fast facts

We are a place of history and tradition. Founded in 1766, Rutgers is the eighth oldest college in the nation.

Rutgers is a member of the Big Ten Conference and the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC), a consortium of 15 world-class research universities, including all Big Ten members and the University of Chicago.

We are the land-grant university of New Jersey.

3,432 School of Environmental and Biological Sciences (SEBS) Full-time undergraduate students

400 Clubs and organizations

184 Participants in Student to Professional Internship Network (SPIN)

10:1 SEBS Student-to-faculty ratio

12 Affiliated graduate programs

20 SEBS Majors
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Inside Cover: Induction Ceremony for incoming students. Photo by Matt Rainey. Table of Contents: iStockphoto, Roy Groething, Max Häggblom, and Scott Glenn.
Welcome to the inaugural issue of Explorations, the new semi-annual magazine for alumni, retired faculty, donors, and friends of the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences.

Why the name Explorations? It’s a reflection of imagination, creativity, investigation, and discovery, which are at the core of what all great universities do.

Why now? Last year, Rutgers celebrated 150 years as the state’s land-grant institution serving the residents of New Jersey. Next year, we will celebrate the 250th anniversary of Rutgers’ founding. A much more modest milestone is that 2015 marks my 10th year as executive dean of the school. Taken together, these milestones seemed to be a propitious time to introduce a school-based magazine that will communicate the impact of our research, teaching, and outreach as well as reinforce the value of a Rutgers degree.

While many of our existing structures have served us well, some will no longer be as relevant to the future of our school, so we’ve begun to introduce new models for excellence that are interdisciplinary, inter-institutional, and international. We’ve moved our faculty toward a culture of intense engagement in teaching and research; strengthened our grant competitiveness; grown our international program; completed a comprehensive overhaul of our agriculture and food systems major; created new institutes for climate and energy studies and for food, nutrition, and health; and begun to better engage our thousands of alumni in support of the school.

Even if you have not set foot on the George H. Cook Campus for decades, there is still much that will feel familiar, like Passion Puddle, Skelley Field, and Helyar Woods, as well as the timeless rhythm of students, faculty, and staff that marks a thriving campus learning environment.

What you’d experience as new is the face of our faculty that is at once more diverse and more international. Over 50 percent of a mostly young faculty cohort recruited in the last eight years are women. Our student population is more diverse and international, like those who come to us through our pioneering 2+2 programs with top Chinese universities, while more students leave our shores for study-abroad experiences that always transform their lives.

A new building that will house the New Jersey Institute for Food, Nutrition, and Health is set to open in 2015 and is but one “concrete” (though mostly, in this case, of glass) example of our commitment to transparency and collaboration in finding multi-disciplinary solutions to difficult and critical challenges, like nutritional security and global human health.

As alumni, you are the living embodiment of our impact throughout the world and I invite you to become more engaged with your school. Stay connected online as well as in person through any of our campus celebrations. I hope you enjoy the magazine and I thank you for your interest in and support of all that we do.

Executive Dean,
School of Environmental and Biological Sciences
They may not be paying attention in class—and may even be caught dozing—but Rutgers’ furriest four-legged students often make it to SEBS Convocation, proudly walking onto the stage wearing their little graduation caps, accompanied by their human companions. They’re the puppies trained by the Rutgers University Seeing Eye Puppy Raising Club, a student-run organization that trains puppies for The Seeing Eye, Inc., a national nonprofit organization dedicated to giving blind and sight-impaired individuals independence and dignity through the use of service dogs.

The university’s Seeing Eye Puppy Raising Club started in 2000 on the George H. Cook Campus. The club consists of puppy raisers, puppy sitters (who lend a hand when raisers need a break), and general club members. Raisers are each responsible for their puppy’s healthcare and training, and live on campus with their puppies in special housing. The puppies are allowed in campus buildings (except dining halls, dorms, and labs), attend classes, and ride on university buses. As part of their preparation to be dog guides, the puppies also venture off campus to interact with crowds at large events, and even take the occasional trip to the beach.

For the puppies, their time at Rutgers is on par with being in kindergarten. They’re socialized, learn basic skills, and are exposed to new people and environments. When the puppies are around 15 months old, they return to The Seeing Eye, Inc. for four months of formal training in harness before earning their Seeing Eye Dog degree.

As club members prepare to say goodbye to their puppies this spring, they get a dose of that bittersweet feeling their parents had when dropping them off at Rutgers’ doors. It’s hard to let go, but they know their charges will go on to accomplish great things.
Taking on Central Park

Thanks to Rutgers Gardens manager Bruce Crawford, Rutgers students can now experience firsthand the ways in which public gardens and parks serve the community—on the George H. Cook Campus and in the Big Apple. Crawford teamed up with Central Park Conservancy president and CEO Douglas Blonsky (CC’83) and Chief of Operations Russell Fredericks (CC’91) to develop the park’s first-ever college internship program. This highly prized, paid summer internship operates jointly in Rutgers Gardens and Central Park. For 10 weeks, interns toil alongside trained volunteers, gaining practical knowledge in areas such as horticulture, garden design, and public gardens programming in two unique environments.

