

CREATIVE LEADERSHIP

TO ILLUSTRATE FOR STUDENTS HIS VISION FOR THE ROLE of art educators in contemporary society, Professor James Haywood Rolling Jr. G'91 sometimes draws on the unlikely symbol of *Kung Fu Panda*—an animated film about a panda who dreams of becoming a kung fu master. “Art education is about passing along the arts practices and the disciplines connected with that in a way that is a catalyst for others’ creativity,” says Rolling, chair of art education and a dual faculty member in the School of Education and College of Visual and Performing Arts. “So in talking to students, I often make the kung fu analogy in terms of the visual arts and design practices. The notion is you have folks who have mastered an art, in this case the martial arts, and they have to pass along the baton to those who will perpetuate these practices. And if the baton doesn’t get passed by them, it doesn’t get passed at all. No one else is going to do it.”

Rolling took up that baton with gusto in 2007, leaving a faculty position at Penn State University to return to his alma mater to lead SU’s art education program and enhance its national visibility and standing. “That struck me as a great challenge and a

unique opportunity,” says Rolling, who earned an M.F.A. degree in studio arts research at Syracuse as a graduate fellow in the Department of African American Studies. His wife, Me’Shae Brooks-Rolling, is director of special events and conferences for SU’s Institute for Veterans and Military Families. “I was also attracted by the concept of exploring what happens when arts-related scholarship is brought outside of the classroom,” he says. “What happens when we use it to activate other kinds of social spaces, bringing the arts into different venues that we might not have thought about? How do we rethink art education, basically, is what I came here with the intent to do.”

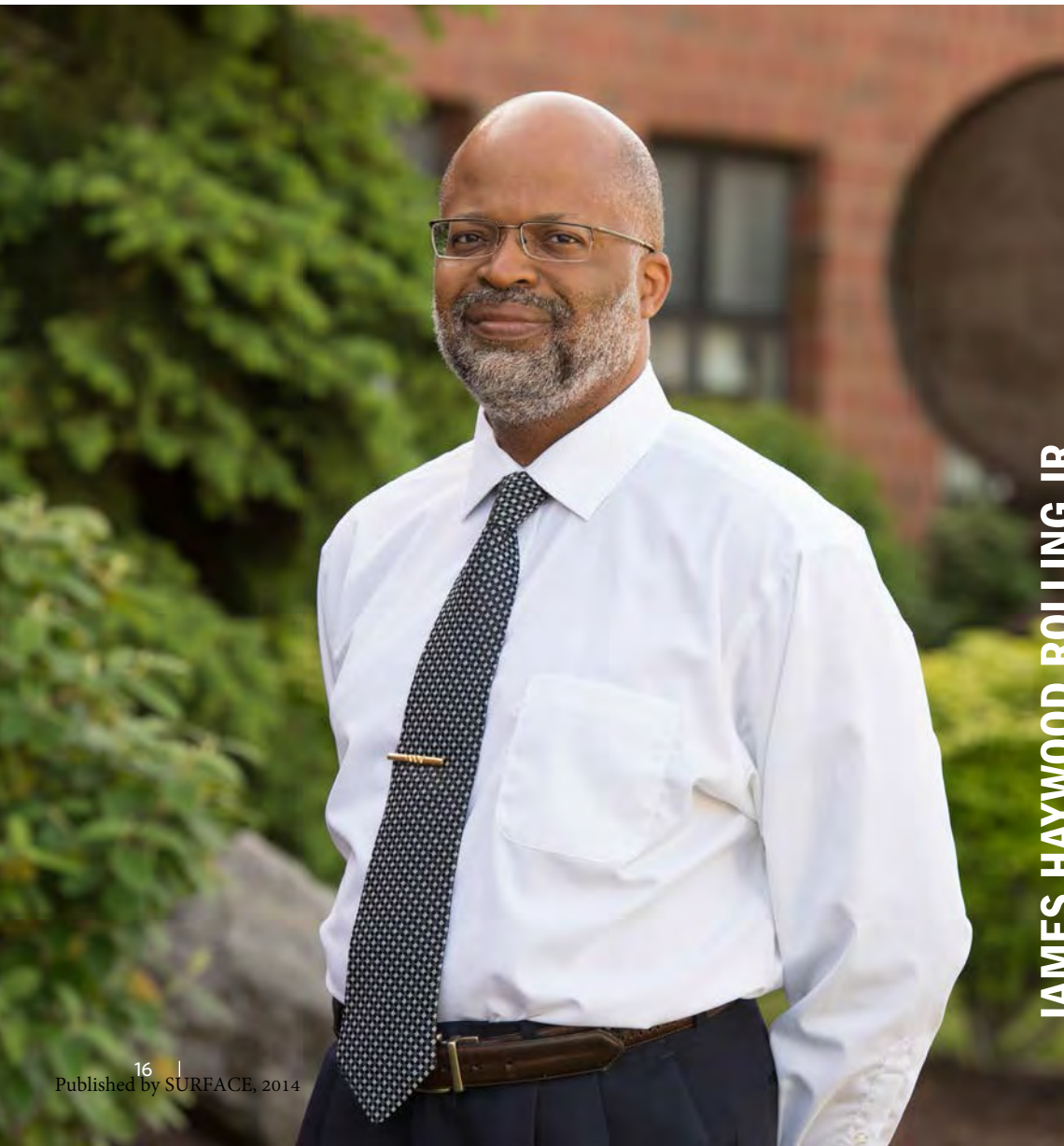
One important move toward making the program more visible was a literal one, relocating it from a small space on South Campus to a wing in the Comstock Art Facility. “This tripled our square footage and increased our capacity to serve students and the community,” Rolling says. He points to expansions to the Saturday Art Workshops for Young People, a more than 50-year-old tradition of community enrichment classes for ages 5 to 15 taught by art education students. The new facility allowed for an

