



CYNTHIA GORDON

## UNDERSTANDING TALK

IT'S A PIVOTAL MOMENT IN THE LIFE OF A SCHOLAR WHEN she comes across an area of study that speaks to her—something causing her to say with quiet certainty, “This is what I want to do.” For Cynthia Gordon, that instant came in her sophomore year as a French and linguistics major at the University of Michigan, when, during her first discourse analysis course, she encountered the work of renowned linguist and best-selling author Deborah Tannen, a professor at Georgetown University. “I ended up doing my Ph.D. in linguistics at Georgetown and studying with her,” says Gordon, the new chair of the Department of Communication and Rhetorical Studies (CRS) in the College of Visual and Performing Arts, where she has been a faculty member since 2008. “So it worked out well!”

While at Georgetown, the focus of Gordon’s research was a project with Tannen and co-principal investigator Shari Kendall in which four dual-income couples with children recorded themselves from morning until night for a week. She says the process that followed—carefully transcribing the recordings to better understand how the details of language “do things for us in the world”—is a favorite aspect of her work. “In this study, we were interested in how people balance the demands of work and family and how they create relationships in their everyday conversations,” says Gordon, who published two books based on the project’s findings. Former research has also included working with medical professionals to understand and improve communication between physicians and their patients. “Overall, I am interested in how people use language to create identities

and shared meaning—how they use language to solve problems,” she says, “and I look at that in all different kinds of contexts.”

The world of electronic communications occupies an increasingly significant place among those contexts, Gordon says. As a research fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University while on leave from SU last year, she was part of a small group studying the language of digital media. “My specific interest was in online discussion-board communication among

people who used a mobile phone-based weight loss application,” she says. “I’m interested in the ways they ‘talk’ in their online discussions about how bringing a cell phone into the social eating experience impacts their family relationships.” She describes her time at Stanford as a “really lovely” experience, both personally and professionally. “It was a nice interdisciplinary group of people from all over—people with different kinds of projects and interests who were brought together to have this year of intensive focus on research and collaborative discussion and seminars,” she says. “I felt fortunate to have the time to focus on my own research and to interact with these wonderful scholars.”

Although she says she “didn’t mean to become interested” in computer-mediated discourse, Gordon finds herself branching out in other new directions, including collaborating with School of Education professor Melissa Luke to study how professional identities develop through communication between counselors in training and their instructors, who supervise them by e-mail. She is also teaming up with a colleague at Howard University and another at Sultan Qaboos University in Oman, collecting data from first-year students in Ukraine, the Middle East, and at SU to learn how they perceive using mobile phones in educational and social contexts. In that study, she hopes to eventually use video recording—a research tool that’s receiving increased emphasis in the field of discourse analysis.

As CRS chair, Gordon is excited to be leading a thriving department that she believes is well-poised for further growth. She’s also happy to be back in the classroom after her year at Stanford, and looks forward to the challenges of her new role. “We have a good, strong, and diverse group, and we’ll keep building on that,” she says.

—Amy Speech



# DRIVEN TO SUCCEED

JANESSA BONTI '14 KNOWS FIRSTHAND the need for improved health care access in her medically underserved Bronx neighborhood—and plans to do something about it. The Falk College nutrition science major's career goal is to become a physician in private practice and open a clinic in her home borough. "Many adults in my neighborhood have no health insurance, no access to doctors, and a lot of ailments," she says. "Obesity is a major problem, and I want to help people with weight management. That's why I majored in nutrition science at Syracuse. Most medical schools in the United States offer only a general overview course, and it isn't enough. How can you give someone weight-loss advice when you've taken only one class?"

As a junior, Bonti's interest in operating her own clinic led her to become an IDEA Connector, one of a group of students from almost every SU school and college dedicated to igniting entrepreneurship across campus. "I was chosen because the coordinators hoped I would interest other pre-med students—who do not typically venture out into the business world—in entrepreneurship," she says. "Looking to the future, I wanted to learn all I could about how to run my own business."

As a 2013-14 Remembrance Scholar, she has learned all she can about the 1988 bombing of Pan Am 103. Bonti's scholarship is in the name of Theodora Cohen, one of 35 SU students killed in the act of terrorism. "After reading about all the victims, Theodora really stood out to me," Bonti says. "I'm an only child, like she was, so I can relate to her. She was so driven, always wanting to be the best she could be. It's heartbreaking that her life was cut short, and I am so honored to represent her."

