

## Two Women are First Winners of New Abigail Allen Award at AU

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Alfred, NY -- The first recipients of the Abigail Allen Award, a new honor established by the Alfred University Women's Studies Program, are Carol Burdick, assistant professor of English, and Megan Allen, a 1998 graduate who is now a reporter at the Utica Observer. The new award will be given each year to one faculty or staff member and one student or alumna "whose service to the University community, and to the women's studies community especially, exemplifies the standards set by Abigail Allen," said Dr. Karen Porter, professor of sociology and director of the Women's Studies Program. Alfred University -- the first co-ed college in New York state and the second in the nation -- owes a lot to Abigail Allen, "one of our pioneers," Porter said. In dedicating her life to the cause of coeducation, "she contributed immeasurably to improving the quality of women's lives on our campus and in the wider community." Abigail Allen was not only the wife of the University's second president, Jonathan Allen (his term ran from 1867 until his death in 1892) but a full partner in his job. "In many ways they ... operated as a team, sharing a common interest in such causes as abolition, women's rights, and temperance," according to the University's sesquicentennial history. Abigail Allen taught, supervised women students, organized women's groups on and off campus, and raised her own three children. In 1887, she led nine other Alfred women to vote in a local election. The women were arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced, "but they never went to prison, and their votes counted," the sesquicentennial volume says. Partly because of her influence, 19th-century AU women graduated believing that they had a right to contribute to public life. Some 80 percent of alumnae married, but almost a third of them continued to work, in contrast to alumnae of women's colleges such as Mt. Holyoke, where 80 percent married but only 6 or 7 percent ever worked again outside the home. Burdick, the author of two nonfiction books, a volume of poetry, and many articles and feature stories, has taught in AU's English division since 1982. Among her many honors was a 1996 award for excellence in teaching. Megan Allen created the *Alphadelphian*, the newsletter of the Alfred University Women's Studies Program, as her senior honors thesis. It was named in honor of Abigail Allen, who founded the *Alphadelphian* literary society on campus in 1846. One of the first women's literary societies in the United States, the original *Alphadelphian* encouraged women to take an active role in public life and raised awareness about women's issues. In the *Alphadelphian*, Megan Allen pointed out that in Abigail Allen's day, full coeducation was highly controversial. "At other colleges females attended classes with males, but were not allowed to present their papers publicly as males were expected to do," she wrote, whereas AU actually encouraged women to speak in public. Higher education for women was even controversial; a Harvard University professor published a book in 1873 called *Sex in Education*, claiming that strenuous studying could render women infertile. The Abigail Allen Award consists of a certificate and a cash award. The recipients' names will be inscribed on a plaque to be hung in one of the major campus buildings. Carol Burdick will receive her award at the AU Honors Convocation April 23, and Megan Allen will receive hers at the Women's Studies Program's spring reception April 17.