The Healthy Dining Team Helps Battle the Freshman 15

Everyone dreads the “freshman 15,” notoriously achieved when newfound freedoms lead to very bad eating decisions…and packing on the pounds. But healthy eating is an attainable goal for current Rutgers students, especially with the help of a corps of nutritional science majors calling themselves the Healthy Dining Team. Working under the direction of nutritionist and registered dietitian Peggy Policastro (GSNB’93) in conjunction with Rutgers Dining Services, run by executive director Joe Charette (CC’77), the team not only educates students on healthy eating but also provides insight into student eating trends to help guide dining hall offerings that are both delicious and nutritious.

Saving the Oyster

Lauren Huey (SEBS’15) may be a brand new Rutgers alumna, but with four years as an Honors Program scholar under her belt, she’s already an old hand at fighting to save the oysters in the Delaware Bay. Fascinated with ocean invertebrates since she was a young girl, Huey took advantage of hands-on research opportunities starting in her sophomore year, and capped her senior year with a research project on oyster disease. She also worked as a student intern at the Rutgers Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory, a key partner in helping revive the Delaware Bay oyster population decimated by disease and overharvesting. Next up? Huey’s plans are to study marine policy and biology in graduate school, and eventually work in the aquaculture industry.

This research project at Haskin is funded by the National Science Foundation and collaborates with other academic institutions. The goal is to learn more about how disease develops and is spread in marine systems.
The Early Years

“In 1862, Abraham Lincoln signed the Land Grant Act … which transformed U.S. higher education, broadening its focus from religion and the classics to embrace the natural sciences, agriculture, and engineering. The Act created a mechanism to educate the ‘industrial classes’ and provide an engine of social mobility through practical education.

“To carry out the land-grant mandate, Rutgers College created Rutgers Scientific School (formally, The State College for the Benefit of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts), and George H. Cook was named its first dean and professor of agriculture. Cook had led the campaign that gained Rutgers this status; in doing so, I believe, he had more to do with Rutgers University as it exists today than any other single individual in its 250-year history.

“Early records show that studies in engineering and mechanics were at first more popular than those in agriculture. Nevertheless, studies in botany, entomology, zoology, chemistry, and applied programs important to the state—like research on mosquitoes and shellfish—became parts of the curriculum by the early 20th century.”

George H. Cook “had more to do with Rutgers University as it exists today than any other single individual in its 250-year history.”

So states Executive Dean Bob Goodman of the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences in an article written for the commemorative book marking the 250th anniversary of Rutgers’ founding. As a prelude to the Rutgers 250 kick-off in November 2015, the school recently celebrated the 150th anniversary of Rutgers’ designation in 1864 as the land-grant institution for New Jersey. Here are excerpts from Dean Goodman’s article.
Professors’ work in the area of soil bacteria led to the discovery in the 1930s and 1940s of antibiotics by Selman Waksman and his students, which led to the development of streptomycin, highly effective in controlling tuberculosis. This earned Waksman the 1952 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine. “Waksman is the only Rutgers faculty member to date to receive a Nobel Prize.”

What’s In a Name?

“The New Jersey Legislature in 1917 had designated the State College of Agriculture as the State University of New Jersey, unleashing a significant controversy that led, in 1921, to the formal creation of the New Jersey College of Agriculture (NJCA), … the public college that combined with the two private colleges, Rutgers College and Douglass College, to form the nucleus of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, in 1956 … The College of Agriculture at Rutgers … took a stand in the early 1960s by adding to its name the word ‘environmental’—Rutgers College of Agriculture and Environmental Science (CAES). Industrialization of agriculture was in full swing, … New Jersey was a major supplier [of pesticides and inorganic fertilizers], and many of these industries we now know contributed their share of pollution of groundwater and estuaries … [which] we are still dealing with half a century later.

“With the arrival of Edward Bloustein as Rutgers’ 17th president in 1972, … a group of CAES faculty created a plan for a new ‘college’ … and so the CAES in 1973 became Cook College (named, of course, for the polymath George H. Cook). It occupied its own bucolic campus (also named for Cook) and spent the next 30+ years struggling for recognition and ‘brand.’”

In 2005, during a university-wide review of undergraduate education, it was determined that Cook would remain a “professional” school, similar to engineering and pharmacy. “Out of much discussion (and not a little controversy) emerged the name we have today, the Rutgers School of Environmental and Biological Sciences. The faculty of the school quickly coalesced around three high-level guiding themes that I articulated for the school: food, nutrition, and health; climate and energy; and international education.”

The Future

“Public, comprehensive research universities that emerged from the land-grant movement of the 19th century … are today struggling to define their future roles … But I believe that there remains an over-arching role for these large, complicated, and expensive institutions … All human progress in science, in technology, and in the arts and humanities depends on people with different knowledge and experiences coming together in places and institutions where ideas are shared, problems are solved, the next generation can learn, and societal needs, including governance, can be advanced. No other institution of human invention is more suited to addressing these issues than the large, comprehensive public university.”

To order the anniversary commemorative book, “Rutgers: A 250th Anniversary Portrait,” visit RU250.com/book on the web or send an email to rutgers250@rutgers.edu.
Professor Max Häggblom’s expertise is bacteria. To be precise, his research centers on environmental and applied microbiology, particularly the study of the “unusual appetites” of bacteria and their role in the biodegradation and detoxification of anthropogenic (man-made) pollutants. Even if you don’t quite understand what that involves, you’re likely not thinking that food is even remotely connected to the professor’s work.

