

Junior Awarded Houston Fellowship

To travel the South researching slavery

By Mark Sullivan
Staff Writer

The Amanda V. Houston Fellowship for 1997 has been awarded to Khalilah Gambrell '98, who will use the \$3,000 grant to visit the American South and conduct research on the history of slavery and her own family ancestry.

Named for Boston College's first Black Studies Program director, the fellowship is awarded annually to a Boston College undergraduate of African descent for use toward a travel-and-study experience.



1997 Amanda V. Houston Fellowship winner Khalilah Gambrell with University President William P. Leahy, SJ, and inaugural Houston Fellowship winner Juan Concepcion at the April 15 award ceremony. (Photo by Lee Pellegrini)

The fellowship was presented to Gambrell by University President William P. Leahy, SJ, at an April 15 ceremony in Gasson 100, which included remarks by Academic Vice President and Dean of Faculties William B. Neenan, SJ, and part-time faculty member Derrick Evans, who teaches in Black Studies and was a close friend of the late Houston, a pioneering African-American educator and community leader.

The program also featured a presentation by 1996 Houston Fellow Juan Concepcion '96, who used his fellowship to tour the Nile River Valley with scholars from several American universities. Freshman Candace Asher sang "I Wish I Knew How it Would Feel to be Free," a favorite spiritual of Houston.

Gambrell, a history major from Springfield, Mass., will use the fellowship to visit the upper South to study how slave history is represented at historical sites such as Mount Vernon and Monticello.

"I want to examine the paradox of how Washington and Jefferson spoke of freedom, but returned to plantations where they had slaves," she said. "This is an opportunity to understand the idea of freedom on which this country is based."

Gambrell also plans to trace her own family history in the area around Anderson, SC, where she was born. She has already charted her family tree back 120 years, and found several farmers among her ancestors in the rural South.

Her faculty advisor on the project, Asst. Prof. Cynthia Lynn Lyerly (History), praised Gambrell as an

"incredibly diligent" student whose quiet demeanor in class belies a probing curiosity.

"Her historical imagination is quite good," Lyerly said. "She is particularly interested in broader questions - of how concepts of freedom were defined through the years, and how slaves have struggled to make a place for themselves and changed the notion of freedom in the South."

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