Alfred University alumna returns as dean of the Inamori School of Engineering
8/15/18

Gabrielle Gaustad '04

Gabrielle Gaustad, a 2004 graduate with a degree in ceramic engineering, will be the new dean of the Inamori School of Engineering at Alfred University, effective Jan. 1, 2019.

“I am thrilled to announce Gabrielle Gaustad has accepted the position of dean of our engineering school,” Alfred University President Mark Zupan said in announcing the appointment. “We wanted a dean who would continue to advance our reputation in ceramics, glass and advanced materials education and research. Dr. Gaustad’s experience and background are well-suited to help us achieve those goals.

Rochester Business Journal article on Gabrielle Gaustad's appointment

“Our engineering programs have an international reputation,” said Zupan. “Our alumni have developed bilirubin lights that cure jaundice in newborns; glasses that correct for color-blindness; body armor that has saved the lives of thousands of first responders and soldiers. They have developed ways to transmit data and voice over fiber optics and glasses that protect our smart phones and other electronic devices. One has founded one of the world’s top LED and sustainability-oriented firms, and others lead top biomedical engineering firms. We have alumni working at some of

the most prestigious companies in the world, including Corning Incorporated, St. Gobain, CoorsTek, General Electric, Ford Motor Company, Dow Chemical and Tesla.

“That’s Dr. Gaustad’s legacy, and that’s her future: to build on the already amazing programs we have, so that our alumni continue to be leaders in the fields of advanced materials, ceramics and glasses into the future,” Zupan added.

“We are thrilled with Dr. Gaustad, a progressive leader in advanced materials engineering,” said Provost W. Richard Stephens. “Even more, we believe as a distinguished alumna of Alfred University, Dr. Gaustad will foster closer ties with our alumni, who are found literally around the world. Perhaps most exciting, though, is that Dr. Gaustad will bring all of this to our engineering students, who need these tools to deal with the rapidly changing world in which they will spend their professional lives.”

Gaustad returns to Alfred University from Rochester Institute of Technology, where she is an associate professor and Master of Science program coordinator for the Golisano Institute for Sustainability.

“Academically, I have come full circle,” said Gaustad. She said she applied for the dean’s position because “the timing worked out really well” for her professionally. After 10 years with the sustainability institute at RIT, which she helped start and grow, she felt it was time for new challenges, and the deanship at Alfred University offered that.

“I have taken on some leadership roles” at RIT, found she enjoyed them, and was looking for additional opportunities.

For the past nine years, she has served on the institute’s admissions and retention committees, chairing it for the past five years, and has also been involved with marketing the institute. “I am really excited to go back to Alfred University” to take on even greater responsibilities, she said.

She’s excited to be joining President Zupan’s leadership team at Alfred University. “I think they will be a really great team to work with. Their enthusiasm for Alfred’s future is infectious.”

Her first step as the new dean will be to “get the lay of the land. I want to meet with everyone, a one-on-one meeting with everyone on the faculty and staff” of the school, as well as many in the University administration.

She also wants to increase enrollment of the “best and brightest students” in the school, partnering with the University’s enrollment management team.

Even though she’s been associated with the sustainability institute, her research and teaching have focused on materials science, she said, explaining materials –how they are selected, how they are manufactured, and how they are disposed of – all affect sustainability.

She was a recipient of a National Science Foundation Faculty Early Career Development (CAREER) Program Award to study the implications of material scarcity and criticality on future clean energy technologies.

Gaustad has received $1.9 million in research funding as a principal investigator from the National Science Foundation, the Environmental Protection Agency, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, as well as more than $2.3 million in research funding as a co-principal investigator or collaborator from federal sources, foundation and industry, working with a wide variety of researchers on interdisciplinary projects. Her research portfolio earned her admission into RIT’s “Principal Investigator Millionaire Club” in 2015. She has also earned an excellence in research award from RIT, and been nominated for excellence in teaching awards.

She has published more than 60 papers in high-impact, peer-reviewed publications, and has been an editor for several journals in her field, as well as organized several conferences and symposia.

As dean, she intends to lead a major effort to increase research dollars coming into the school. “We are going to go

after sponsored research in a major way," she said. With her background, she believes she will be able to mentor new faculty and can lead "large-scale research initiatives."

After receiving her B.S. degree, magna cum laude, in ceramic engineering from Alfred University, Gaustad earned an M.S. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a Ph.D. in Material Science and Engineering.

She first met her husband, Jeff Povelaites, also a 2004 Alfred University graduate, when both attended the National Science Foundation's Young Scholars program at the University, aimed at introducing high school student to materials sciences, particularly ceramics and glass. As a result of that summer experience, both enrolled in the School of Engineering at Alfred University.

As undergraduates, both were members of a National Aeronautics and Space Administration team chosen to fly on a retrofitted KC-135 out of the Houston NASA location. It was known as the "vomit comet" because participants experienced the anti-gravity effects of flying in space. Other members of the team were Michael Nicholas '04, and Darren Manter'04. "Our team name was 'SPACE - Sol-gel Platinum by Alfred Ceramic Engineers'," Gaustad said. "We actually were trying to uniformly disperse platinum in a sol-gel matrix (for potential catalytic convertor applications). The platinum is too dense to do this normally but the zero gravity environment allowed the platinum to freely float in the sol-gel which then rapidly cured into a dense matrix before we returned to normal gravity.

Gaustad and Povelaites are parents of a five-year-old son; the family lives in Rochester.

President Zupan expressed his appreciation to members of the search committee: William Carty, chair, the John F. McMahon Professor of Ceramic Engineering; Holly Shulman '87, professor of ceramic engineering; Jalal Baghdadchi, Professor Electrical Engineering; William LaCourse, Kruson Distinguished Professor of glass science; Steven Tidrow, Inamori professor of materials science; Alastair Cormack, interim dean, School of Engineering and the Van Derck Frechette Professor of Ceramic Science; Junjun Ding, assistant professor of materials science; Matt Kelleher, assistant professor of ceramic art; David Marsh, assistant professor of chemistry; Andrew Eklund, the Goetz-Bentz Professor of Chemistry; Maria Mendez '19 a ceramic engineering student; and Trustee Joseph Cesarano '83.

Zupan also extended his gratitude to several trustees who acted in an advisory capacity during the search for a dean, including Dr. Cesarano, Dr. Cheryl Blanchard '86; Dr. John Edmond '83; Dr. Christine Heckle '92; Tom Hinman '79; Dr. Terry Michalske '75; and Dr. Kathleen Richardson '82.