But you’d be mistaken. For the past five summers, Häggblom has taught an intensive two-week, 3-credit course called “Microbiology and Culture of Cheese and Wine,” a hugely popular global learning experience for undergraduates in the life sciences. Students participate in lectures, group projects, and field trips on site in the host city of Cluny, France, located in southern Burgundy. The goal is to emerge with a greater understanding of the science and culture of cheese and wine manufacturing.

Students learn the history of viticulture, the science of ethanol fermentation, and the complexity of the chemical and biological reactions during maturation that give wine its character. Also taught is how milk is processed into cheese, and the central role bacteria and fungi play in this process. And, yes, they get to savor the complex tastes and aromas of the diverse cheese varieties of the region.

While not quite earning him “rock star” status, word of Häggblom’s course has Rutgers faculty and staff clamoring for the occasional mini-version offered closer to home on the George H. Cook Campus—of course, with artisan cheese and fine wine tastings as the ultimate prize.

When not teaching this popular course, Häggblom spends his time teaching in the undergraduate and graduate microbiology programs, as he’s done since he came to Rutgers in 1993. He also chairs the Department of Biochemistry and Microbiology. Among his most meaningful awards is the 2014 SIMB Waksman Outstanding Teaching Award from the Society of Industrial Microbiology and Biotechnology; the nomination came from his former and current post-doctoral, graduate, and undergraduate students.

One of them, Preshita Gadkari, who graduated in 2012 with bachelor’s degrees in biotechnology and microbiology and who is currently in the doctoral program for microbial biology, calls him “an incredible teacher, scientist, leader, and advisor.” We’ll toast to that.
“If I were to try and answer the age-old question of what I want to be when I grow up, I would probably say I want to be Dr. Clark. I want to influence students the way Dr. Clark has influenced me.” Such is one student’s appraisal of the effect George Clark has had on undergraduates in the Department of Human Ecology. And in a large institution where it can be hard to make personal connections with faculty, Clark has been described as downright warm and fuzzy. Clark, an instructor in the department for more than 30 years, was named SEBS’ Outstanding Academic Advisor in 2010 and describes himself as a “Rutgers lifer,” having received his bachelor’s and doctoral degrees from Rutgers. His wife, Pat (CC’73), and his three children are also Rutgers graduates. Perhaps this tradition helps him connect so well with students. As another put it, “George must be the most approachable professor at Rutgers because almost every time I am in the Cook Office Building, there is a waiting room of students in line to speak with him.”

Though the name suggests otherwise, the New Jersey Pine Barrens are “anything but barren,” says Ning Zhang, assistant professor of fungal biology. For Zhang, this area of more than one million protected acres, encompassing seven counties in southern New Jersey, is unique and vast—and vastly understudied—and it offers an ecosystem rich in microbial biodiversity. As a microbial specialist, Zhang has focused on the study of fungi, especially in the Pine Barrens, since coming to Rutgers in 2009. Recently, she’s discovered new fungal species that she believes help grasses and other plants survive in the marginal soils and stressed environment of the Pine Barrens. Zhang is using this discovery to develop a system that rapidly identifies microbes that cause turfgrass diseases because, ultimately, stemming disease is crucial for the success of New Jersey’s vibrant turfgrass industry, which contributes upwards of $3.2 billion annually to the state’s economy.

Doug Eveleigh is probably the only professor in Rutgers history who could pen a song about antibiotics set to the tune of “On the Banks of the Old Raritan” (writing such lyrics as “actinomycetes were found to abound”), and then persuade members of the Queens Chorale to sing it. Or host a departmental symposium entitled “Microbiology with Professor Douglas Eveleigh—Sheer Fun!” Retired in 2014 as the original holder of the Douglas and Linda Eveleigh and Dennis and Linda Fenton Chair in Applied Microbiology, Eveleigh still visits campus, keeps in touch with scores of former students, and is working with department administration to find a worthy successor for the Fenton Chair. Among many honors, Eveleigh was the first recipient of the Society for Industrial Microbiology and Biotechnology’s Waksman Outstanding Teaching Award and won the SEBS Teaching Excellence Award in 2013, in recognition of more than 40 years of enthusiastic, passionate, and illuminating approaches to student learning.
If the world of candy had a star couple, hazelnuts and chocolate would be its Bogie and Bacall or Brad and Angelina. This trendy combination is driving the market for hazelnuts, with 90 percent of the world’s hazelnut crop currently going into candies and demand exceeding supply.

Unwrapped from its golden foil shroud, however, the true potential of this nut lies in not only expanding local agricultural markets, but also helping to feed a hungry world. That, at least, was the vision of the late professor C. Reed Funk (GSNB’62), a pioneer in the field of turfgrass breeding, who began an ambitious perennial tree crops breeding project at Rutgers in 1996.

He set his sights on using plant breeding to develop highly nutritious and sustainable tree crops that could be grown on marginal land. With the help of his student protégé, Tom Molnar (CC’00, GSNB’06), Funk assessed which nut crops could breed hardy trees able to grow on underutilized lands and withstand the climate of the Northeast.

