Clifford D. Clark
DIVERSITY FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM
Why diversity?

Diversity is in the very roots of Binghamton University. Sixty years ago, the founders of Harpur College — the precursor to Binghamton — understood that the only way to address the pressing issues of the day was through scrutiny so intense that it demanded perspectives from every background. Only with ideas and expressions from a diverse pool of researchers could truly exceptional solutions be found.

Today, Binghamton University is one of the top public research universities in the country. And it still understands the fundamental importance diversity plays in its success.

Research shows that institutional diversity enhances student growth and development in problem-solving and collaborative skills. These benefits are felt not just by students from minority groups but by the student body as a whole because diversity opens issues up to be examined from multiple angles, exposing students to new ideas and providing them deeper understanding.

Increased diversity also has a transformative effect on the university. The two main goals of a university are educating students and researching solutions. A diversity of perspectives strengthens both missions, fostering an environment where there are no sacred cows, where every notion is questioned in a search for innovation, solutions, and truth.

On a diverse campus, students hear voices from different backgrounds and see things through different perspectives.
It began with a vision

Since its inception nearly 20 years ago, the Clifford D. Clark Diversity Fellowship Program has assisted more than 500 outstanding students from historically underrepresented groups follow their dreams and achieve their full potential, advancing their discipline through discovery and teaching.

Established by the State University of New York in 1987 to increase the diversity of the student body, thereby fostering different ideas, perspectives and knowledge, the graduate fellowship program was embraced by Binghamton University and its fourth president, Clifford Clark.

Because in his previous 12 years as president Clark had brought Binghamton’s fledgling graduate programs to fruition while dramatically increasing campus diversity, the University named the diversity fellowship program after him. It was his vision of a top-notch education accessible to all that helped the University take its place among the most highly selective and widely respected public doctoral universities in the nation.

To date, more than 400 Clark Fellows have graduated from Binghamton and have gone on to make their mark in the world — advancing their discipline through discovery and teaching, influencing policy and decisions in government, or creating and innovating in industry and business.
Diana B. Alioto
MA ’93 THEATRE

“I was fortunate to be able to afford the program largely because I was offered the Clark Fellowship,” midwest native Diana Alioto said of enrolling in Binghamton University’s Theatre Department. “It made my decision to travel so far away from my family a little easier.”

She credits her Binghamton mentors — Professors Tom Kremer and Barb Wolfe — and her experience as an intern and guest performer at the Cider Mill Playhouse as giving her a solid foundation for the future. That varied experience, coupled with the freedom she enjoyed because of the Clark Fellowship, made her versatile enough to pursue two career paths.

Monday through Friday Alioto is the company manager for the Skylight Opera Company in Milwaukee, Wis. On the weekend she pursues acting and singing, donning the habit of a Roman Catholic nun for her role in the one-woman comedy show “Late Nite Catechism.”

“The Clark funding was instrumental,” she says, “allowing me the opportunity to pursue my studies and my passion — it gave me my career.”

Omar Tonsi Eldakar
BS ’03, PHD ’08 BIOLOGY

Toward the end of Omar Eldakar’s successful undergraduate career, a professor recommended him to the selection committee of the Clark Fellowship, writing, “[Omar] has always been highly intelligent, but now he is highly ambitious as well; he exemplifies the increased diversity in academic life here at Binghamton University.”

The committee selected Eldakar to receive Clark funding, which he said was “huge, because it catapulted me out of the University bubble and into competition on the national stage. You always doubt yourself, wondering how you would compete in the real world.”

With the support of the Clark Fellowship, Eldakar traveled to national conferences on human behavior and evolution, participating in poster sessions and presenting a paper that erased all doubts about his future.

Eldakar is now a PERT Fellow in the Department of Insect Science at the University of Arizona. This highly selective program prepares outstanding candidates to meet the demands of a tenure-track academic career. “I get to do my own research, to teach, to search,” he said. “I just want to continue to discover.”

