Dear Parents,

Along with the record-breaking cold we had in Boston this winter, you may have heard Tufts’ application rate was at a record high again. As a parent of a current undergraduate, you likely have a strong sense of the university and have seen the remarkable achievements of students and professors firsthand, so this doesn’t surprise you. As one of the top research universities in the world, Tufts offers unparalleled opportunities for undergraduates, and therefore we continue to rise among our peers.

Perhaps applications rose because of our Jumbo school spirit. There’s a tangible excitement being part of a university that won three NCAA championships in one year. Our student-athletes, like all our students, are quintessential multitaskers: brilliant and well-rounded.

Or maybe Tufts is even more desirable because we have students like Abuzar Royesh (page 3) who co-founded an organization that was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize or because of a one-of-a-kind program like the new Tufts Institute for Innovation (page 6). The truth is, what makes Tufts so great is how all of our amazing students and faculty are offered the opportunity to intersect in so many ways. Many of these life-changing opportunities are due in part to your support. Your generosity means we continue to create an outstanding and transformative student experience. As always, I sincerely thank you and encourage you to continue your support.

Warm Jumbo wishes,

Gina A. DeSalvo, director
Abuzar Royesh's home in Afghanistan is only about thirty minutes from a refugee camp of about 10,000 internally displaced people who fled their homes in Helmand Province to escape the Taliban, but it felt like another world entirely the first time he saw it. The refugees thought of him as a foreigner, the Tufts junior says, and he felt threatened.

But he was not dissuaded from helping.

Before beginning his journey to Tufts, Royesh, along with Dina Fesler, a woman he met while a high school exchange student in Minnesota, founded the Bridges Academy to promote literacy and education for at-risk youth in Afghanistan. The academy was nominated for the 2014 Nobel Peace Prize.

After doing some translating work for Fesler on a different project, Royesh returned with her to Afghanistan in 2010 to visit the camp. “There were kids my own age, but who had no access to education, employment. They worked in opium farms and couldn’t go back because of the war,” Royesh explains. “We saw education as the only way to help move these refugees out of poverty,” he adds.

As an international relations and political science student, Royesh knows first-hand the power of education. One of six children and the first in his family who will receive a bachelor’s degree, Royesh is deeply appreciative of the financial support he receives from the university, including receiving the Alireza Family Scholarship.

The first part of the project was to begin an education literacy project, where they not only taught literacy skills, but also took boys to meet politicians and leaders outside of the camp. The Pashtun elders did not let girls participate, although refugees were introduced to successful women to show them how opportunity changes lives, he says.

One of the biggest hurdles was winning the trust of the refugees. Not only was he viewed as a foreigner, there is a long history of animosity between their ethnic tribes, Royesh says, explaining that he is part of the Hazara tribe and the refugees are Pashtun.

“We knew that I could appeal to the youth like me and become a role model, so that’s precisely what I did,” he says.

Opening their minds was key, Royesh states. He and Fesler eventually organized video conferences with schools in Minnesota and all over the country to show the refugees that Americans were not enemies. Three years later, they began working with youths in juvenile rehabilitation centers who were imprisoned for thefts, murder, and plotting suicide bombings.

“In the beginning, three students from the camp mentored the youths in the juvenile detention centers. That’s when we realized the true impact of the program,” he states.

Royesh credits his Tufts professors and friends with shaping his intellectual journey. “I truly love it here. I’ve met an extraordinary network of people and have had amazing opportunities,” he says.

“Abuzar is a thoughtful, understated, and accomplished young man,” says Associate Professor of Religion Ken Garden, noting that his student would sometimes give talks to high school students about Afghanistan where he had to sometimes field questions on ethnic and religious stereotypes.

For now, Royesh is focusing on his studies, but intends to return to his country and strengthen the program he helped begin. “We’re hoping to organize Bridges into a machine that is self-sufficient,” he states. With a Nobel Prize nomination to take back, there is little doubt he will succeed.
When the Tufts Institute for Innovation (TII) launched in August, inviting researchers to study “Microbes: Improving the Environment and the Human Condition,” its goal was to do more than take advantage of individual opportunities that come from having myriad experts across three campuses. “We want to turn the traditional research model on its head,” says David R. Walt, a university professor and TII’s founding director.

Interested in outcomes rather than outputs, Walt explains that TII’s approach is to focus on innovative ways to solve problems utilizing broad multidisciplinary teams and driving all the way through to implementation of those solutions. “The translational model takes a discovery and then finds the best way to apply it, to implement it. We are bringing researchers together who have a window into different communities, who understand the pressing needs of those communities, and who can build teams with all the needed tools to bring to bear on those problems. We can engage in a multifaceted way with economists, public health experts, and others, and bring in science and technology when and how it’s warranted,” he states.