They narrowed their focus on hazelnuts, which thrive on rocky hillsides and, compared with other species, are a very low-input crop. They require little or no supplemental irrigation, pesticides, or fungicides, and can be grown on various soil types, including those that are typically deemed inhospitable.

Imported plant species, the European hazelnut is susceptible to disease and also lacks a tolerance for New Jersey’s winters.

Molnar, now an associate professor in plant biology and pathology, is addressing this issue by selecting and breeding resistant and tolerant varieties that will not only thrive in New Jersey but also produce large, tasty nuts. Assisted by field researcher John Capik (CC’04, GSNB’14), the first generation of plants from Molnar’s breeding program will be released in three years.

In addition to commercial nut production, Molnar also anticipates opportunities for the New Jersey nursery industry to produce hazelnut trees for residential use by breeding several ornamental varieties with attractive purple leaves, bright fall color, contorted and weeping branches, and edible nuts.

Funk passed away in 2012, but he devoted his last years to establishing the roots of this nut breeding program. In addition to investing his expertise, Funk provided financial contributions of over $500,000 to both the hazelnut and turfgrass breeding programs so this work would grow and flourish.
Protecting the Jersey Shore

Sea levels are rising and so is the understanding of what is needed to protect Jersey Shore communities. At Rutgers, scientists working to protect the shore believe solutions must answer three interrelated questions.

First, how can the ecology near the shore be saved? As the ocean rises, many of its natural resources will be lost. So it becomes critical to find a way to support the flooded salt marshes, coastal vegetation, and animals that live there.

Second, how can the Jersey Shore's economy remain intact despite the repeated loss of beaches and low-lying communities? Any comprehensive solution to the shore's eco-challenges must include a plan to sustain the vibrant tourism industry of the Jersey Shore.

And third, how can the recreational, laid-back culture of the Jersey Shore remain intact while changes are implemented?

Rutgers ecologists, landscape architects, and social scientists have proposed some joint solutions. Regarding the shore’s barrier beaches, like areas near Toms River and Barnegat Bay, concept plans promote beach activities but move them further inland, where economy, ecology, and civic life can safely continue without the threat of weather-related devastation.

In areas without barrier beaches, such as those along Raritan Bay, proposals include making room for water by carving out land. This way, as the sea rises, there will be new areas (currently upland) to which the marshes and coastal habitats can move, securing these valuable resources. The new coastal lagoons can also support recreation, helping to maintain the economies of these communities.

Scientists don’t know the exact decade in which existing coastal lowlands will be lost, but these concept plans ensure the economic vitality of the Jersey Shore and its cultural joys for years to come, while offering security for residents, visitors, and natural resources. In the end, the consensus is clear: we need to plan now for the future of our famous shore.

Vitamin A Deficiency
Loredana Quadro’s Search for Alternatives

Vitamin A. Our bodies need it but cannot make it, so it becomes necessary to eat foods or take supplements rich in vitamin A or beta-carotene, the nutrient’s most abundant dietary form. But according to the World Health Organization, this is easier said than done for hundreds of millions of people who suffer from vitamin A deficiency, and the result is millions of deaths—many of them children in developing countries.

The good news is that a team of Rutgers scientists, led by Department of Food Science Associate Professor Loredana Quadro, believes they’ve found a way to fight this deficiency. In lab experiments, they’ve determined that *E. coli* bacteria engineered to produce beta-carotene can be a source of this vital nutrient for various tissues within the body.

In the search for ways to increase vitamin A intake without consuming foods or supplements rich in the nutrient, the team’s research represents an important step toward figuring out how human-friendly bacteria can be engineered to produce high levels of beta-carotene within the human gut. But since *E. coli* can’t be used in humans, on deck is engineering “a human-friendly probiotic strain that will be capable of producing high levels of beta-carotene,” says Quadro. Stay tuned!
Iron Chef Competition

Iron Chef is an annual competition held by Rutgers Dining Services and the RU Healthy Dining Team. Ten students are given 20 minutes to create an original recipe using ingredients and appliances found in university dining halls. The student creations are judged on flavor, creativity, practicality, presentation, nutritional content, and sanitation. Judges include professors, deans, chefs, and foodies from the university who taste, provide feedback, and choose the top three dishes. Winners receive bakeware, professional-grade cookware, and a gift card.

Climate March

September 21, 2014 was a red-letter day for over 150 Rutgers students, who were joined by faculty and staff, and more than 400,000 other participants in New York City at the People’s Climate March. Streaming down Central Park West in what appeared to be an endless sea of chanting and energized humanity, the enormous throng worked to encourage world leaders who were gathering for the UN Summit on Climate Change—taking place two days after the historic march—to take definitive action on climate change and its societal consequences. The SEBS-based organization Students for Environmental Awareness showed great energy and creativity in organizing for the march and demonstrated this generation’s inspiring commitment to work for change.
Rutgers Gardens Gala

The Rutgers Gardens Gala is an annual benefit to support the operation and expansion of this self-sustaining botanical garden and a vibrant part of the George H. Cook Campus. Held each year at the historic Log Cabin and Alumni Pavilion in the gardens, the gala presents an award for “Dedication and Outstanding Commitment to Rutgers Gardens” as well as the “Distinguished Achievement in Horticulture Award.”