enrollment increase from 80 to nearly 200 kids a semester. Plans are also underway to offer summer workshops and, in partnership with the Talent Agency, a nonprofit arts organization founded by SU faculty, to open the program to high school students.

A visual artist who specializes in mixed media and portraiture, Rolling is also a prolific writer whose most recent book, *Swarm Intelligence: What Nature Teaches Us About Shaping Creative Leadership* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), argues for the importance of creativity and collaboration in the nation’s classrooms and workplaces. “I’m interested in how we change the societal paradigm that undervalues the arts and does not recognize how crucial they are to student learning and achievement, and to the collective achievement that grows civilization and develops humanity,” he says.

His professional contributions were recently recognized by the National Art Education Association, which named him the 2014 Art Educator of the Year for significant achievement in higher education. “That means a great deal to me,” he says. “It’s an acknowledgment of the work I’m doing in service to our profession. And it means we’re on track in terms of making Syracuse University visible, known, and valued in the field of art education.”

—Amy Speech



JAMES HAYWOOD ROLLING JR.

Photo by Steve Sartori

DEDICATED DYNAMO

ANGELA LAFRANCE EMBRACES LIFE WITH GUSTO. ON most weekday mornings, this petite grandmother of five is up before dawn, goes for a run with her dog, Lilly, and is at her desk on the second floor of the Women's Building by 7:30 a.m. "I'm almost always the first one at work because I love my job, I love Syracuse University, and I'm so committed to what I do," says LaFrance, director of alumni and donor records in the Office of Development. "I'm a high-energy person—my husband says I make him nervous because I move too fast."

LaFrance was born in Albania to an Italian father and Italian American mother, who had left their home in Italy to find work. They returned to Italy when World War II erupted and later settled in Syracuse in search of a better life. She credits much of her personal and professional success to her hardworking parents, Isabella and Gaetano Pisciarino, who taught her self-discipline and a strong work ethic.

After marrying and raising four children, LaFrance began working as a key punch operator at Syracuse University in 1978. Back then, everything was stored on index cards. "I did data entry and processed checks manually," she recalls. "I knew all of the account numbers by heart. I slept with them and thought about them all night. Now data entry is all done on computers."

During her 36 years on the Hill, LaFrance has relied on her boundless energy and can-do spirit to get through three data entry conversions—from 3x5 cards, to microfiche, to computers—when not all of the transitions went smoothly or according to plan. "Something went wrong when we converted to a new computerized database system in the '90s," she says. "So we had to decide whether to scrap the whole project or correct the problem. I said, 'Let's move forward,' so we went through 10,000 records manually and made corrections."