While the research space is in a newly renovated laboratory in Boston, undergraduates have unique opportunities for research and collaboration on all three campuses. TII announced a new program for summer scholars that will offer firsthand research experience, networking, and skill-building opportunities by pairing undergraduates with faculty mentors to conduct lab research, social science research, or field research related to the thematic area of microbes. “We have a number of faculty projects funded from our TII Seed Funding program that offer rich research opportunities to students who can learn firsthand the power of working on broad multidisciplinary research teams. We anticipate many applications from students who will conduct fieldwork at international sites, or lab work here on campus. We are seeking sponsors to expand the program in coming years to meet this need,” says Lauren Linton, deputy director of TII.

Professor Elena Naumova, academic dean for faculty, Friedman School of Nutrition Science & Policy, is working with students in TII-funded projects in India and Ghana to develop innovative approaches to reduce the public health burden of water-associated infectious diseases and to implement these strategies to improve community health. “I am fortunate to work with outstanding students at Tufts. Their energy, curiosity, and commitment make these projects exciting and impactful. I am a firm believer that knowledge has to be shared, improved, and increased, and this can be done effectively by working in ‘cross-generational’ multidisciplinary teams,” she says.

Hanna Ehrlich, A15, who traveled with a research group to India, says, “The success of this trip was multi-pronged: it offered experiential learning in an international setting, collaborative opportunities with experts in microbiology and public health, and progress in microbial research with significant public health implications.”

“Lots of undergraduates are excited by TII and want to be involved,” states Walt. “Where they are the core of the university we are thrilled to build programs that provide opportunities for transformative experiential learning.” He points out that the Institute is planning to open an Innovation Hub in the new Science and Engineering Complex opening on the Medford campus in 2017, which is designed to encourage multidisciplinary research and innovation through to developing products and solutions that are “translation ready.”

TII is a priority for philanthropic support from Tufts’ parents, alumni, and friends, Walt says. “This support will enable undergraduates to explore ideas and participate in research from inception through to implementation. They can be part of this new model for discovery that will improve the human condition. As an educator, that is particularly inspiring to me.”
Summer of Experience and Service

Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service Summer Fellowship Helps Launch Careers

It’s not unusual for students to have careers launched after a Tisch Summer Fellowship (TSF), an internship program solely for Tufts students, which balances real-world skills, civic engagement, and learning, explains Mindy Nierenberg, senior director, Tisch College Programs.

“One of the things that makes TSF unique is that Tufts students aren’t competing with students from other universities. Each of the internships has a Tufts connection, typically alumni, who serve as mentors,” Nierenberg says. Students apply for specific internships through Tisch and work with a supervisor in the organization. Fellows attend an orientation on campus prior to the summer, attend peer meetings, write a final reflection paper, and receive mentorship and support from a Tufts graduate based in each city.

Fellows receive stipends of $3,800 in Massachusetts, $4,000 in D.C., and $4,100 in New York, Nierenberg says.

“Tisch College is especially grateful for the generous support from the James and Judith K. Dimon Foundation,” notes Tisch College Dean Alan Solomont. “This gift, as well as those from other generous donors, goes a long way towards making this program successful and accessible to Jumbos of all backgrounds.”

Jonathan Reingold and Karen Criddle, A16P, decided to support TSF after their daughter Kendall’s D.C. experience as a civic engagement intern at the Alliance for Children and Families.

“Tisch Summer Fellows was a great opportunity for Kendall to get real-world work experience while learning what a career in the non-profit sector might entail. These kinds of opportunities are a fantastic complement to the academic offerings at Tufts, and prepare students for their life after college. We were very impressed with the support that the program provided for Kendall and we wanted to make sure that this program would be available for other Tufts students in the future,” Reingold states.

Makeba Rutahindurwa, A14, describes her experience with TSF as “the pivotal moment” in her career. Currently employed as a paralegal for the ACLU’s Center for Justice, Rutahindurwa began working at the ACLU as a Summer Fellow.

“It was the first internship I held where I was fully engaged and inspired by the work I did and people I met. I have a strong network of friends and mentors that I know will be there no matter what I end up doing,” she says.

“In politics, connections are crucial,” says Benjamin Hoffman, A16, whose internship with AARP provided him with valuable experience and perspective. “Tufts alumni are great in reaching out and helping.”

The political science major worked on AARP’s advocacy campaigns, including tracking the voting records of Congress.

Jewel Castle, A17, created an organizational handbook and developed tools to support the New York City Community Learning Schools Initiative (NYCCLS).

“NYCCLS facilitates partnerships with public schools and non-profits and businesses to provide important services like medical and dental care, arts, enrichment, and social services,” Castle explains. Over winter break, the organization independently hired Castle back to continue her work.