Omar describes the Clark funding as “huge, because it catapulted me out of the University bubble and into competition on the national stage.”
Talented scholars and researchers choose Binghamton University for their graduate studies because they want to immerse themselves in subjects they are passionate about and take their studies in exciting new directions. In return, the University fosters their development, encouraging their curiosity, growth and discovery, and cultivating their collaborative and interdisciplinary work. This further enhances the University’s well-established reputation for academic excellence.

Integral to academic excellence

The growing expertise and contributions of these talented graduate students — as they work with superb faculty on research projects and assist in teaching undergraduate students — benefit faculty and undergraduate students alike. Because fellows have learned how to pose interesting and important questions, how to answer those questions and how to disseminate that information, they are crucial to the transfer of knowledge across the University — and from the University to the world. This helps fulfill the University’s overriding mission to convert the power of intense intellectual effort into real-world accomplishments.

CLARK FACT — MORE THAN 400 CLARK FELLOWS ADVANCE THEIR DISCIPLINE THROUGH DISCOVERY AND TEACHING, AND INFLUENCE POLICY AND DECISIONS IN GOVERNMENT, INDUSTRY AND BUSINESS.
Denisse Yepez
BS '05, MS '08 MECHANICAL ENGINEERING
PHD STUDENT, INDUSTRIAL AND SYSTEMS ENGINEERING

A Clark Fellowship helped Denisse Yepez complete her master’s degree, and another is making it easier for her to continue on for a doctorate. But she gets her motivation from her family. “My grandfather is my inspiration, because I know that although he didn’t have a college degree, he became successful and opened his own machine shop in Ecuador.” Denisse’s goal is to be “a good researcher in flexible electronics.” She’s already on her way, working with the talented team at the Center for Advanced Microelectronics Manufacturing, a national microelectronics manufacturing, research and development center specializing in roll-to-roll flexible electronics. “It is very rewarding to work with people who have years of experience and are willing to guide you,” she says.

Desiree Melton
PHD '06 PHILOSOPHY

“The Clark Fellowship was more than just funding. It represented a man who had a vision to engage underrepresented minorities here at Binghamton and worked to see it through,” said Desiree Melton, who chose Binghamton University in large part because of the promise of five full years of funding through the Clark Fellowship.

“That was so important,” she said. “I had a five-month-old daughter, and I knew the funding would mean I could concentrate on my studies the first four years, plus summers, without having to set aside time for teaching. It allowed me to finish on schedule.”

Now a professor of philosophy at the College of Notre Dame in Maryland, her undergraduate alma mater, Melton continues to welcome opportunities to mentor current Clark fellows so that she can give something back to the program that started her on her way.

Continuing Clifford Clark’s vision with her students today, Melton explores the work of feminist and underrepresented minority philosophers, mentoring the next generation of young scholars.
Clifford Clark believed “part of the learning process is to learn about other people,” so much so that following his retirement he established an endowment that assists in funding the Clifford D. Clark Graduate Fellowship Program for Diversity. In doing so, he paved the way for future contributions from individuals equally committed to diversity.

The financial support given through the Clark Fellowship and others like it not only covers tuition costs, but also provides a stipend for living expenses, health insurance and monies for research and travel. Funding makes it possible for fellows to focus solely on their graduate studies and research during their first year, and to have their second through fifth years for teaching and research assistantships.

**CLARK FACT — THE CLARK FELLOWSHIP HAS SUPPORTED MORE THAN 300 DOCTORAL AND 200 MASTER’S STUDENTS.**
The Clark Fellowship provides the one thing all writers and researchers need to fulfill their goals: Freedom.

“That’s one of the most important aspects of it,” Binghamton University doctoral student of creative writing John Smelcer says. “The ability to support yourself with little impeding your studies and research. It really keeps you free. It just gives you so much more available time to research or write. In the little time I’ve been here, since 2006, I have written and published at least a dozen books around the world — in just four years — because the Clark has given me so much time and freedom.”

Smelcer came to Binghamton two years after winning the school’s national Milt Kessler Poetry Book Award for Without Reservation, leaving his native Alaska where he grew up in the Ahtna tribe. Working his whole life to preserve the dying languages of both his tribe and the Alutiiq, Smelcer has written the dictionaries for both, and the freedom of the Clark Fellowship allows him to deepen his work.