Bonti, too, has that inner drive to succeed. The first person from her family to go to college, she credits her mother with instilling in her a strong work ethic, and her religious faith with the strength to meet academic and personal challenges. "I'm grateful for the support I get from my mom and my faith—they have helped me persevere when I'm faced with difficult classes and choices," she says. During her first year at SU, Bonti searched for a faith family on campus, but didn't find one that fulfilled her needs. So the next year, she and a friend decid-



JANESSA BONTI



## REMEMBRANCE SCHOLARSHIP

### RECIPIENTS:

35 seniors, chosen for distinguished academic achievement, citizenship, and service to community

### BACKGROUND:

Established by SU to honor the memory of 35 students lost in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am Flight 103, the endowed scholarships provide \$5,000 to each recipient. The endowment is supported by gifts from alumni, friends, parents, and corporations, with significant support provided by C. Jean Thompson '66 and Board of Trustees Chairman Richard L. Thompson '67, in memory of Jean Thompson's parents, Jean Taylor Phelan Terry '43 and John F. Phelan; and by the Fred L. Emerson Foundation.

ed to start their own Pentecostal Student Association ministry at Hendricks Chapel. Other students expressed interest, and this year, the group found space off campus for worship.

Amazed by all she's accomplished at Syracuse, Bonti is thankful for the opportunity to attend SU. "At first, I was intimidated about coming here, because I didn't know what to expect," she says. Assistance from the Office of Supportive Services and a Summer Start experience before she began her first year helped her acclimate to her new surroundings. "I was able to meet other students and make connections, which made all the difference," she says. To give other new arrivals the same kind of welcome experience, Bonti has served as an orientation leader. "I've had a lot of mentors at SU," she says. "So why not give back and help others?"

—Paula Meseroll





**SYEISHA BYRD**

## COMMUNITY ENERGIZER

GROWING UP ON THE LOWER WEST SIDE OF SYRACUSE, Syeisha Byrd G'12 was so distressed watching many of her friends drop out of school or lose their lives to gang violence that she vowed to commit her life to confronting these issues by working with local youth. Her journey began at the Boys & Girls Club at age 14 and continues today through her work with SU students as director of community engagement at Hendricks Chapel. "The Office of Engagement focuses on social justice issues in the community," says Byrd, who earned a master of social work degree from the Falk College of Sport and Human Dynamics. "I create and develop programming for student volunteers to help combat whatever problems need to be addressed in the community—everything from reducing gang violence to mentoring refugees."

When the position at Hendricks opened up in 2010, Pamela Heintz '91, G'08, associate vice president and director of the Shaw Center for Public and Community Service, encouraged Byrd to apply. "Syeisha came immediately to mind because her

passion for her work with youth, her commitment to everyone she works with, her unbridled energy, and her pure love of life make her a natural for the position," says Heintz, who worked with Byrd on community issues during her time at the Boys & Girls Club. "Syeisha believes she can change the world and bring everyone along with her. Working with Syeisha is like letting sunshine into the dark places."

