

# Meet the Rainmakers

**Student callers make Phonathon a success**

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Thursday, November 19, 2015

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It's been around for more than a decade now, and the positive effect it has had on the university goes beyond dollars raised to the connections alumni and parents make with current students when they pick up the phone.

Phonathon, where students call alumni and parents to seek monetary donations for the university, started at UNH in the early 2000s. It operates on a semester calendar, although Phonathon manager Rebecca Forrest '13 notes there are limited shifts for students during the summer and winter breaks.

Students who work for the Phonathon don headsets and dial for dollars, sharing details about courses, research, sporting events, exhibits, theatre productions and other campus happenings to encourage potential donors to contribute financial support. And often, they learn quite a bit about UNH from the donors on the other end of those calls.

UNH Today recently spoke with five of the current callers to find out about their work with Phonathon.



FRANCESCA BRAGAN '16



JUSTIN BROCHU '18



JAMES ELLIS '16



ANDREA PLOURDE '19



MICHELLE RIGGS '15

**Francesca Bragan '16** of Lowell, Mass., is a political science and international affairs dual major who is also a tour guide, a member of student government and president of the multicultural sorority. Her dream job: oversee the international aspects of a nonprofit or nongovernmental organization.

**Justin Brochu '18** of Penacook, N.H., is majoring in journalism. His dream job: sports journalist.

**James Ellis '16** of Westford, Mass., is majoring in business administration – finance and marketing options. His dream job: working as a financial advisor.

**Andrea Plourde '19** of Pembroke, N.H, is a civil engineering major. Her dream job: designing and restoring bridges in New England.

**Michelle Riggs '15** of East Greenwich, R.I., is a human development family studies major who is scheduled to graduate in December and will continue on to pursue her master's degree with a May 2017 graduation date. Her dream job: elementary school teacher.

### **UNH Today: What do you like about being a Phonathon caller?**

**Bragan:** *I am now one of two student managers at the Phonathon, and I have worked my way up from caller to where I am today. I*

*love being a member of this team because it has not only taught me to think on my feet but also to be able to connect with others on the phone or in person.*

**Brochu:** *I love being able to talk to alumni from all different decades to hear about the experiences they had while they were students at UNH and hear about how much UNH has changed over the years.*

**Ellis:** *I like being up-to-date about everything that is happening around campus; I also like talking to parents and alumni about all the*

*great things that UNH offers.*

**Plourde:** *I really enjoy talking to alumni about their experiences here at UNH and discovering how much the campus has changed and grown, while also raising money for its current students. It is so great when I meet someone who loved their time here as much as I do and we get to share stories about each of our experiences.*

**Riggs:** *I think it's fun to talk to various alumni and parents of UNH students because it teaches me so much about UNH that I wouldn't have known otherwise. I learn about majors and clubs that I am not a part of from parents and history of the school from alumni. I like that I am helping to raise money for UNH while having these conversations. The communication skills that I have gained over the past three years are extremely valuable for my future.*

### **UNH Today: What was one particularly interesting call or conversation you've had during your work as a caller?**

**Bragan:** *My favorite call I had was with this gentleman who worked for President John F. Kennedy in the White House during the Cuban Missile Crisis. I loved being able to hear his recounting of the events with such personal details, and to think that he was a UNH grad made me excited to see where my future might take me.*

**Brochu:** *One very interesting call I had was with a woman who was not only interested about the great things going on at UNH but also very interested in what I was majoring in and what I plan on doing in my future. It was great to hear some great advice she had for me, and the conversation was very personal. I learned a lot from her experiences not only at UNH but also in her life.*

**Ellis:** *I spoke with one person who studied abroad in Germany in the late '70s and was able to spend a day in East Berlin. She had a lot of cool stories about the people and the cultural differences.*

**Plourde:** *I recently spoke with a man who went to school with my grandparents when they were attending UNH. It was really neat to hear stories about my grandfather as a college student and all that he was involved in. The man I spoke with also told me that he has done so much and become so involved in his retirement age because of his career at UNH and the education he received.*

**Riggs:** *While my favorite calling group is parents, I find that I learn the most from alumni. There was one alumna who taught me about the history of the elementary education graduate program, which I found very interesting. Because of my conversation with her, I have been able to share the history of the program with others.*

**UNH Today: Picture yourself 10 years out of college with \$1 million in extra funds that you plan to donate to UNH. How would you want those funds spent?**

**Bragan:** *If 10 years from now I had \$1 million dollars to donate to UNH, I would donate it to the scholarship fund for students. I believe money should not be the reason students are not able to come here, and I want to help in any way, shape or form. With state funding so low and being an out-of-state student, I understand the burden of tuition and I don't believe others should feel that. It is important to focus on your studies and not have to worry about how to pay.*

**Brochu:** *With \$1 million of donations that I could give to UNH, I think I would want those funds being spent on renovating some of the dorms so they can house as many students as they can and to make sure the students have great facilities because UNH is just a great place to be, and I feel as if we need to make sure the students are happy while staying in Durham and to continue promoting the wonderful atmosphere we already have here at UNH.*

**Ellis:** *Being a business major, I would love to donate to the Paul School. I am very grateful for all of the opportunities that the Paul School has provided me.*

**Plourde:** *I would choose to have those funds separated into three different areas. I would want one-fourth of the money to go to UNH's greatest need and one-fourth to go to the College of Engineering. However, I would most strongly support the scholarship fund for in-state students. Being an in-state student paying for college myself, I am very grateful for the scholarships I have received from the university. The aid is the reason I can go to college and follow my dream to be a civil engineer. I want other in-state students in the future who are in my position to have that opportunity to go to a highly accredited university as well.*

**Riggs:** *I would want a third of the money donated to the human development family studies major and another third of the money donated to the elementary education graduate program. I would want the last third split up between student scholarships, student research and ongoing renovations on campus.*

The dedication of all the Phonathon callers is truly paying off.

“This week we set a new semester record of 72 pledges in a shift with \$6,811 raised and a 56-percent pledge rate,” Forrest explains, adding, “The previous record was set on Thursday the 12th with 50 pledges.”

How do all those pledges add up?

“The impact of Phonathon in securing dollars and donors for UNH is immeasurable,” Forrest says, noting that between the end of August and November 17, “we’ve raised \$113,789 from 1,349 pledges. Gifts come from UNH alumni and current parents, and donors have the ability to support any area of campus or dedicate their gift to UNH’s greatest need. Each year we raise around \$400,000 from around 4,000 pledges.”

## In case you are wondering...

In case you're wondering whether you contributed to the recent record-setting evening, it was Monday, November 16. Thank you!

## Interested in becoming a Phonathon caller? [Learn more here.](#)

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### SUCCESS



University of New Hampshire

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The stories are written by the staff of [UNH Communications and Public Affairs](#).

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