Rutgers Day 2015

For more than a century, Ag Field Day has been an opportunity for members of the public to learn about and participate in programs related to the school and the experiment station. Ag Field Day is now part of a larger Rutgers Day celebration in New Brunswick, in which New Jersey residents are invited to learn more about Rutgers University through tours, performances, hands-on activities, demonstrations, exhibits, and lectures across the Cook/Douglass, Busch, Livingston, and College Avenue campuses.

Congratulations Graduates!
Uncharted Waters

The ocean covers 71 percent of the Earth’s surface and contains 97 percent of the planet’s water.

It produces half of the oxygen we breathe and controls the Earth’s water cycle, including the rains that support agriculture. It stores and transports the heat that controls weather and regulates climate. And yet, 95 percent of this vast frontier remains unexplored.

Oceanographers from around the world have raised the alarm that ocean exploration is critical to maintaining the human population, made more urgent by the accelerating pace of global climate change, which is altering the planet in ways that are still not understood. The global community will increasingly look to the sea for sustainable and resilient solutions to meet the growing demand for water, food, and energy.

Rutgers researchers in the Department of Marine and Coastal Sciences are answering that call.

Given the scale of the ocean, international partnerships are required, and progress will depend on developing a globally informed community of ocean citizens as well as the ability to better forecast the average conditions of tomorrow’s climate and the variability reflected in tomorrow’s weather. One tool used to accomplish this is an autonomous underwater glider capable of collecting data that can fill a gap in the Earth’s global observing system.

In 2009, RU 27 (nicknamed “Scarlet Knight”), a Webb Slocum glider guided by Rutgers undergraduates, completed the first trans-Atlantic flight from New
Jersey to Baiona, Spain. As soon as RU 27 made landfall, the Rutgers team from the Coastal Ocean Observation Lab (the “COOL Room”) was challenged to launch a global mission of ocean exploration with a fleet of gliders.

The team soon began planning the Challenger Glider Mission, reimagining the four-year historic voyage of the HMS Challenger, which in 1872 was the first dedicated global expedition for science and signaled the dawn of ship-based expeditionary research in oceanography.

That first expedition spanned nearly 70,000 nautical miles (128,000 kilometers), using the latest sampling technologies to painstakingly profile the ocean depths and sea floor. The modern Challenger mission involves a fleet of gliders covering 128,000 kilometers around the five ocean basins, and sampling the currents and conditions of today’s seas.

A central goal of the Challenger mission is to build an ocean-literate population through hands-on education and engagement. This will increase global ocean literacy, train the next generation of ocean scientists, develop a training platform for technology and learning, and provide a means for people to join an international science mission.

A hallmark of this project is that any undergraduate student can be involved. The students are the explorers participating in hands-on teamwork. The mission requires collaboration in a multicultural worldwide community, and prepares participants for the modern workforce. The goal is to excite the next generation to pursue science and engineering careers. K-12 students are also engaged locally around the world via citizen science projects that follow the mission.

Test flights of the new generation of gliders (RU 29) have been completed, with one mission navigating from Iceland to Africa to the Caribbean. A second flight went from Cape Town, South Africa to Ascension Island and onto Brazil. The next two legs of the mission are slated to begin in spring 2015.

The Challenger Glider Mission is based on partnerships. The current team includes Rutgers University, The University of Cape Town in South Africa, the British Royal Navy, the United States Navy, civilian personnel on Ascension Island, the University of Sao Paulo in Brazil, Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canario, Teledyne Webb Research, Iridium, and CLS America. Critical support has been provided by the U.S. Integrated Ocean Observing System at NOAA, the U.S. Office of Naval Research-Global, and the G. Unger Vetlesen Foundation.

Indeed, the intention is for the Challenger Glider Mission to help train the next generation of oceanographers; but at its core, it’s an open, global experiment full of adventure.
She initially planned to be a research meteorologist, but for Dylan Dreyer (CC’03), all it took was an internship with a New York television weatherman to realize that her true dream job was reporting weather on the small screen.

Getting there was a different matter. As Dreyer, who is now the meteorologist on NBC’s Weekend Today Show and frequently appears on the NBC Nightly News, puts it: “Becoming a broadcast meteorologist is anything but easy. It takes sacrifice, commitment, perseverance, and a very thick skin. A good dose of luck didn’t hurt, either.”

Growing up in Manalapan, New Jersey, Dreyer wasn’t sure what she wanted to study when she got to college. She liked math and science, “and meteorology sounded like fun,” she remembers. She joined Rutgers’ fledgling WeatherWatcher television program, which at that time consisted of a pre-recorded broadcast from a small room with a PowerPoint and one camera. “I worked so hard to get this little pre-recorded weather show done,” she recalls with a laugh.

After graduating cum laude, Dreyer got her first break at a small station in Pennsylvania. Eager to employ her science skills, she was thwarted by the station manager who told her, “I don’t want to see any wavy lines or upside-down triangles on the weather map. Just tell ‘em when it’s going to rain.”

Her next job was in Providence, a much larger market, where she honed her television persona and performance skills. She soon landed a position in Boston, a top-10 market, with NBC affiliate WHDH-TV. She became friends with the staff and best of all, she met the man who became her husband, her cameraman Brian.

