HONORING OUR 2020-21 FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENTS

2020 GRADUATE STUDENT FELLOWSHIP CELEBRATION

HONORING OUR 2020-21 FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENTS
We recognize our generous partners who donate both financially and through their engagement with the university as ambassadors of our mission.

We value the members of the UWM community who provide support to our graduate students.

Finally, we honor the recipients of these fellowships, whose dedication and pursuit of excellence help make UWM a top-tier research university.
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*R1 refers to the top tier of U.S. research universities, as ranked in the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education. UWM’s R1 ranking places it among the top 2.6%, based on the amount of doctoral degrees awarded and research dollars expended. R1 fellowships are intended to reinforce this status by supporting exceptional PhD candidates who plan to graduate during the 2020-21 award year.
Distinguished Dissertation Fellows (DDF)

The DDF recognizes exceptional scholarly achievements and recognition relative to expectations in the field of study and exceptional potential contribution of new knowledge.

Who is eligible? UWM PhD students who either have dissertator status or will achieve dissertator status by the start of the award year.

Annual stipend is presently $16,500 for current dissertators.

Md Assad Uz Zaman, Engineering PhD Program

“Receiving such a competitive award will reinforce my academic achievements and reflect highly in my professional profile.”

Md is working on the design and development of a mobile robot with an arm that can help a person with physical disabilities perform household tasks.

“Such a robot will be able to navigate a person’s house with automated programming and user input,” he says. “It needs to calculate the motion of each of its components, from its wheels to each joint of its arm precisely. In my research, a new robot configuration with omni-wheels—enabling motion in any direction—will be designed with all necessary calculations for its motion.”

Susan Borchardt, Geography PhD Program

“By focusing my attention on my research, I will be able to prepare a more complete manuscript for publication.”

The increasing number of high-capacity groundwater wells used for agricultural irrigation in Wisconsin has raised concerns about their impact on the state’s drinking and recreational waters.

Susan is investigating how climate variables and human activity affect stream flow—a function of water volume and velocity, which is an important determinant of water quality and aquatic habitat conditions. She will use computer models to examine the relationship between surface water and groundwater in two different basins within the state.

Tathagato Chakraborty, Urban Studies PhD Program

“This award is an invaluable appreciation of my research and academic progress.”

Tathagato examines the effectiveness of U.S. low-income housing policy in achieving its stated goal of deconcentrating poverty in metropolitan areas and allowing the disadvantaged poor to access affordable housing in high-opportunity neighborhoods. “Low-Income Housing Tax Credit, as a policy, has arguably led to poverty concentration, especially for inner-city minority communities,” he says.

Coming from India, Tathagato was surprised by the resemblance between an American “ghetto” and an Indian slum. “The plight of the marginalized poor seemed astoundingly similar.”

Azam Elyasigorji, Engineering PhD Program

“This award has been like an exciting aurora in my life.”

Azam is working to detect corrosion in the embedded steel that reinforces pre-stressed concrete girders. She uses magnetic flux leakage, which involves magnetizing the steel through a strong magnetic field. At areas where metal is corroded or missing, she can detect “leaks” of the magnetic field from the ferrous material. She also employs finite element analysis as a powerful verified tool to simulate the expensive and time-consuming experiments.

Azam says she wants to be an asset to her home city in Iran, and that she chose civil-structural engineering for its interdisciplinary focus.

Wei Fan, Geography PhD Program

“This award encourages me to be more focused on my research, and lets me be more confident about what I am doing.”

Delineating urban functional zones—the basic units of urban areas—is essential for city planning and management. Timely updated urban functional zone maps, however, are rarely available in most cities due to the prohibitive financial and labor costs.

In her research, Wei is developing an automatic method that includes the use of machine learning as well as social media data collection from volunteer users. This automatic identification of urban functional zones offers the potential to replace current manual approaches.
Austin Harris, Atmospheric Science PhD Program
“The award provides me freedom to focus on research and financial support to publish and present the findings at conferences.”

Austin studies hurricane evacuations, specifically how forecasts combine with societal factors to produce an evacuation. He hopes to determine “which factors are most important to the evacuation’s success, which aren’t, and how the factors interact.”