“It’s very unusual for undergraduates at other universities to have these kinds of experiences,” Nierenberg states. “We’re fortunate to have involved alumni and parents who provide needed support and mentorship.”
When the 42,000-square-foot Steve Tisch Sports and Fitness Center opened its doors in October 2012, with its sky-lit Kraft Family Atrium, fitness area with a gleaming array of exercise machines and weights, myriad classes, and the Personalized Performance Program, it delivered a message that personal fitness and athletics matter at Tufts.

Two years later, Tufts Athletics celebrated its most successful year in Jumbo history with NCAA wins in track and softball and a second NCAA championship for men’s lacrosse. Baseball achieved an NCAA Tournament berth, women’s basketball had an NCAA Final Four appearance, women’s tennis was selected for NCAA play for the 14th consecutive season, three members of the men’s track and field team won All-American honors, and football had a glorious opening win. Tufts Athletics is now ranked seventh out of more than 400 NCAA Division III institutions in the Learfield Sports Director’s Cup, which ranks schools according to their finishes in NCAA events.

And it’s not only students cheering on the athletes—parents are amongst Tufts’ most ardent fans and supporters.

“It’s unprecedented to have this many championship teams at one NESCAC school right now,” states Amy Meltzer, A17P. She and her husband Jonathan Meltzer, A17P, from New York, are enthusiastic supporters of the tennis team of which their daughter Alexa is a member. “We both played sports in college and understand the importance of parental support for teams to be able to travel, hire assistant coaches, and help with uniforms and gear.”

William and Elizabeth Arbaugh, A17P, A19P, from Maryland, are thrilled that the program has provided a positive athletic environment for their son Jonathan, a member of the swim team. “Jon has been able to pursue a major in computer science and still train and compete with the team because there is a good balance between athletics and academics. Because friendships from college often endure a lifetime, we value the bonds created through participation in varsity athletics,” Elizabeth states.

Men’s head soccer coach Joshua Shapiro notes that parents are uniquely aware of the demands on their children. “They see how hard the programs at Tufts work to support their kids. I think they also see the challenges presented to programs to match the commitment level of the students. Our student athletes work so hard, but the resources are not always in place to match the commitment, especially relating to post-season runs and out-of-season work. We feel parents’ contributions can really enhance the student experience,” he states.

“Fundraising has become an integral part of the business plan for college athletics,” explains Director of Athletics William Gehling, A74, AG79, A05P. “A critical part of our team fundraising is for programs like special trips, but it’s also for basic operational needs like gear and uniforms.”

“We believe sports should make people happier and healthier,” state Kazuo and Keiko Nakamura, A15P, from Japan, who support the men’s soccer team in honor of their son Kento, noting that being part of the team has been essential to keeping Kento’s life well balanced, both physically and mentally.

Gehling points out that one of the reasons Jumbos are doing so well is the show of appreciation from parents and alumni. “Support is an important ingredient,” he says. “It’s really every bit as important as success on the field.”
Community health and psychology major Leah Petrucelli, A15, didn’t have a computer science or engineering background when she began working with Assistant Professor Ben Shapiro to design wearable athletic devices.

“I was working as a personal trainer, and Ben was one of my clients. He encouraged me to try to design a wearable device, so I created a squat sensor that lights up red and changes to green when the person has achieved a 90-degree squat.”

It was a challenging assignment—with some bugs still to be worked out—but Petrucelli enjoyed being pushed out of her comfort zone. “He connected me with the right people and now I’ve been able to accomplish something I otherwise never would have done,” she says.

Assistant Professor Ben Shapiro is committed to using engineering and technology to make education fun, but developing games for educators and students is a serious business.

“I enable youth to investigate how network technologies improve lives,” Shapiro says. “Most of my research focuses on computer science education, by broadening participation of underrepresented populations and by examining how to deepen learning.”

Temple University student (graduate in May) Madeline Golison, A16, took his course Theories and Technologies of K-12 Computer Science Education, and it became her favorite, she says. “Professor Shapiro’s creative teaching style has inspired me to learn more about computer science education, especially among minorities and women,” she says.

Aaron Tietz, AG13, who worked as a research assistant, notes that Shapiro works harder to create a sense of community for undergraduates than any other professor he knows.

“T’m really interested in engaging middle and high school students who have been typically left out of learning about technology, like girls, African Americans and Latinos,” he says.

“A scholar-in-residence at Lewis Hall, Shapiro and his wife live with Tufts undergraduates. “It’s shockingly tame,” he says, smiling. “The only noise we really hear is the scrape of a chair by a desk.”

He is going to brighten things up at Lewis, as well as South Hall, by creating an art exhibit using interactive lighting. His intention, of course, is to teach while having fun.
“As I think about applying to graduate school in public health, I am grateful to have an example of research that is both methodologically rigorous and relevant to solving a real-world problem.”

—Ariel Branz, A15, who traveled to Ghana as part of a research team collecting water samples and health records, in a Tufts Innovative Institute-funded project. See the article, page 4.