Today, LaFrance oversees a nine-person staff of data, biographical, and gift specialists. She is responsible for processing all charitable donations, maintaining biographical records for more than 300,000 alumni and friends of SU, and ensuring that all allocations in the system correspond with the University's policies and procedures. She also mentors work-study students. "I always hire first-year students so I can train them and work with them for four years," she says. "I'm demanding of myself, so I'm demanding of my students because they represent Syracuse University, and I want perfection. The students are like my children, and I still keep in touch with many of them after they graduate."

According to Dona Schuman, senior director of advance-



ANGELA LAFRANCE

ment services, LaFrance treats all donors and alumni with great respect. "The University received a substantial gift from one donor because Angela had taken the time to listen to his needs and they became good friends," says Schuman, who supervises LaFrance and her staff. "Angela also is our matching gifts administrator, and she works very hard to get as much revenue for Syracuse University as she can."

Although she never intended to work at Syracuse for more than three decades, LaFrance says she has stayed on all these years because she enjoys the variety of her work and the opportunity to learn new things and touch people's lives. "As someone who came from another country, I'm so thankful to have a job I love and take such pride in," she says. "Syracuse University is a great place to work, and I cherish every moment."

—Christine Yackel

SUMMERTIME LEARNING

CHRISTOPHER COFER IS COMMITTED TO EMPOWERING personal growth through experiential education. He first discovered his passion for this work when he was a ski instructor in Park City, Utah, and later solidified it when he served as a director of outdoor adventure programs and team challenge facilitator at a summer camp in the Catskill Mountains. "I see myself as an agent of change," says Cofer, director of Summer@Syracuse. "Helping individuals grow and build confidence through experiential education is very rewarding."

Despite his love for the outdoors, and with a bachelor's degree in creative writing and American literature from Northern

Arizona University in hand, Cofer decided teaching English was a more practical career path. So he and his wife, Anne, a fine artist from England, sold all of their belongings, packed a camper van, and with their 3-month-old daughter, left Utah and headed east, where he was to begin graduate school at SUNY New Paltz after giving up his spot at Columbia University due to the high cost. But everything fell apart shortly after they arrived in the Catskills for one last summer at camp. "First the van died. Then we realized living in New Paltz was seriously expensive, and the student loans weren't going to cut it," Cofer says. "We left Utah to pursue our dreams in higher education, and the math was not adding up."

This temporary career setback turned out to be life-changing for Cofer when out of necessity he spent a year teaching middle school students in Brooklyn. "It was a real eye-opening experience for me," he says. "I was able to see what the educational system is like for the majority of American children. For the first time in my life I saw the disparity firsthand, and from then on I wanted to find ways to enact real change in individuals' lives through experiential education and access to higher education."

Cofer went on to earn a master's degree in recreation and leisure studies at SUNY Cortland with a concentration in outdoor and environmental education. After a stint as program director at the Jewish Community Center in Syracuse, in 2007 he assumed the position of director of Summer College at SU, an academic program for high school students. Four years later, he became director of Summer@Syracuse, a division of University College that offers a variety of credit and non-credit summer courses and programs.

As director of Summer@Syracuse, Cofer is responsible for the general direction of Summer Sessions; oversight of such specialized programs as Summer College, SummerStart, and Syracuse SAccess Initiative; and working with academic departments across the University to provide guidance, training, and supervision of residential staff for academic summer programs for minors. He also manages the Innovative Summer Program Development Fund, which provides financial support to encourage faculty and academic departments to design, develop, and deliver new summer courses and programs with little to no financial risk. "One of the main reasons I came to SU is because of the availability of financial aid for students in summer programs and the extensive support services provided for students year-round," says Cofer, Northeast regional vice president of the North American Association of Summer Sessions and a member of the Association of University Summer Sessions. "I see Summer@Syracuse as a playground of opportunity where faculty and students are able to explore beyond the confines of fall and spring."

Today, this father of four, ages 2 to 15, says he will continue to pursue his passions while helping others do the same through innovative summer programs on the Hill. "Our family motto is 'Never Stop Exploring,' he says, "and I know we never will."