“I’m constantly expanding them,” he says. “I go back and work with elders who still speak it, but none of them are very fluent and none of them can read or write it. I’m the last person in the world who can speak, read and write two native Alaska languages.”

But his writing interests reach far beyond the entomology of native languages to include just about every genre — poetry, novels, movie scripts, television scripts and plays (“I haven’t written the romance, no Harlequins”). Last year he had a play produced, and it was performed all over the country.

In addition to the work it generates, Smelcer says the freedom afforded by the Clark also helps to level the playing field for underrepresented students like Native Americans, enabling them to fulfill their educational and career goals.

“Of the major ethnic groups in America, Native Americans are by far the least represented in academia,” says Smelcer, who plans on a career as a college professor. “Way less than one percent of the faculty in universities are Native American.”

But the Clark Fellowship is also personally important for Smelcer, who, in his 40s, felt stifled by his home state’s lack of PhD programs or creative writing communities.

“The Clark awards are life-changing opportunities,” he said. “The Clark Fellowship didn’t just change my life. It saved my life. Seriously … it gave me the chance to fulfill my dreams. I don’t think I would have otherwise.”
Through the Clifford D. Clark Graduate Fellowship Program for Diversity, Binghamton University offers fellowships to students from historically underrepresented groups who have been admitted to graduate or professional study. The program provides support for students who will contribute to the diversity of the student body in the graduate or professional program in which they seek enrollment, especially those students who demonstrate they have overcome a disadvantage or other impediment to success in higher education. Funded by the State University of New York and an endowment fund, the Clark Fellowship package includes calendar-year stipends, full-tuition scholarships, health insurance, guaranteed award periods, research and travel opportunities, and other benefits.

**CLARK FACT** — FELLOWS RECEIVE PEER MENTORING THROUGH THE GRADUATE COMMUNITY OF SCHOLARS, A PROGRAM THAT NETWORKS AND SUPPORTS MINORITY GRADUATE STUDENTS.

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These talented graduate students benefit faculty and undergraduate students alike.
Profiles

Jasper Chiguma
MS '06, PhD '09 MATERIALS SCIENCE

When talking about the strong drive to succeed shared by Clark Fellows, Jasper Chiguma puts it succinctly: “In one way or another, we are going to achieve our objectives. But the Clark Fellowship makes it easier, allowing us to concentrate on our education, travel to conferences and buy books. The Clark Fellowship ensures that people develop in their disciplines.”

Earning his doctorate in materials science from Binghamton University in 2009, Chiguma says the Clark Fellowship helped him as a scientist because he could concentrate fully on the graduate school challenges of writing papers and conducting research without worrying about money issues.

This freeing of the mind, Chiguma says, is what makes the Fellowship so important because that’s what leads to groundbreaking ideas that will change the world. “People can always get money from other sources,” he says. “But it’s difficult to come up with the good ideas whose development is helped by the Clark Fellowship.”

Now a post-doctoral student studying with Binghamton Professor Wayne Jones, Chiguma hopes to find materials to replace the limited and expensive metals currently used in solar cells.

But, he says, aside from allowing its recipients to produce important work, the Clark Fellowship has an intrinsic value not readily noticeable. “You can’t override the importance of meeting people from other cultures, from around the world,” he says. “You learn how they live, how they were educated, how they think. And that enriches you because you become familiar with ideas and approaches that are different. And that makes you better at what you do.”
Candidates for a Clark Fellowship must:

- Be U.S. citizens or have permanent resident status
- Demonstrate how they will contribute to the diversity of the student body in their program
- Be newly admitted to a graduate program as a full-time student; typically only newly admitted applicants are considered, but exceptions may be made for extraordinarily strong candidates

Applicants to the Clark Fellowship must write an essay (maximum of 500 words) describing:

- How they have demonstrated commitment to increasing opportunities for underrepresented minorities and/or breaking down stereotypes
- How they will commit to participating fully in all aspects of the fellowship program including serving as a mentor and teacher for a wide variety of students
- How they will contribute to the diversity of the student body in their graduate program such as:
  - Being a member of a group historically underrepresented in higher education (African American, American Indian, Hispanic American, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander), or
  - Having been raised in a single-parent household, or
  - Being a first-generation college student, or
  - Having a history of overcoming disadvantage.

