

2018 Mandelbaum Fellowship Award

Citation for Galen Watts

The logo for OCUFA, consisting of the letters 'OCUFA' in a bold, blue, sans-serif font. The letters are slightly shadowed, giving them a three-dimensional appearance.

Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations
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Read by Gyllie Phillips, OCUFA Vice-President

This year's Henry Mandelbaum Graduate fellowship award winner at the PhD level of study is Galen Watts, a doctoral candidate at Queen's University in Cultural Studies. He is the seventh PhD candidate to be awarded this fellowship and, in the view of the selection committee, embodies the spirit of the Mandelbaum award as an impressive scholar who is an incredible community member, leader, and person of integrity.

Galen's work uses an interdisciplinary perspective that bridges religion, culture, and politics. His research is timely and complex, exploring the experiences of Canadian millennials who self-identify as "spiritual but not religious". Galen notes that most scholars link this shift in self-identification to either increased connections with social justice movements or the influence of capitalism as it seeks to promote consumer culture. Galen indicates that perhaps these explanations don't adequately explore the complexity of the "spiritual but not religious" phenomenon and that it can be better understood by accounting for new environmental movements and changing understandings of national and global citizenship.

Galen holds himself to a high standard, believing that "academia is valuable both as an end in itself and as a resource to make positive change in the world" and that it's important to "

1. address both personal and large-scale societal issues in order to have a truly just and cohesive society."

These principles have guided Galen on his long path back to the academy. He took some time off to travel, understand himself better, and mentally prepared to tackle graduate school. He saw first-hand the differences between haves and have-nots in Canada and beyond. He learned the importance of self-care as a vital step to being available to care for and serve others.

His experiences and renewed interest in the academy have led him to consider spirituality and the ways that shifts in social and cultural dynamics influence rising addiction rates, increased mental health concerns, social alienation, and changes to the role community plays our lives. Galen is particularly interested in how these issues intersect with how young Canadians understand what constitutes 'the good life'. Millennials have a different understanding of their responsibilities to other citizens and spirituality. Galen is interested in exploring how these new perspectives might affect the future of Canadian democracy.

Galen's commitment to the greater good and the community is demonstrated by his work. He has acted as a mentor through Kingston's Youth Diversion program, where he met weekly with an at-risk youth and provided emotional support and guidance. He has co-organized conferences, established a weekly event to support youth in Kingston struggling with addiction issues, contin-

ues to spend one-on-one time with marginalized community members, and has been working with an entrepreneur to develop an app, Re-Tribe, that will help connect isolated and lonely individuals to facilitate community building.

In addition to his community work, Galen's academic work has earned him recognition and acclaim. He has shown himself to be a cautious and thoughtful student, with his referees giving him stellar endorsements:

"Galen Watts is really exceptional on several fronts: his awareness of current cultural challenges, his intellectual ability, his commitment and dedication, and his increasingly evident leadership qualities. I am confident that he will play an important role in the future, combining outstanding academic work with cultural leadership."

"Galen cares passionately about human wellbeing, the moral health of society, and the individual's connection with the questions of meaning and self-worth. The myriad of extracurricular activities, groups and initiatives he has led and engaged with dovetail nicely with his research and are proof of how much this project matters to him personally."

Galen's academic passion and extracurricular work is an inspiration. He understands how his research can help heal communities and how his work in the community can provide vital perspective for his research. It is our pleasure to add the OCUFA Henry Mandelbaum Graduate Fellowship to his growing list of accomplishments and we look forward to hearing more from Galen in the coming years.