“We hope the research will improve weather forecasts, identify policy needs, and support practitioners in emergency management, civil engineering, and other disciplines.” Austin’s introduction to meteorology was the 1999 tornado that destroyed his hometown of Moore, Oklahoma.

Cong He, Mathematics PhD Program
“This award gives me a chance to concentrate on my research work, and it will accelerate the process of my graduation. This funding will provide me the financial aid to participate more conferences in the future.”

In the field of geometric topology, Cong is especially interested in knots theory. A mathematical understanding of knots is valuable in DNA studies, revealing to scientists the mechanics by which enzymes replicate DNA and perform other essential functions.

Cong was a 2019-20 Distinguished Graduate Student Fellow.

Jessica Kahlow, Communication PhD Program
“Because of the DDF, I will be able to prioritize my research while maintaining work-life balance.”

Jessica’s research explores how understudied and marginalized groups use communication technologies to improve their relationships. Comparing differences in relational maintenance strategies, channel use, and intimacy over time between neurodiverse and neurotypical relationships, Jessica is examining how maintenance behaviors can alleviate negative relational stressors such as ADHD.

“I really started to grow, develop, and find my space in the field once I started letting myself study topics that had a personal meaning to me,” Jessica says.

Jieun Lee, Linguistics PhD Program
“This award will allow me to dedicate more time and effort to my dissertation and share my work and communicate with scholars at conferences.”

Jieun studies second language (L2) learning. “To aid impaired language learners,” she says, “it is important not only to identify the sources of individual differences but also to develop effective L2 training methods that reduce learning difficulties.”

Jieun hopes her work on L2 learning strategies and training will lead to pedagogy that is applicable to both naïve and advanced learners.

“As a second language learner,” she says, “I have always been interested in second language perception and production.”

Hui Lin, Freshwater Sciences PhD Program
“This award is great validation of what I’ve achieved to date, and an honor to be recognized among a high level of UWM graduate students.”

Hui uses optical instruments to observe the size of organic matter and investigate its composition in the freshwater ecosystem.

He was lead author on a paper (co-written with SFS Professor Laodong Guo) that examines a new approach to characterizing dissolved organic matter, which was published this year in a scientific journal.

The importance of the health of freshwater ecosystems and the influence of dissolved organic matter led Hui to pursue his PhD at UWM.
Nina Linneman, Educational Psychology PhD Program

“Receiving this fellowship is a true honor and allows me more time to dedicate toward the final phases of my training.”

Within pediatric psychology, Nina is interested in pediatric chronic pain and functioning, particularly adherence and self-management of pain symptoms. “Pain is extraordinarily complex and cuts across many pediatric chronic disease conditions,” she says, “so I hope to continue to make contributions to this area of research and intervention for children and families.”

Her undergraduate research experience and intervention with children on the autism spectrum while at Marquette University led to her current research interest.

Gayantha Loku Kodikara, Geosciences PhD Program

“A DDF is a great honor and a fantastic opportunity to invest my effort to expand my research at the highest quality level possible.”

Gayantha studies the origin and evolution of evaporites and associated lake sediments in two ancient lakes in southern California. He applies knowledge gained from these studies to develop an integrated approach for identifying and characterizing similar environments on Mars using remote sensing data.

Gayantha’s dream of studying the geology of other planetary objects—especially Mars and the moon—began during his undergraduate studies in geology and continued through two master’s degrees before he arrived at UWM.

Salahadin Lotfi, Psychology PhD Program

“This award allows me to focus on my research priorities as I strive to finish my PhD on an accelerated pace.”

Sala seeks to understand the underlying brain mechanisms behind normal and abnormal functioning—such as anxiety, PTSD, and depression—from a cognitive-neuroscience perspective. He designs computerized and other technology-based training to try to improve or alleviate brain malfunction in such abnormalities. He also creates laboratory-based cognitive experiments to manipulate the brain functions of healthy individuals and measures their reactions using advanced statistical analyses and cutting-edge neuroimaging techniques.

Logan Prust, Physics PhD Program

“The travel award will enable me to present my work at national and international conferences.”