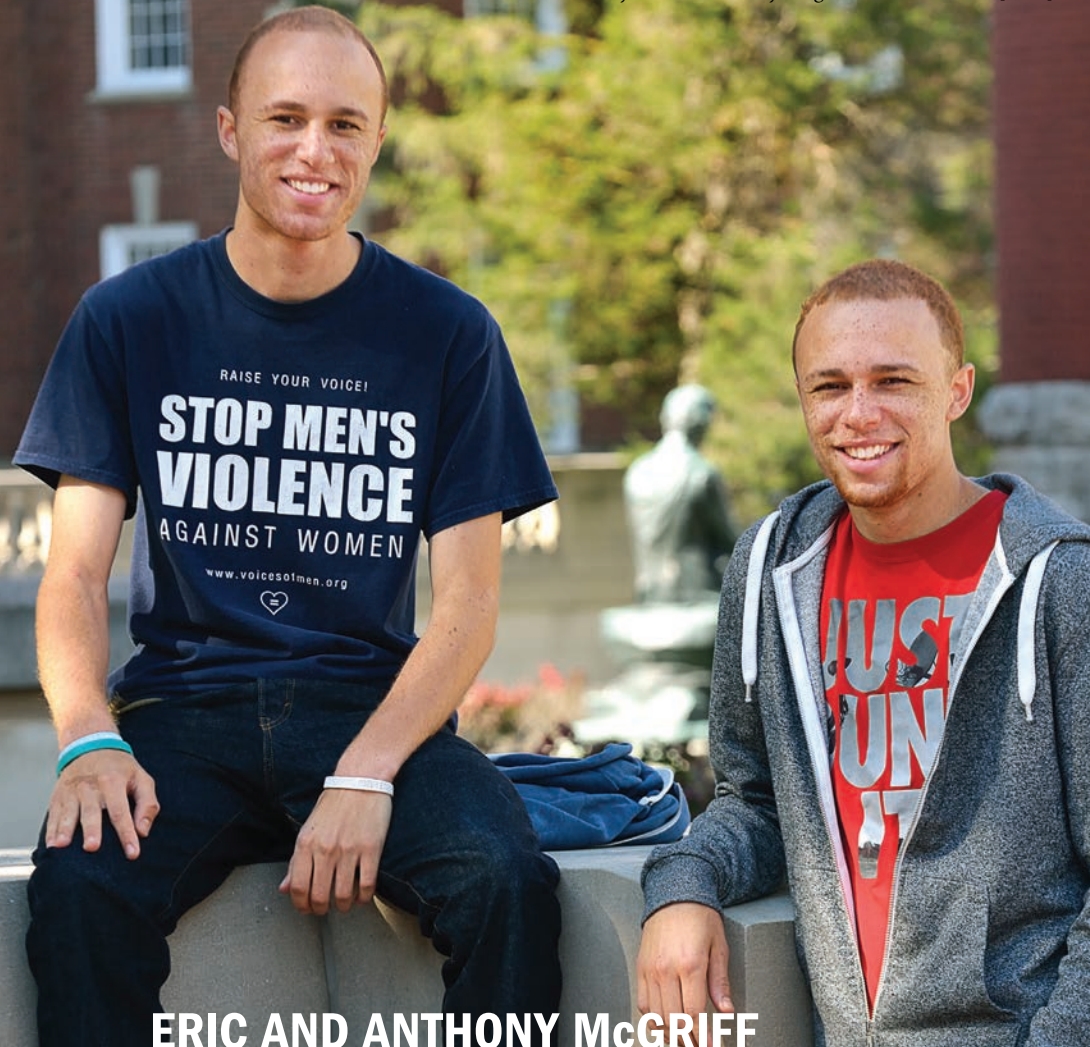
Byrd and Heintz enjoy a good working relationship and are currently developing a joint training program for student leaders. "My goal is to build partnerships with all groups on campus," Byrd says. "I spend a lot of my time referring and connecting folks." And after working with Byrd for the past three years, Heintz has come to appreciate her community perspective. "It's one thing to learn about and listen to those in the community with whom we work, but it's quite another to partner with someone on campus who is an integral part of the community," she says.

One of Byrd's goals is to build sustainable programs that not only give students the opportunity to be good citizens by giving back to the community, but also will teach them how to create their own programs and lobby for social change. Her biggest

challenge is getting students to walk through the chapel doors to volunteer because they assume her office is religious. "A lot of students are spiritual, but don't consider themselves religious, and they don't want to be preached at," she says. "So I have to get out there and actively recruit students by inviting myself to speak to classes and in residence halls and attending any event that will help publicize what we do."

Byrd's commitment to her community extends well beyond campus. This fall, she will teach crocheting—interwoven with lively conversation—to individuals recovering from addictions at Syracuse Behavioral Health Care, and she serves on the advisory board of the Center for New Americans to help refugees from Somalia and Bhutan settle into their new lives in Syracuse. She also chairs the committee planning SU's 29th annual Martin Luther King Jr. Dinner, all while raising three children ranging in age from 11 years to 7 months. When she does find time to relax, Byrd heads to a Zumba class for an energizing workout or the shores of Oneida Lake to go fishing. "I'm a Zumba fanatic and try to take classes at least three times a week," she says. "And I love to fish because it is so quiet and peaceful." —Christine Yackel





ERIC AND ANTHONY McGRIFF

## DYNAMIC DUET

CHILDREN'S AUTHOR MARC BROWN IS FAMOUSLY QUOTED as saying, "Sometimes being a brother is even better than being a superhero!" And while twin brothers Eric and Anthony McGriff '15 would likely affirm that being a brother can be amazing, they might also argue that brotherhood and superhero status need not be mutually exclusive. Okay, Eric may not be faster than a speeding bullet, and Anthony probably can't leap tall buildings in a single bound. But as spirited advocates of violence prevention, impassioned mentors and spokesmen for social justice, and accomplished professional musicians with a style all their own, the two make a dynamic duo. And they're just getting started.

The brothers' passion for advocacy work originated with their experience during high school as volunteers for a Stop the Violence Summer Camp for children in Syracuse's South Side neighborhood, a program developed by their church pastor in collaboration with the Syracuse City Police Department. "We had 8- to 10-hour days, and there could be as many as 150 children," says Eric, a political philosophy and women's and gender studies major in the College of Arts and Sciences (A&S) who feels called to tackle oppression and strive for equality. "But it was so fun—everything from playing kickball to bringing in speakers to going on field trips. To be a resource for those kids, to be there for

them—it was touching. We both just fell in love with it."