It wasn’t long before the call came from the Weekend Today Show, so Dreyer packed up and headed to New York in September 2012. When Superstorm Sandy hit just a month later, she was on call at network headquarters in 12-hour stretches for days on end, as backup for the established stars of the business. But she wouldn’t have had it any other way.

Dreyer acknowledges that her Rutgers experience helped her develop a strong work ethic and, as it turns out, her experiences as a crackerjack WeatherWatcher set the tone for her success today. “My first day on the Today Show was September 14,” she says. “There I was on national television, sitting next to Lester Holt, a broadcast icon. I was sweating and nervous, but it was just like all the other times—you just work on making the next show better than the current one.”
It looks like a very simple dish—a taco housed in a Nacho Cheese Doritos corn chip shell. But don’t tell that to Steven Gomez (CC’01, GSNB’10), who worked in test kitchens in Taco Bell’s Irvine, California headquarters and manufacturing plants around the country for years to perfect it.

The development process was painstaking and rigorous, from working with the delicate shells to making sure the orange seasoning rubs off on diners’ fingers, just like the corn chip does. By the time of the national launch in 2012, millions of shells had been stockpiled across the country to prepare for impending demand, and for good reason—the launch itself was one of the most successful in fast food history.

“In the world of food product development, the amazing success of Doritos Locos Tacos may sound like one of those once-in-a-lifetime blockbuster products,” Gomez says. “But when you combine world class teams with a brand that embraces an innovative culture, as Taco Bell does, you will see a lot more blockbusters like this in the future.”

Gomez didn’t come to Rutgers with Doritos Locos Tacos—or even food science—on the brain. “I grew up in Union, New Jersey, and chose Rutgers because it is a great state school educationally and value-wise,” he remembers. “I started at Livingston College, and while I was in a business class, I started daydreaming about creating foods—things like food supplements for athletes or just new food products I wished I could buy.”

So he gravitated to the Department of Food Science and found several mentors, relishing the faculty involvement in his and other students’ progress. “The food science department has excellent professors,” he says, “and the best part is that students develop a family bond since we are a smaller group within the huge university.”

Gomez began working for PepsiCo after earning his bachelor’s degree in 2001. While he was working, he pursued his master’s degree in food science, completing it in 2010. He is especially grateful for the faculty support during his graduate studies. He says, “It was tough managing a full-time job with graduate courses, but I was able to space it out enough that it was manageable and well worth it.”

He points out, “My food science major allowed me to draw from a vast number of disciplines: chemistry, physics, engineering, biochemistry, and more. Now I get to be a scientist with the additional perks of being able to work with food and food ingredients—and in most cases, I get to eat the ‘experiment.’”
Zaid Abuhouran (SEBS’12) is headed to the White House—but not by way of a political campaign. Starting in July, he will begin a six-month rotation in the education office of the White House’s Domestic Policy Council, where he will work alongside President Barack Obama’s team of advisors on nationwide issues in education.

This plum assignment is part of Abuhouran’s internship with the federal government’s Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) program, a highly competitive two-year training and development opportunity. Candidates go through testing, in-person interviews, and other rigorous steps to become eligible for a paid, internship-style position in a government agency. Rotations usually last four to six months, and agencies may hire fellows permanently upon the program’s completion.

In his new post with the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, Abuhouran will work to improve underperforming schools through the federal School Improvement Grants program. He will also contribute to President Obama’s My Brother’s Keeper program, which works to improve educational and life outcomes for young men of color.

Abuhouran attributes his passion for education, policy, and public service to his Rutgers experiences on the George H. Cook Campus, specifically citing his dedicated professors and the myriad leadership opportunities available to students. Before he graduated in 2012 with a bachelor’s degree in public health and political science, he involved himself extensively in enrichment biology in Baltimore’s Paul Laurence Dunbar High School. At the same time, he earned a master of science in education degree from Johns Hopkins University.

But it wasn’t just college that ignited Abuhouran’s enthusiasm and ambition.

“My interest in education stems from my parents’ emphasis on my siblings’ and my education throughout our childhood,” he says. “I grew up in Secaucus, New Jersey, and also lived abroad in Jordan for nine years as a teenager. While abroad, despite their financial struggles, my parents were adamant that we receive a quality education and sent us to a private international school. My mother is also an elementary school teacher—another factor that has influenced my desire to work in public education.”

His long-term goals? “To influence the American education system positively, to ensure that all children are guaranteed a quality education, and to have an impact on the lives of others,” he says.

And who knows, even though Abuhouran maintains he has no ambitions to run for high office, he just might someday be headed to the White House in a different—and much more public—way.
The principle of “one medicine” or, as it is sometimes called, “one health,” deems that the relationship between human and animal medicine—and public health and the environment—is inseparable.

In practice, one medicine inspires inclusive collaborations among physicians and veterinarians, yielding outcomes beneficial to all involved. Ralph Brinster, V.M.D., Ph.D. exemplifies this concept.

A 1953 graduate of the Rutgers College of Agriculture’s Department of Animal Sciences, he went on to receive his veterinary degree and his doctorate in physiology from the University of Pennsylvania.

In the 1980s, his reproductive work resulted in the production of a “super mouse” about twice the size of a normal rodent, which landed on the cover of Nature magazine and generated headlines all over the world. His work led more recently to spermatogonial stem cell research, with further implications for understanding human reproduction and disease prevention.