Logan’s research focuses on numerical simulations of astrophysical processes—specifically, common envelope evolution, a phase in the life of binary star systems thought to be responsible for the formation of systems such as double neutron stars and double black holes.

Logan’s parents both worked as engineers on the space shuttle program, which led to his undergraduate degree in aerospace engineering, before he switched to physics. “This unique background has prepared me to face the many challenges associated with computational astrophysics,” he says.

Mohammad Qandil, Engineering PhD Program

“This award will help me focus on dissertation writing and publishing more peer-reviewed papers.”

Mohammad’s primary research seeks to increase water turbine efficiency and performance by minimizing the formation of air pockets in low-pressure areas where the blades churn through the water. He is also working on a hybrid renewable energy system as an alternative to the electrical grid in remote areas. He is the lead student at the federally funded UWM Industrial Assessment Center, which promotes energy efficiency and sustainability through energy assessments of manufacturing facilities. Mohammad was a 2019 UWM Graduate Student Excellence Fellow.
The R1 DDF is intended to reinforce UWM’s R1 status by supporting exceptional PhD students who plan to finish and defend their dissertations and complete all the requirements for the PhD degree during the 2020-21 award year.

Like the DDF, the R1 DDF recognizes outstanding scholarly achievements and recognition relative to expectations in the field of study and exceptional potential contribution of new knowledge.

Who is eligible? UWM PhD students who are able to finish their dissertations and complete the degree programs during the award period.

Annual stipend is presently $16,500 for current dissertators.

Jessie Roy, English PhD Program
“The DDF will provide a much-needed year to focus solely on my writing, allowing me to complete the most ambitious possible book.”

Jessie’s dissertation project, Brides: A Novel, tells the story of a queer woman struggling to come to terms with being disowned by her family after her wedding, a trauma that is kept alive by her job designing wedding gowns. “In this book, I explore the strangeness of ‘gay marriage,’ which both marks the beginning of a new family and can trigger the loss of one’s family of origin, introducing new subject matter into the tradition of fictional writing about exile, grief, and memory,” Jessie says.

Alexander Wallace, Psychology PhD Program
“This award will allow me to spend more time on both conducting and writing my dissertation and additional research projects.”

Alexander examines the impact of cannabis use on brain development and cognition in adolescents and young adults. He also looks at how the concurrence of comorbid Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder and substance use in adolescents affects developmental trajectories. In addition, he explores the role of health factors in mitigating the developmental and cognitive impacts of these disorders.

Alexander’s interest in research began in college. His honors thesis examined the relationship between ADHD and substance use.

Carissa Weis, Psychology PhD Program
“This award is very special to me, as it allows me to focus completely on my research to finish out my PhD this year.”

Carissa uses neuroimaging techniques such as magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) to characterize patterns of brain activity that may underlie symptoms of anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Her dissertation work aims to find out if patterns of brain activity recorded shortly after a trauma can help predict if someone is at risk of developing PTSD months later.

“I’ve always been fascinated by the brain and had an interest in understanding how we each can have such distinct responses to the same situation,” Carissa says.

Sumona Dhara, Biological Sciences PhD Program
“The R1DDF will help me attend an advanced gene regulation course at the Marine Biology Laboratory.”

Sumona studies the zebrafish’s ability to regrow damaged nerves after injury. The regeneration-associated genes (RAGs) that function throughout the lives of zebrafish are turned off in humans after the central nervous system (CNS) matures. Her recent publication revealed the genetic programming associated with successful regeneration in zebrafish. She now seeks to understand molecular mechanisms regulating RAG expression, and hopes to apply this knowledge to promote nerve regeneration in humans suffering from CNS injuries or degenerative diseases.
### Ae Hee Lee, English PhD Program

“This award gives me the very necessary opportunity to design a dedicated creative space to focus on producing a complete manuscript.”

Ae Hee was born in South Korea, grew up in Peru, and lives in the U.S. Her poetry focuses on cross-cultural experience and communication. “I seek to challenge traditional notions of otherness, belonging, and interpersonal love, with a critical eye on how we think of them in neoliberal terms,” she says. Inspired by poet Gloria Anzaldúa’s “new mestiza.” Ae Hee’s poems “will dramatize the liminal space that we can occupy as we negotiate cultural constructs such as citizenship, ethnicity, religion, and gender norms.”