Having grown up in a northern suburb of Syracuse, surrounded by a loving family and supported by caring teachers and mentors, the McGriffs say the camp opened their eyes to the social inequities of their own community, and inspired them to be agents for change. They went on to serve as chairmen for Vera House's White Ribbon Campaign to help raise awareness about domestic violence, and entered a suicide prevention training program. "We've learned how one person can make a difference," says Anthony, an A&S political science major who hopes to work in the field of mentor programming. "As camp volunteers, we were able to impact the lives of more than 100 children, just us two people. If we can pay it forward, we can change our community. We can make it a safer place. That's really inspiring. And it's all I want to do."

At SU, the McGriffs persist in their commitment to making a positive impact, encouraging others to do the same through their words and example. They're actively engaged with the University's Advocacy Center, a

unit within the Division of Student Affairs that provides sexual and relationship violence services, prevention, and education. The brothers are involved with several peer programs at the center, including serving as Mentors in Violence Prevention peer facilitators. Both also have leadership roles in A Men's Issue, a student organization celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, working to redefine masculinity and put an end to relationship violence. They are also youth coordinators with their church, and continue to volunteer at Vera House, which honored them with its Special Appreciation Award last year.

Behind their social justice work plays a unique and somewhat surprising soundtrack: The two are talented and enthusiastic musicians who perform as a string duet, often covering contemporary hip-hop songs on their classical instruments—Eric on violin and Anthony on the cello. "We started playing in elementary school and eventually began doing our own thing," Eric says. "At age 15, we booked our first wedding. And from that point on people just loved our style." Frequent winners of music competitions while in school, the brothers now perform up to 15 times a month at SU shows and receptions, faculty weddings, or community events. "Our style of music is cool," Anthony says. "People like it, and it's something we love to do. It's our passion, but not our profession. Our first love is for advocacy work and speaking up to help people."

—Amy Speech



## JOHN E. AND PATRICIA A. BREYER PROFESSOR IN ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING

**Recipient:** Amit Agrawal, L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science

**Background:** SU Trustee and LCS Dean's Leadership Council member John E. Breyer and his wife, Patricia A. Breyer, of Alpharetta, Georgia, endowed the professorship in electrical engineering with a gift to The Campaign for Syracuse University. "Pat and I have had close ties with Syracuse University for many years and wanted to support engineering and science in a lasting way," Breyer says. "We felt that funding a professorship would achieve our goals as well as those of the University. We are pleased that Professor Amit Agrawal was selected to be the first person to fill the professorship. He is a deserving young scholar who will contribute to research and education at Syracuse University."



**AMIT AGRAWAL**

## CREATING WAVES

PROFESSOR AMIT AGRAWAL FINDS beauty in the most infinitesimal of realms, nanoscale spaces only detectable through powerful microscopes, using fabricated materials not found in the natural world. Agrawal conducts research in the field of nanoscience, specifically exploring the interaction of light with artificially fabricated materials, or metamaterials. He constructs metamaterials, composites of metals, such as silver or gold, and dielectrics—glass or polymers—that interact with electromagnetic waves or light in unique ways and, in turn, possess certain striking visual properties. Applying a voltage and shining light on these materials sometimes result in brilliant shades of reds, greens, and blues (RGB). "That's why I like optics—you can see beautiful colors," Agrawal says.

Some of his recent work involves trying to make an RGB pixel array—akin to ones in TV and cellphone screens—with special polymers coated on a nanostructured metal surface, exhibiting a variety of colors that could be turned on and off using electric fields. This field of study, electrochromism, could be especially useful in creating cheaper and more efficient visual displays. "The people in the display industry want contrast without sacrificing speed or switching efficiency," says

Agrawal, whose research was highlighted in the journals *Nature*, *Nature Physics*, and *Nature Photonics*. "There are intelligent ways of integrating such polymers with plasmonic or metal-based nanophotonic structures to achieve these goals."

Agrawal, the inaugural John E. and Patricia A. Breyer Professor in Electrical Engineering, joined the L.C. Smith College of Engineering and Computer Science faculty in 2011, after conducting groundbreaking postdoctoral research with colleagues at the Center for Nanoscale Science and Technology (CNST) in the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). "My general area of research is plasmonics. It's a fancy word for optics that is based on metals," says Agrawal, who holds a visiting fellow appointment at CNST. "It's the way light interacts with metals and it creates an electromagnetic wave at its surface called a plasmon—similar to a wave created on the surface of water when you throw a stone on it. Because of the properties of the metal and the medium surrounding it, plasmons have the same frequency but much shorter wavelength compared to the incident light—making them an ideal candidate for nanoscale optics applications."