Membership in a racial/ethnic group that is underrepresented in the graduate program involved may serve as a plus factor in making the awards, but does not form the sole basis for awards. Although not a requirement, economic disadvantage (as determined by federal income guidelines or FAFSA) may be the basis for eligibility under this category. Every applicant is evaluated on his or her own merit.

CLARK FACT — Fellows receive up to five years of competitive stipends and tuition support if entering a doctoral program with a bachelor’s degree.
Profiles

Jane Alberdeston Coralin
MA ’04, PHD ’07 ENGLISH, CREATIVE WRITING

Jane Alberdeston Coralin was recruited and mentored by Professor Maria Gillan specifically with the Clark program’s diversity mission in mind. Gillan considers Jane to be “one of the brightest creative writing talents we have ever had here at Binghamton.” Jane’s dedication to the local community earned her a graduate excellence award for her work with children and poetry. She has become a highly regarded and accomplished poet; is a professor of creative writing at the University of Puerto Rico; and is an alumna of Cave Canem, an organization for poets of African descent.

“The Clark program helped me greatly, in that I had the time and space to enjoy my graduate experience at its fullest. I was able to delve beyond my studies into publishing; and though I had been published before my years at BU, I feel that my work matured because of the freedoms I had at the University, many of them possible because of Clark funding.”

Adam Lambert
MA ’99 BIOLOGY

Over the years, Adam Lambert has become an accomplished juggler — not in the literal sense, but figuratively. He successfully managed to balance the needs of his young family while also attending to his research studies at Binghamton. He credits the Clark Fellowship for his success, saying it allowed him to concentrate on his studies without the added burden of teaching. The funding enabled him to complete his master’s degree on schedule. This degree became the cornerstone of his academic career; he now holds a PhD and has a tenure-track position at Eastern Connecticut State University.

“The Clark funding was instrumental, allowing me the opportunity to pursue my studies, and my passion — it gave me my career!”
Financial support for diversity graduate students is an ongoing challenge. In terms of cumulative debt, there is much higher incidence of African Americans, Hispanic Americans and Native Americans sustaining high levels of education-related debt. Most of the discrepancy in racial/ethnic group indebtedness is attributable to graduate school debt rather than undergraduate debt.\(^1\) In addition to an academic-year stipend and tuition scholarship, these students need health insurance, summer stipends and funds to cover research and conference costs. Clark Fellowship funds from SUNY cover academic year and summer stipends, the University provides tuition scholarships and student health insurance, and interest on the Clark endowment supports research and travel awards for Clark Fellows.

**Stipend Levels** — Fellowship stipends are competitive against national benchmarks from other doctoral institutions. Stipend levels vary by academic discipline, but the 75th percentile (i.e., top 25 percent) nationally for public research universities is our target for stipend levels.

**Guaranteed Award Periods** — Stipends and tuition scholarships for incoming Clark Fellows are guaranteed for specified periods. For students entering doctoral programs with a bachelor's degree, support is guaranteed for five years, provided students are making good progress. For students entering master's programs with a bachelor's degree, support is guaranteed for two years. For students entering doctoral programs with a master's degree, support is guaranteed for four years.

**Cost Structure** — In the first year, stipends, tuition scholarships and student health insurance are funded entirely by the Clark budget. In subsequent years during the guaranteed period, stipends are cost-shared by the department’s regular teaching assistant allocation (half of prevailing stipend level plus tuition scholarship) and the Clark budget (remaining portion).

As part of the department’s student support practices, actual duties to be performed by the half-time teaching assistant are determined by the department. Graduate directors are responsible for planning specific activities, in consultation with the student, the student’s adviser, and other program faculty and staff.