A few years ago, Brinster was honored at the White House, under the auspices of the National Science Foundation, with the 2010 National Medal of Science—the highest honor the U.S. government bestows on scientists. His citation celebrated “his fundamental contributions to the development and use of transgenic mice,” generating “a revolution in biology, medicine, and agriculture.” Specifically, his research provided the experimental foundation for progress in germ line (the cells that give rise to sperm and eggs) in a range of species.

Brinster’s recent White House medal is just one of the many national and international honors he has received. He was awarded the prestigious Wolf Prize in Medicine from the president of Israel, the Gairdner Foundation International Award (now called the Canada Gairdner International Award), the Distinguished Service Award from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Charles-Léopold Mayer Prize from the French Academy of Sciences, and the first March of Dimes Prize in Developmental Biology, to name a few.

He also received the George H. Cook Distinguished Alumni Award in 1999 and received an honorary degree from Rutgers in 2000. He is currently the Richard King Mellon Professor of Reproductive Physiology with the School of Veterinary Medicine and the Graduate School at Penn.

One article about Brinster noted that while he declined to reveal his age, “his retirement is not in sight.” So, no doubt, more accolades are in store for this brilliant trailblazer.
Dick Merritt, who earned his bachelor’s degree in agriculture and environmental science in 1954 and his master’s and doctoral degrees in horticulture in 1956 and 1961, respectively, began as an undergraduate at Rutgers’ “ag school,” residing in a cooperative living house on campus. It was called Phelps House and was located where the Sears store currently stands. He was provided this opportunity thanks to professor Frank G. Helyar, who created low-cost alternatives to college dormitories during the Great Depression of the 1930s.

When Merritt became dean of resident instruction of what was then the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences, he remained dedicated to Helyar’s vision. In the 1960s, he worked closely with Phelps House alumni (and those of the Towers, the piggery, and other places where Professor Helyar housed students) to raise money to build a dedicated unit for cooperative living on campus. The new facility, named Helyar House, served to memorialize Professor Helyar’s impact on so many students in need of affordable housing. It was completed in 1968 and could accommodate up to 40 men each year. In 2002, it became coed.

Today, Helyar House residents have a greater responsibility of self-government than those living in traditional residence halls. Under the supervision and guidance of a University Resident Counselor, house members work together to achieve common goals in a supportive living environment. In addition to reduced housing and meal expenses, Helyar House students are also awarded scholarships, which are primarily supported by Rutgers’ cooperative living alumni. Each year, over $36,000 in scholarship funds are provided.

Merritt was dedicated to Helyar House, serving as secretary of its alumni association. When he died in 2011, he left a bequest to help continue the experience of on-campus, cooperative housing started by professor Helyar, and carried on today by the alumni he helped.
Going International

Barry Adler, DVM (CAES’72), founder and director of the Woodbridge Veterinary Group and Hospital in Woodbridge, New Jersey, has kept close ties to the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences and Rutgers over the years. He and his wife, Deborah, believe in the value of a Rutgers education and, like many alumni and spouses, they have generously supported Rutgers—from encouraging talented students to attend, to volunteering at alumni activities and advocating for a stronger Rutgers. In addition, Adler has worked with the school’s Office of International Programs to establish the first scholarship for international study. The Adler scholarship provides financial aid for international summer study for those who otherwise would not have this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Since 2009, more than 90 students have been able to travel abroad thanks to the Adlers and other alumni who are supporting international education here at SEBS.

Read All About It!

A global leader renowned for his astuteness in food, water, and environmental trends, Lester R. Brown (AG’55) acknowledged in his autobiography that his New Jersey roots are what nurtured his big-thinking abilities. Brown, who grew up on a farm in South Jersey, broadened his perspective on agriculture and science while an undergraduate at Rutgers. And, this year, his over-50-year career as a noted author, speaker, and adviser concludes with a chapter that brings him back to campus.

Brown is closing the Earth Policy Institute (EPI), the think tank he founded. Rutgers will take over the management of EPI’s website and maintain it as an archive, and establish a Lester R. Brown Reading Room on the George H. Cook Campus to house the entire collection of Brown’s books. In addition to these holdings, Brown is leaving Rutgers $1 million in his will to support the university’s work on environmental issues.

Corporate Stewardship

The horseshoe crab, a declining species, plays a vital role in its bay shore habitat—its eggs provide food for the migratory Red Knot bird, which is also in decline. Surprisingly, these crabs also provide a vital service outside of their habitat. Their unique blue blood is used by pharmaceutical companies to test intravenous solutions for contamination. This means they’re often plucked from their waters and brought to facilities to “donate blood” before they are returned to the sea.

To preserve this species, the Rutgers Aquaculture Innovation Center is raising thousands of horseshoe crabs to release into the ocean. This horseshoe crab enhancement project, funded by an initial gift from E.I. DuPont’s “Clear Into the Future” program, focuses on increasing the survival rate of the crab during its early life stages. A new crowd-sourcing effort is about to launch, as well, to infuse much-needed support into this vital program.
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All around the university, we’re hearing “Thanks a billion!” That is a reference to the $1.037 billion raised universitywide during the “Our Rutgers, Our Future” capital campaign that ended December 31, 2014. We wish to thank our alumni and friends who supported the campaign, our students, faculty, staff, school programs, and facilities, and our commitment to teaching, research, and community service. Names of selected donors appear on these pages, and all campaign donors to the School of Environmental and Biological Sciences and the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station/Rutgers Cooperative Extension are posted online. Go to discovery.rutgers.edu.

