yourself to reflect on experiences."

These confirmed her desire to attend medical school: "Even if my profile doesn't fit the typical pre-med, I am now more determined than ever to achieve my goals," Lam says.

Beck frequently witnesses such personal transformations in his students, who he says are treated as responsible adults in the program. "I want each student to become a *mensch*, a human being," he says. "By this, I mean that students are well-informed about the world they are entering and have the capacity to reflect on themselves to understand who they are and why they think, believe, and act the way they do – that they interact with others in an ethical manner to bring about change in society to improve their own lives and the lives of others, especially those who are the most vulnerable."

"We want our students to see that they are leaders," he adds, "and that they will continue to build on their leadership skills."

– Olivia M. Hall