Philadelphia, January 2008 – Casey Saccomanno, a senior fashion design major, was awarded one of the first $25,000 Geoffrey Beene National Scholarships Jan. 9 at the YMA Geoffrey Beene Fashion Scholarship Dinner in New York.

“This is a huge award, a huge honor,” said Saccomanno, who was one of four student winners announced at the dinner. The other winners were from Rhode Island School of Design, Parsons The New School for Design and the University of Colorado, Boulder.

“This is truly a great accomplishment for Casey to be recognized at this major industry event and for the University to be recognized as a preeminent institution for educating the future leaders of the industry,” said Clara Henry, director of the university’s Fashion Design program.

In addition to the $25,000 award, Saccomanno and two other Philadelphia University fashion design students, Janelle Frank and Sandra Huffaker, won YMA scholarships of $5,000 each, which had been previously announced.

“We applaud Jennelle, Sandra and Casey for their professionalism and commitment,” Henry said. “They all have a bright future in this industry and will make significant contributions.”

This is the first year the YMA awarded $25,000 scholarships to the top students in the country. The scholarships were funded in part through a bequest from the estate of famed designer Geoffrey Beene. The annual scholarship fund dinner is a top event attended by about 1,500 fashion industry officials. This year, honorees included designer Kenneth Cole and the event was emceed by Tim Gunn, a host of Bravo’s Project Runway and chief creative officer for Liz Claiborne Inc.
Winning is nothing new for Saccomanno, who as a sophomore was awarded the $1,500 Carson Kressley Scholarship for an outstanding student at the May 2006 Philadelphia University Fashion Show. At that show, she also received the Good Lad Award for children’s wear and the following year, as a junior, she won the Ann Taylor Loft Award for design excellence.

“From the very beginning, Casey was a rising star,” Henry said. “Her conceptual development and workmanship has always reflected consistently high standards. She’s a hard worker, self-motivated and very dedicated to her field of study.”

At Wednesday night’s event, though, tensions were high as the names of three other winners were called before hers. “I was thinking ‘well, at least I tried,’” Saccomanno said. When her name was announced as the last winner, she said, “I didn’t believe it – I sat there for a second” before she started walking to the stage to accept her award.

Saccomanno put in almost a whole semester of work on the YMA project, which was a case study of Gap Inc. Starting in late September, she researched the design, products, merchandising and marketing of the internationally known brand.

First, Saccomanno surveyed Philadelphia University students and faculty and mall shoppers to find out what Gap’s strengths and weaknesses are. She ultimately recommended adding a wider color palette corresponding to three moods – rustic, invigorating and mysterious – with colors ranging from brown, red, green and yellow to deep purple and blue. Using the knitting machines on campus, Saccomanno developed color swatches to represent each mood. Her case study also called for adding organic clothing options in higher-grossing stores to appeal to customers interested in natural, organic fibers.

About three weeks ago, Saccomanno found out she was one of eight finalists and on Jan. 7 she went to New York to present her case study to a panel of judges.

“The competition was keen,” said Harry Harrison, executive director of the YMA Fashion Scholarship Fund. “Casey’s presentation had the most visual impact, and her use of texture and color and her incorporation of a theme to this retail case study were very effective.”

“This was a great learning experience, and it’s wonderful to get a reward for it,” said Saccomanno, who hopes to get a job working in women’s wear in New York after her graduation in May.

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