

## Rashaun Allen Becomes the First Fulbright Scholar from the Creative Writing MFA Program

In a first for the Stony Brook Southampton MFA in Creative Writing and Literature program, Rashaun J. Allen '17 has been named the winner of a Fulbright U.S. Student Program award from the U.S. Department of State and the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board.

Allen, a fall 2016 graduate, will use the award to conduct research at the **University of West Indies Cave Hill** campus in Barbados as part of a project to write about his family history.

Recipients of Fulbright awards are selected on the basis of academic and professional achievement as well as record of service and leadership potential in their respective fields.

"Rashaun has been the kind of intrepid student we at the creative writing program believe is essential to the arts in America," said Julie Sheehan, the director of the MFA in Creative Writing program. "He has been a consistent voice for diversity in our reading series, faculty hires and classroom reading assignments. He has made the most of every teaching opportunity that has come his way. He has consistently taken a hands-on approach to his own career. No surprise, then that he is the first to apply for a Fulbright from our program—and, deservedly, the first to receive one."

"The MFA program was gasoline to my writing fire," Allen wrote in an email. "It provided me with a community of writers just as passionate about the written word as me. Winning the Fulbright became my opportunity to make the most out of my writing ambitions."

Allen also noted that his writing in the 7 generations category on his website, [www.rashaunjallen.com](http://www.rashaunjallen.com), provided the inspiration for his decision to apply for a Fulbright.

"One of the great strengths of our program is memoir," Stony Brook Southampton Associate Provost Robert Reeves said, "and so it is fitting that the first Fulbright should go to Rashaun Allen, who is using the award to work on an innovative piece that ties together two communities based on his exploration of family history in Barbados."

Having worked closely with Allen on the Fulbright application process, Carla Caglioti, Executive Director of the Southampton Graduate Arts campus, said that "no one is more deserving of this honor than Rashaun. He worked very hard to get into the MFA program and showed complete dedication throughout his time with us while also working at a full-time job. It's wonderful to see his talent and persistence rewarded in this way."

In her recommendation for Allen's Fulbright application, Sheehan wrote: "Rashaun's writing is swiftly moving toward a level of imaginative polish I never would have predicted. For example, one short story was driven totally by the first-person voice, through which we got a guided tour of not only the Caribbean island where the narrator lives, but his personal history.

"By the end of this fiercely economical piece, when the narrator's cousin alights from the U.S., the story has eased into a political piece about economic imbalances and the blindness privilege has to itself. This agenda is not easy to manage in 500 words; Rashaun succeeded not only in packing the story with layers of meaning, but packing it with humor and rich, sensory imagery as well."

Allen has independently published two books of poetry: "**A Walk Through Brooklyn**" and "**In The Moment**." The books made the tenth and eleventh best selling spots in Amazon's Kindle store in the African-American poetry section.

Allen was one of **five Stony Brook University students** to be named Fulbright Scholars.

The Fulbright Program is the flagship international educational exchange program sponsored by the U.S. government. Designed to build lasting connections between the people of the United States and the people of more than 160 other countries, the program is funded through an annual appropriation made by the U.S. Congress to the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs.

Since its inception in 1946, the Fulbright Program has provided more than 370,000 students, scholars, teachers, artists, and scientists with the opportunity to study, teach and conduct research, exchange ideas, and contribute to finding solutions to shared international concerns. Fulbright alumni have achieved distinction in many fields, including 57 who have been awarded the Nobel Prize, 82 who have received Pulitzer Prizes, and 37 who have served as a head of state or government.



Rashaun Allen with Robert Reeves, Stony Brook Southampton Associate Provost.