University of Pennsylvania President Amy Gutmann today announced the recipients of the 2019 President’s Engagement Prize and President’s Innovation Prize. Awarded annually, the Prizes empower Penn students to design and undertake post-graduation projects that make a positive, lasting difference in the world. Each Prize-winning project will receive $100,000, as well as a $50,000 living stipend per team member.

Six Penn seniors were named recipients of the 2019 President’s Engagement Prize. They are Princess Aghayere, Summer Kollie, and Oladunni Alomaja, for Rebound Liberia; José Á. Maciel and Antonio E. Renteria, for Cultivando Juntos (Cultivating Together); and Brendan Taliaferro, for Host Homes for LGBTQ Youth in Philadelphia. Three seniors received the President’s Innovation Prize: Malika Shukurova and Katherine Sizov, for Strella Biotechnology, and Michael Wong, for InstaHub.

“Each of the Prize recipients has demonstrated a purpose-driven desire to get out and make a difference—in their community, across the country, and around the world,” said Gutmann. “From our backyard in Philadelphia to the basketball court in Liberia, Rebound Liberia, Cultivando Juntos, Host Homes for LGBTQ Youth in Philadelphia, Strella Biotechnology, and InstaHub represent a most remarkable range of Penn-educated talent, determination, and public-spirited enterprise.”

The Prizes are generously supported by Judith Bollinger and William G. Bollinger, in honor of Ed Resovsky; Trustee Lee Spelman Doty and George E. Doty, Jr.; and Emeritus Trustee James S. Riepe and Gail Petty Riepe.

Student recipients will spend the next year implementing their projects. Details on their projects are as follows:
Summer Kollie, Princess Aghayere, and Oladunni Alomaja of Rebound Liberia

- **Princess Aghayere, Summer Kollie, and Oladunni Alomaja, for Rebound Liberia:** Aghayere, Kollie, and Alomaja will use basketball as a tool to bridge the literacy gap between men and women and as a mechanism for youth to cope with the trauma and stress of daily life in post-conflict Liberia. Rebound Liberia will build an indoor basketball court in conjunction with a community resource center, and its annual three-month summer program will combine basketball clinics with daily reading and writing sessions and personal development workshops. Aghayere, Kollie, and Alomaja are being mentored by Ocek Eke (https://global.upenn.edu/global-initiatives/person/ocek-ke), director of global and local service-learning programs in the School of Engineering and Applied Science (https://www.seas.upenn.edu/).
• Josué Á. Maciel and Antonio E. Rentería, for Cultivando Juntos Maciel and Renteria will pioneer a community-based curriculum in the agricultural workplaces of Kennett Square, Pennsylvania. Featured in the PBS documentary “Unnatural Causes,” Kennett Square’s mushroom industry creates stable income opportunities year-round. However, the physical work is grueling, involving frequent lifting, prolonged kneeling, and repetitive manual tasks in tight spaces. Cultivando Juntos will help to alleviate this working environment’s negative effects on the health of farmworkers, many of whom are Latinx immigrants. Maciel and Renteria are being mentored by Adriana Perez (https://www.nursing.upenn.edu/live/profiles/10-adriana-perez), assistant professor in the School of Nursing (https://www.nursing.upenn.edu/).
Brendan Taliaferro of Host Homes for LGBTQ Youth in Philadelphia

- **Brendan Taliaferro, for Host Homes for LGBTQ Youth in Philadelphia:**
  Taliaferro’s project will address a dire need for safe and stable emergency housing for LGBTQ youth experiencing homelessness in Philadelphia by creating a host homes program. A host homes program is an innovative, evidence-based housing model that places youth in the homes of vetted and caring adult volunteers and connects them with intensive support services. Working in partnership with Philadelphia’s Office of Homeless Services, the Attic Youth Center, Point Source Youth, and Turning Points for Children (a foster care nonprofit), Taliaferro’s project will place Philadelphia among a handful of major U.S. cities piloting the host homes model. Taliaferro is being mentored by Amy Hillier (https://www.sp2.upenn.edu/people/view/amy-hillier/), associate professor in the School of Social Policy and Practice (https://www.sp2.upenn.edu/).
Malika Shukurova and Katherine Sizov of Strella Biotechnology

- **Malika Shukurova and Katherine Sizov, for Strella Biotechnology:** Strella is developing a bio-sensor that can predict the maturity of virtually any fresh fruit. Strella’s sensors are installed in controlled atmosphere storage rooms, monitoring apples as they ripen. This enables packers and distributors to identify the ripest apples and fruit for their customers, thus minimizing spoilage and food waste and promoting sustainability. Strella’s current market is U.S apple packers and distributors, which represent a $4 billion produce industry. The startup is looking to expand to other markets, such as bananas and pears, in the future. Malika and Katherine are being mentored by Jeffrey Babin (https://eent.seas.upenn.edu/meet-our-faculty/babin/), Practice Professor and Associate Director of the Engineering Entrepreneurship Program (https://eent.seas.upenn.edu/).
• **Michael Wong**, for **InstaHub**: InstaHub’s mission is to eliminate energy waste through snap-on automation that enhances, rather than replaces, existing building infrastructure. Founded at Penn in 2016, InstaHub is focused on fighting climate change through energy conservation efforts with cleantech building automation technology. Wong’s long-term goal for InstaHub is to create a model for many other simple innovations combatting water, food, and energy waste without replacing existing infrastructure, further reducing the environmental impact of the retrofit process. Wong is being mentored by David Mazzocco, associate director for sustainability and projects in The Wharton School (https://www.wharton.upenn.edu/).

This year’s President’s Engagement Prize finalists also included Jacob Nelson, Hannah Sanders, and Andrés Fernández Pallares, for Herban Cairo, a social enterprise based in Cairo, Egypt, designed to support disadvantaged families by building rooftop gardens; Lauren Schafrank, for H.E.L.P. (Homeless End of Life Program) for Philadelphia, a mobile hospice and end-of-life program for the city’s homeless population; and Jay Shah, Santosh Nori, and Zuhaib Badami, for MedMobile, a medically-equipped mobile unit designed to bring primary care services to underserved areas in Philadelphia. Braden Fineberg was named a President’s Innovation Prize finalist for Flourish Change, an iOS/Android app that rounds up transactions
from a donor’s credit and debit card transactions and donates the remainder to a user’s chosen organization.

“I am immensely proud of our students’ commitment to meaningful work that extends beyond the classroom and the campus,” said Gutmann. “I congratulate all of this year’s Prize recipients, and I wish them the very best as they move forward with their projects.”

Seventy-two seniors submitted applications for both Prizes this year, with proposals spanning a diverse and impressive array of social impact ideas.

“These inspiring projects,” said Provost Wendell Pritchett (https://provost.upenn.edu/about/wpritchett), “embody the wide-ranging interests and dynamic commitment to innovation of our remarkable Penn students. Global in their scope, they share the founding mission of our university: to make a tangible impact on significant challenges that affect people’s lives around the world. We are grateful to the faculty advisors and staff of the Center for Undergraduate Research and Fellowships who worked closely with our students to develop these exciting entrepreneurial initiatives.”

The President’s Engagement and Innovation Prizes are intended to strengthen Penn’s commitment under the Penn Compact 2022 to impactful local, national, and global student engagement as well as to innovation and entrepreneurship. Penn has awarded more than $3 million in project funds and living stipends since the inception of both prizes, making these the largest prizes of their kind in higher education. Details on the success of past Prize recipients can be found at https://pennpep.upenn.edu/ (https://pennpep.upenn.edu/) and https://pennpip.upenn.edu/ (https://pennpip.upenn.edu/).

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