

Master's Candidate in Public Policy and Administration Receives Food Policy Fellowships



“I dream of a future without hunger.” says Christa Drew, a candidate for a master’s degree in public policy and administration (MPPA) who recently received the Sylvia Rowe Fellowship from the [International Food Information Council](#) (IFIC) in Washington D.C. “My goal is to work on policies targeting food distribution and the myriad barriers to ongoing access to an adequate supply of healthy food (known as food security),” Drew explains. “I want to see the restoration of public trust in science and its role in policymaking. I’m interested in increased transparency around food science research, conflicts of interest, and the process to serve in advisory, regulatory and policymaking roles. I want to contribute to policies which provide for a safer, more nutritious and affordable food supply.”

IFIC’s mission is “to effectively communicate science-based information about health, nutrition, and food safety for the public good.” The Sylvia Rowe Fellowship from IFIC supports a six-week internship with the organization to further develop Drew’s communication skills related to food safety and nutrition issues and their importance for today and tomorrow.

Drew came to UMass Amherst with ten years’ experience in program development, management and advocacy with community-based initiatives. “Food security is fundamental to human health and happiness, yet is tragically limited,” says Drew. “I have always had a visceral interest in social justice related to food security and freedom from violence (conflict). I have focused my education [from Syracuse University’s Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs] and subsequent work on these issues.”

Most recently Drew was program manager of Hunger-Free and Healthy, a community-based program with seven different initiatives. She was also a consultant and coordinator for the Worcester Advisory Food Policy Council. “This group provided coordination and leadership on hunger, food, and nutrition issues and policies. It served in an advisory capacity to Congressman James P. McGovern,” says Drew. “He is considered the national champion for eliminating hunger. Working with Congressman McGovern and experiencing his unwavering commitment to and leadership in addressing hunger at a policy level was the main impetus for my decision to move from the design and management of these community-based programs to the policy level.”

Drew chose UMass for her master’s degree because, she notes, “the [Center for Public Policy and Administration](#) (CPPA) has a strong reputation for its academically rigorous program. A key partnership between CPPA and the Food Science Department suggested that I might be able to pursue my passion for working on food issues. When I was selected as the recipient of the UMass Food Science Policy Fellowship, which offered full funding and support from the [Food Science Policy Alliance](#) under the skilled leadership of [Dr. Fergus Clydesdale](#), it was too exciting an opportunity to pass up.”

Drew is a great admirer of [Sylvia Rowe](#), for whom her IFIC fellowship is named. Rowe, the former president and CEO of IFIC, is an adjunct professor at UMass. She is also a key collaborator with the [International Life Sciences Institute](#) (ILSI) North America, which awarded Drew a Scientific Integrity Fellowship this year. Before taking on her Rowe Fellow responsibilities this summer, Drew interned at ILSI North America in D.C. “During that internship I focused on conflict of interest issues in funding food science and nutrition research and the criteria and selection processes for board and scientific committee members. I also explored the principles of partnerships between the public, private and academic sectors.”

The IFIC fellowship application process is highly competitive, requiring a personal statement, resume, letters of recommendation, transcript, and two lengthy multi-person interviews. “I’m very excited about being selected,” Drew says. “Besides the six weeks at headquarters in D.C., I’ll be the Rowe Fellow for the entire year, so other opportunities to collaborate and contribute may arise.”

Focusing on the importance of networking, Drew notes, “I consistently seek and try to seize, as well as create, opportunities in which I can contribute to others’ well-being and also grow professionally. I’m a member of the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management and the Massachusetts Public Health Association and an executive officer of the Justice Studies Association. But my career is only one part of my desired future. Fostering relationships with family and friends, and nurturing a healthy, happy family of my own is another part of my dream.”

Overall, Drew is very pleased with UMass. “I’m impressed with the variety of strategies used to effectively communicate with students. I appreciate the university’s commitment to healthy food and sustainable, eco-friendly practices. The campus community provides a diversity of age, race, socio-economic status and countries of origin. My professors utilize creative and engaging teaching methods. They are committed to helping students learn and succeed through responsive communication and opportunities for additional instruction outside of the classroom.”

Graduate school is very different from undergraduate school, Drew notes. “My experience at CPPA is unique as I am incorporating a focus on Food Science in addition to the already robust 48-credit program for the MPPA. While I do serve as the peer-elected representative on the CPPA Student Affairs and Curriculum Committee and am the incoming co-chair of CPPA’s Diversity and Social Justice Committee, the rigor of my studies precludes much participation in social opportunities—and there are many. I am extraordinarily grateful for the opportunity to sharpen my intellectual abilities and increase my knowledge and skills.”