Profiles

Nabil Hassan El-Ghoroury
MA ’97, PHD ’02 CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Nabil El-Ghoroury says the Clark Fellowship was critical for him becoming associate executive director of the American Psychology Association for Graduate Students (APAGS), a position his Binghamton adviser told him to pursue, saying, “the person who does this will be someone who changes the field of psychology.”

When he first became a member-at-large in APAGS, the Clark Fellowship provided the funding he needed not only to complete research on his dissertation, but also to travel and gain exposure to the APA on a national scale.

As associate executive director, he advocates on behalf of the group’s 42,000 graduate student members and focuses on diversity.

“Embracing diversity is an issue near to my heart,” El-Ghoroury explains. “My father is Egyptian and my mother was Nicaraguan and Chinese. I speak Spanish, but in Arabic I can only count to 20. [But] being diverse means more than being bilingual. I will work to represent the interests of students from a broad array of backgrounds — nontraditional-aged students, disabled students, ethnic minority students, LGBT students — diversity of all sorts.”

Christopher M. Greene
MS ’98 INDUSTRIAL ENGINEERING,
PHD ’01 SYSTEMS SCIENCE

Christopher Greene considers Distinguished Professor Hari Srihari to be his special mentor; he returns to Binghamton several times a year to consult with him on his research. The opportunity to receive Clark funding enabled Christopher not only to concentrate on his research, but also to explore teaching. He had not originally intended on a teaching career. However, he says, “I like the aspect of being able to interact with students and work on research. In industry I would have to focus on a product or process.” Christopher is currently an assistant professor in the Department of Industrial Engineering at the University of Alabama.

The opportunity to receive Clark funding enabled Greene not only to concentrate on his research, but also to explore the teaching side of academics.
Why we promote diversity

Diversity fosters disparate ideas and perspectives that contribute to innovations and academic excellence. A diverse student body (with equally diverse faculty and staff) offers many benefits that reach beyond campus. These include:

For individuals — Research indicates institutional diversity enhances student growth and development in critical thinking, problem-solving and collaborative skills. This benefit is universal; that is, it does not just benefit students from minority groups.

For the University — Increased diversity has a transformative effect on colleges and universities.

For the economy and the private sector — Research shows workforce diversity benefits business because it increases flexibility and economic viability. Diverse work teams also promote creativity and innovation.

For society — Research indicates cross-racial or cross-ethnic interactions positively influence the amount of acceptance we have for people from other cultures, our rate of community service and our personal growth in other areas of civic responsibility.

CLARK FACT — FELLOWS ARE EMPOWERED TO TAKE CHARGE OF THEIR CAREER DEVELOPMENT THROUGH GRADUATE SCHOOL WORKSHOPS AND SEMINARS.
Karima Legette
BA ’01, MA ’05 GEOGRAPHY

Karima came to the University as an undergraduate from Binghamton High School via Brooklyn, N.Y., and has never left. “I love it here,” she says. “I came originally to study electrical engineering and then found a home in the Geography Department.” It was “a good fit for me — a small program that allowed me to make connections with the faculty.” Professor John Frazier was instrumental in recommending Karima for a Clark Fellowship. “Because it is a small program, there is nowhere to hide, so my work had to be good!”

Now a counselor for the University’s Educational Opportunity Program, Karima says her training in geography was invaluable because “my job focuses on preparing first-generation undergrads, or those underrepresented in graduate school, for admissions to doctoral programs. I am an urban geographer, a researcher of people and urban cultures.

“The Clark Fellowship gave me the opportunity to continue my studies, and with my work here I hope I am able to give back to the University in a small way.”

“Former Clark Fellow Karima Legette remained at Binghamton to help students as a counselor in the Educational Opportunity Program. She is shown here, third from left, with EOP staff members and program alumni.”
Clark Diversity Fellows 1987–2010
If you would like to learn more about the Clifford D. Clark Graduate Fellowship Program for Diversity, or if you are interested in supporting this or any other University fellowship, please contact either the Binghamton University Foundation at 607-777-6208 or the Graduate School Development Office at 607-777-2070.