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or email Diana Orban Brown at orban@aesop.rutgers.edu
Rick Snethen AG’43 was profiled recently in the Buffalo News series, “Saluting Our War Heroes.” The newspaper profiled Rick’s role as commanding officer in the Army Counter Intelligence Corps., as his unit successfully provided security for General Douglas MacArthur’s stay when he visited the Philippines. After his discharge, Rick earned a master’s degree from Colby College and was a science teacher in New Jersey and New York. Rick lives in Williamsville, New York where he moved in 2005 following his wife’s death. He spends time with his children and travels with them. This news comes to us from Class of 1943 correspondent J. Domer Zerbe Jr. RC’43 of Cherry Hill, New Jersey.

Lou Winters AG’46 is preparing for carpal tunnel surgery brought on by the use of a walker, reports class correspondent Joe Salardini AG’46 of Fort Lee, New Jersey. During his time at Rutgers, Lou served as president of three organizations: Student Council, Interfraternity Council, and Beta Delta. Joe notes that he, too, has recently started using a walker and intends to keep an eye out for carpal tunnel symptoms. In addition to being the Class of 1946 correspondent, Joe is a recipient of the Loyal Sons and Daughters of Rutgers Award.

Fred Braun AG’52, GSE’57 offered a piece of advice most valuable to current Rutgers graduates to “follow through on your commitments.” One of Fred’s commitments is sharing news of fellow classmates with class correspondent Bob Comstock RC’52, who wishes all alumni would be as diligent as Fred.

Fred Quick AG’53 recently attended a Theta Chi reunion held at the home of Don ENG AG’51 and Nancy Olson DC’53. Delicious food and “adult” beverages were enjoyed by all while party guests watched Rutgers defeat Navy on the Olsons’ large screen television, reports class correspondent and fellow party guest Jim Van Vliet ENG’53.

Don Hyer AG’56 retired as dean of the Ocean School of Ministry in Lakewood, New Jersey, last June, where he directed a leadership development program for eight years. He is now living in Florida and is excited for new opportunities, according to Class of 1956 correspondent Paul Albright RC’56.

Philip Gordon AG’63 recently shared a story with Class of 1963 correspondent Adrian Zapotocky ED’63. A housing shortage caused by a terrible blizzard during Philip’s sophomore year “forced” him to live on Douglass Campus and eat with the young women in the dining hall. What a misfortune! Philip was also a member of the fencing team during his time at Rutgers.

With the Class of 1966’s 50th reunion rapidly approaching, Rob Chenaux AG’66 hopes to join classmates from his new home in Naples, Florida. According to class correspondent Larry Benjamin RC’66, Rob retired in 2004 after 30 years with Loblaw Companies in Toronto, the last 15 of which he served as president of Loblaw Brands. He then established a food and wine consulting company with national and international clients.

Alberta Hemsley AG’67 shared with class correspondent Mike Moran
RC’67 that during her 45 years as a science teacher, she had tenure four times in three different states, and taught abroad for seven years in five different countries. Alberta regularly travels between Cincinnati, Seattle, and Tucson to visit family. She discovered her love for exploration when she joined the Peace Corps upon graduation. Henry P. Wilson GSNB’67 is a professor of weed science in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech. The Board of Visitors conferred on him the title of professor emeritus, class correspondent Mike Moran RC’67 notes.

Class correspondent Rick Stier AG’74 recently visited the alumni office and was able to catch a winning game at the stadium. Mark Gregory Robson CC’77, GSNB’79, ’88, ’95, SPH’95 is a professor and chair of the Department of Plant Biology and Pathology, and editor-in-chief of the Journal of Human and Ecological Risk Assessment at SEBS. Class correspondent Marcia Smith Fleres RC’77, RBS’93 had so much news to share on her classmates that space ran out to print it all! More Class of 1977 news can be viewed on the web at tinyurl.com/p5f6232. Kathleen Clark CC’82 works for the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife to protect the eagle population in this region, class correspondent Norm Schleiffer RC’82 tells us.

Phillip J. Scarpa CC’83, RWJMS’88 is president of the Aerospace Medical Association (AsMA), which approved affiliation membership of the Rutgers Robert Wood Johnson Medical School Aerospace Medicine Interest Group, whose members share and promote educational research, according to class correspondent Milan Indrisek RC’83.

Mark R. Smith CC ‘84 graduated with a master of divinity degree at Princeton Theological Seminary’s 202nd commencement ceremony.

Chris Watkins GSNB ‘85 is director of Cornell Cooperative Extension, overseeing the extension's 57 offices across New York, class correspondent Linda Tancs RC’85 reports. He conducts a postharvest science research program with a major focus on apple fruit.

Megan Malaska CC ‘05 studied the ecosystems, unique desert plants, and the diversity of life at the Bahia de los Angeles UNESCO World Heritage site and the Sea of Cortez this past summer at Miami University. She is the manager of the Bronx Zoo Education Department, which is part of the Wildlife Conservation Society. This news comes to us from Amy Weiss RC’05, class correspondent.

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