Agrawal's research in collaboration with NIST centered on creating a large-area

metamaterial that exhibits a negative refractive index at ultraviolet frequencies. Agrawal and his NIST colleagues constructed the metamaterial by stacking very thin layers of silver and titanium-dioxide that together act as a flat lens, as opposed to the curved convex or concave lenses typically found in optics. The flat lens, when illuminated with ultraviolet light, can directly image three-dimensional objects and has infinite optical axes, as opposed to a glass lens with only one axis.

At SU, Agrawal, who earned a B.E. degree in electronics and telecommunications at Pt. Ravishankar Shukla University and M.S. and Ph.D. degrees in electrical engineering from the University of Utah, will soon conduct his research in L.C. Smith's new Ultrafast Nanophotonics Lab. Much of Agrawal's work is ripe for exploring applied areas—industrial, defense, and commercial uses—but it's in the intrinsic science where he finds the most satisfaction. "There's a fundamental domain where we still don't completely understand how light interacts with such complex materials at the nanoscale," says Agrawal, who teaches the graduate-level course, Nanophotonics. "We're primarily working on the fundamentals and still figuring out the physics."  
—Kathleen Haley



LEE BADMAN



## CONNECTIONS EXPERT

IT SEEMS MORE A SIMPLE STATEMENT of fact than a commentary on his character when Lee Badman somewhat amusedly refers to himself as “a geek through and through.” No surprise, then, that he considers his position with SU’s Information Technology and Services (ITS) department to be something of a dream job. As network architect, Badman presides over the University’s AirOrangeX, a growing high-speed wireless network of more than 3,800 access points in Syracuse, Los Angeles, New York City, and Washington, D.C., as well as network upgrades at SU Abroad centers in London and Florence. He also played an essential role in the design and installation of the Carrier Dome’s OrangeHotSpot—a WiFi infrastructure that rivals that of any NFL stadium. “I over-

see the campus wireless network, having a direct hand in everything from design and strategy to consulting on policy, and am also part of a team that does the wired network,” says Badman, who started with ITS 15 years ago as a communication technician. “The technical aspects of the job are infinitely satisfying to me.”

As an additional tribute to his inner nerd, he enjoys “a wonderful side gig” as a wireless and mobility blogger for *Network Computing* magazine, writing four to six pieces a month for the online publication. “I get to interface with all kinds of people from out in the industry,” says Badman, an amateur radio operator who served 10 years in the U.S. Air Force as an electronic warfare systems technician and technical training instructor. He also writes on top-

ics related to higher education and information technology for *Information Week*, formerly covered networking topics for *Cabling Business Magazine*, and served as amateur radio columnist for the *Syracuse Post-Standard*. “It’s a great way to learn what is going on out in the world,” he says. “And quite frequently I can bring things I learn back to SU and leverage some little golden bit of wisdom for our benefit.”

Travel has played a key role in Badman’s career through the years, finding him at home in such diverse places as Mississippi, New Mexico, Alaska, and the Philippines, and—through his SU post—on temporary assignment in Italy and England. As part of the University’s Haiti Support Committee, he has made two trips to Haiti, helping identify six Haitian students who were awarded graduate scholarships at SU, and installing wireless networks on three State University in Haiti campuses. Despite many challenges during the visits, including problems getting equipment through customs and the arrival of tropical storm Emily, Badman says he is grateful for the experience and proud to be a part of the support team’s humanitarian efforts.

A Syracuse native, Badman is equally grateful for his family and devoted to the community they call home, serving as deputy mayor and village trustee in nearby Jordan, where he has done everything from coach Little League to work at the annual chicken barbecue. He brings that same care and commitment to his role as an adjunct faculty member at the iSchool, whether teaching Introduction to Networking or serving as guest lecturer in other courses. “Being a parent, being able to teach, and being able to service the students, I’ve had the opportunity to see the campus from a lot of different dimensions, and that’s been good,” says Badman, whose oldest son, Ryan, a 2012-13 Remembrance Scholar, graduated from SU in May and whose son Thomas is now a junior, both with majors in physics. He and his wife, Suzanne, director of patient education at Upstate University Hospital, also have a daughter, Katherine, a high school junior. “This is a wonderful place to work with a tremendous amount of opportunity and where everyone’s ideas count,” he says. “That makes coming to work very pleasant.”

—Amy Speech