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**Class of 2009 to Leave a Legacy of Opportunity and Support**

**By Patrick Lattin**

Each graduating class leaves its own unique mark on NYU, and the Class of 2009 will be no different. Many members of the class have banded together to make a Senior Class Legacy Gift, a final farewell and an immediate gift back to the school that for the last four years has provided opportunities for growth – in knowledge, in a profession, and in person.

Justin Cohen, a CAS senior studying history and politics, heads a committee of 11 seniors who are helping to raise the funds for the 2009 legacy gift. The gift will be a contribution to the Wasserman Center's funded internship awards, a fund that provides grants of up to \$1,000 to future NYU students who are completing unpaid internships with non-profit organizations.

Cohen said the committee began meeting in October and has since developed a set of goals to lead the class of 2009 in their contribution to NYU. "The goal of legacy is both short-term and long-term. The short-term goal is our gift. That will have our name as a class attached to it," he said. "The more long-term goal is to build a generation of alumni who donate. It's definitely one of our goals to convince people that you can make a difference for our later generations."

The committee researched past proposed projects and the needs of the University before narrowing the gift options to three. The entire senior class then voted to help fund students with unpaid internships. Cohen said the decision was reached after recognizing both the need for professional experience through internships and the hardship that often accompanies working with no compensation. "In these tough economic times, the job market is dwindling, and companies are looking for people with more experience. Recent graduates are operating on an uneven playing field," he explains. "The problem is they don't pay. People need money for college, to live. The idea is to make unpaid internships more profitable, more appealing."

Michelle Knopf, associate director of the Wasserman Center for Career Development, said the fund allows students to gain invaluable professional experience and alleviates some of the financial stress of working in an unpaid position. "For a lot of students, it allows them to do the internship, as they would usually need a job," she explained. "A lot of students will do a non-paid internship and another internship or a part-time job, so this allows them to focus on their internship."

Knopf has seen the interest in the fund increase steadily since it was first offered in spring 2006. Even with a contribution from the Class of 2007, she said the Wasserman Center doesn't have the funds to help all students who show interest. "We've been able to give out more grants each year, but as it becomes better known, we receive more applications," she says.

Since deciding on the funded internship award, the committee has begun fundraising through advertisements, e-mails, work with student councils and even a grassroots campaign to encourage seniors to get involved. Cohen said the goal for senior fundraising, which would then be matched by University President John Sexton, has been set at \$25,000. Though the fundraising will continue through the summer, Cohen said he is hopeful for a successful campaign. "Hopefully, the class of 2009 will leave a legacy that is remembered."