—Christine Yackel



CHRISTOPHER COFER

**KATHERINE FREGA**

THE HEALING GAME

KATHERINE FREGA '16 HAS LOVED Syracuse University lacrosse since childhood, a devotion instilled in her by her late father, Mark '85. "Even though we are from New Jersey, we would come to the Dome to watch games, and we'd always go watch when Syracuse played Rutgers or Princeton," says the College of Arts and Sciences biology and policy studies pre-med major, who was a standout lacrosse player in high school. "My goal was to play lacrosse for Syracuse. It was all I wanted to do. I was so close to doing it, and then I got sick in my junior year of high school."

Frega was diagnosed with Hodgkins lymphoma—cancer of the lymphatic system—and spent three years in treatment. During the months of hospitalization, she was inspired to consider a career in health care, perhaps as a nurse, or a social worker. "My father said, 'Why don't you become a doctor—you're smart enough,'" she says. "I thought about it and decided I want to work in a pediatric specialty. I'm

leaning toward oncology, because I know it so well."

Since her first year at Syracuse, Frega's had the opportunity to explore a medical career by working as an undergraduate research assistant at SUNY Upstate Medical University. This summer, as part of a clinical research program, she is volunteering in Upstate's emergency department. Her policy studies in the Maxwell School also focus on health care, including ways to develop government action in addressing public health issues. The public policy major requires 35 hours of community service, and to meet that goal, Frega has volunteered at after-school programs for third-graders in Dr. Weeks Elementary School, and at the Syracuse Northeast Community Center, conducting open gym for teens. "It's pretty cool that I get to do these things and get credit, too," she says.

A person who enjoys having a wide social circle, Frega is a founding member

of the newly re-chartered Delta Phi Epsilon sorority and in the fall will serve as the organization's philanthropy chair. She's also a member of the University's club lacrosse team and credits the game with playing an important role in her recovery. "It's called a healing game, but it's so much more than that," she says. "For Native Americans, it's very spiritual, and I felt that, too. I always had a Native American stick with me when I was in treatment."

Planning her Syracuse University experience helped Frega through that difficult time, as well. "I spent my

entire treatment thinking about what I wanted to do when I got here," she says. "I wanted it so much, and was afraid it might not be as great as I imagined. But it was everything I had hoped for, and more."

When she first arrived on campus, Frega hesitated to tell anyone about the cancer, but then decided it would be hiding too much of her life experience. "Instead, I chose to be an advocate for people with the disease and raise awareness of it," she says. "Having cancer changed my entire outlook on life. I don't stress over little things any more. If I'm having a bad day, I think about what I've been through, and try to look at the big picture."

That resilient attitude has helped her cope not only with the disease, but also with the unexpected death of her father in March. "My dad met my mom, Christina Clair ['85], when they were seniors at Syracuse," she says. "I grew up loving this place because of him and the Orange pride he instilled in me. If I go to a lacrosse game or to the Varsity for pizza, I feel like a part of him is here, too."

—Paula Meseroll

INSIGHTS ON AUTISM

NATALIE RUSSO WAS JUST 11 YEARS OLD WHEN SHE READ the book that inspired her devotion to children with developmental disabilities and pointed her toward a career in school psychology. The book, *Somebody Else's Kids*, recounts author Torey Hayden's experiences in the '70s teaching "the leftovers"—four children whose exceptional learning requirements couldn't be met in inclusive or special needs classes. "She tells the story of how she works with them and what they are like, and how she helps them grow through the course of the academic year," says Russo, a psychology professor in the College of Arts

and Sciences who recently received a \$2 million grant from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to study autism spectrum disorders—a group of developmental disorders that affects one out of every 88 children. "After I read it, I remember going up to my parents and saying, 'I want to work with these kids for the rest of my life.' And I never changed my mind."

Now an expert diagnostician of children with autism who is also a neuroscientist, Russo describes her research as "far afield" from the typical work of a school psychologist. Rather than directly focusing on interventions to help children with learning or behavioral issues, she says her work is "firmly entrenched" in the basic neurosciences. Specifically, she uses electrophysiology, placing electrodes on kids' heads to measure their brain activity while they do such simple tasks as looking at flashes and listening to beeps. "I look at kids with autism and the way they process and integrate sensory information," says Russo, a Montreal native who holds a doctoral degree in school/applied child psychology from the city's McGill University. "So, what does your brain do if you have a sound, versus if you have a sound and a flash? In the typical brain, you get this extra boost of processing when the two things happen at once, and in autism that's not necessarily the case. I'm trying to understand why that is, and how it impacts everyday life."

At the heart of Russo's research is a strength-based approach to data interpretation and research design—a focus she first encountered in the TEACCH special education program during her clinical internship at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. TEACCH emphasizes a structured and predictable learning environment and the use of visual learning, which is a strength of many people with autism. "Generally, when you study disability, you are often saying, 'These kids can't do this or they can't do that as well as others,'" says Russo, who completed postdoctoral training with the electrophysiology and multisensory integration experts at New York's Albert Einstein College of Medicine. "In the TEACCH approach, you use kids' strengths to help mitigate their weaknesses, working with parents to teach them how children with autism view the world so they can better communicate with their child. I think a lot of parents resonate with the strength-based approach, because they've spent years being told what their child can't do."

Russo says she is "truly honored" for the opportunity afforded by the NIH grant to better understand autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and the ways individuals with an ASD experience the world. "My hopes are that we can shed some positive light on autism and the things that people with autism can do," she says. "I hope my research will be beneficial to the kids and families who have been so kind as to share their time with us."

—Amy Speech



NATALIE RUSSO

WADING INTO WETLANDS RESEARCH

GERARDO MARTINEZ '15 ARRIVED IN SYRACUSE from his Inglewood, California, home with only one travel bag, an open mind, and a plan to explore whatever opportunities came his way. He didn't know a single person, but was ready to make the most of his time here. "I figured if I wanted to actually go get a college experience, I should just go far," says Martinez, a civil engineering major with a focus in environmental engineering in the College of Engineering and Computer Science. "Now this is my second home. Every summer since I graduated from high school, I've been here. I really love it here—it's just a different environment for me."

So far, so good for Martinez's exploration of life on the Hill. Like many students, he's attended his share of Orange sports events, played intramural soccer, and joined a fraternity, Kappa Alpha Psi. But, most important, he's discovered a deep interest in environmental research—and has found a home in the research laboratory of Charles T. Driscoll Jr., University Professor of Environmental Systems Engineering and Distinguished Professor. "It's one of the best experiences I've had," Martinez says. "Professor Driscoll has been lots of help and has always given me the proper guidance. Even when he knows the answers, he wants you to figure it out, and I feel that's what research is all about. It's great how he works."

Under Driscoll's guidance and with support from the Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation Program and the Syracuse Center of Excellence (COE), Martinez has conducted research since summer 2012 on a constructed wetland in nearby Madison County. The wetland is designed to naturally process waste runoff from an agricultural operation there, preventing contaminants from running into a stream that feeds into the Chenango River. To evaluate its effectiveness, Martinez has collected monthly samples from the wetlands' four filter cells—similar to ponds—and analyzed them for contaminants, focusing on nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphorus, and trace metals like zinc. "Gerardo has found that, in general, the facility effectively removes contaminants from the waste stream, although the removal is better in the summer than the winter," Driscoll says. "He is passionate about his research and does an effective job communicating his findings to audiences."

Martinez collected second-place honors for research presentations he made at conferences hosted by the COE and the New York Water Environmental Association. In January, he was awarded third place for his presentation at the National Collegiate Research Conference, an annual event held at



GERARDO MARTINEZ

Harvard that draws top undergraduate researchers from around the country. "When I started here, I wanted to go into structural engineering and build bridges, buildings, and roads," says Martinez, an Our Time Has Come Scholar. "But I was open minded and let myself go to see what else I was interested in and that has changed my whole outlook. Now I want to work with water resources and water filtration."

For Martinez, this path of discovery has been well worth the effort. With a love for math and science, he credits his physics teacher at Mira Costa High School for initially pointing him toward engineering—and he plans to pursue graduate studies in environmental engineering. When he graduates from Syracuse, it will be a big moment for his family. His parents speak only Spanish, and he's the first in the family to graduate high school and head off to college. "I'm trying to pave the road for my little brother and sister," he says.

In the meantime, he wants to continue pursuing water-related research and see where it takes him in the future—perhaps to a developing country where he can make a difference. "There's so much going on with water, so many water-borne diseases and problems, not just in the U.S., but in other countries," Martinez says. "I want to fix water problems, and helping out in a third-world country is something I've always wanted to do."

—Jay Cox