### Dalila de Negreiros, African and African Diaspora Studies PhD Program

“My award will help me to fully dedicate my time to my research.”

Dalila is an Afro-Brazilian researcher and activist. She is conducting a comparative study about Black Studies centers and departments in Brazil and United States, seeking to highlight resistance strategies developed in Black Studies centers and departments.

### Suraj Pandey, Physics PhD Program

“This prestigious award will make my CV strong and will be very helpful for my future endeavors”

Inside cells, proteins change their structure to perform specific functions. Using time-resolved serial femtosecond crystallography, Suraj takes 3-D snapshots of proteins in action—at a rate measured in quadrillionths of a second—to observe reactions in real time.

Before coming to UWM—which he calls “a wonderful platform to understand proteins”—Suraj studied in Nepal, his home country. “I realized that there are many things that look simple on the surface,” he says, “but the more we delve into them, the more interesting and meaningful they become.”

### Morgan Stevenson, Psychology PhD Program

“I am excited to be able to focus the majority of my time towards my dissertation research.”

Morgan seeks to understand how the brain changes after learning new motor skills, with a particular focus on whether astrocytes—a cell type in the brain that has been less investigated—contribute to motor learning.

“If we can better understand motor learning, we may be able to develop better treatments for conditions that produce motor deficits, ranging from autism to stroke,” she says.

While working with children with behavioral and developmental disorders as an undergraduate, Morgan wanted to learn how to improve the outcomes for these diagnoses.
Distinguished Graduate Student Fellows (DGSF)

The DGSF recognizes strong academic achievement or exceptional potential, demonstrated leadership potential, and research goals.

Who is eligible? New or continuing master’s and doctoral (non-dissertator) students.

Annual stipend is currently $15,000.

Anahita Alahmoradiqashqai, Health Sciences PhD Program

“Aside from this being a motivating recognition, this is a great opportunity financially for me to fully focus on my research.”

Anahita is participating in a collaboration with Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin that seeks a better approach for diagnosing rare diseases such as hypermobile Ehlers Danlos syndrome (hEDS). The ultimate goal is to devise better treatment and care plans for hEDS, which is especially difficult to diagnose.

“Using 3D motion capture, we put shiny markers all over the body and ask children to walk and do the tasks that they do as activities of daily living to find the crucial biomedical phenotype” Anahita says.

Farzad Banihashemi, Engineering PhD Program

“This award would help me put more time and effort into connecting the fields of machine learning and power system protection.”

In electrical power systems, faults are inevitable. “They come from lightning, cable aging, human errors,” Farzad says. “We have to find them and react fast and accurately to save the system, equipment, and people.” He sees machine learning as part of the solution. “How amazing would it be if you can predict the faults in the system rather than reacting when they occur?”

Six years working in industry after earning his master’s degree was enough, he says. “I found the academic work experience more challenging and futuristic.”

Molly Beckwith, English PhD Program

“The DGSF will support me as I dedicate this year to drafting and revising multiple book-length works of fiction for publication.”

Molly’s writing focuses on women, sexuality, and belief in the American South. “The tensions between these parts often result in lightly magical fiction—called slipstream or fabulism—that borrow from literary traditions like fairy tales and gothic fiction,” she says.

As a master’s student, Molly studied magical realism, fabulism, and fairy tales—“for their subversive politics and surreal aesthetics,” she says. “Now, I am focusing on gothic fiction for the foundational role it plays in contemporary American fabulism.”

Mark Dickson, Philosophy MA Program

“I am thrilled to be able to focus on my researching, writing, and presenting at conferences.”

Mark’s primary interests are metaphysics and early modern philosophy. “In metaphysics, I am interested in distinguishing between in-itself reality versus reality’s appearance in human experience, and how to account for the fundamental concepts utilized in mathematics, logic, and science,” he says. “I am also interested in early modern philosophy, especially select issues in the thought of Spinoza, Locke, Edwards, and Kant.”

Mark says he was drawn to analytic philosophy “by its precision, rigor, and tools for creating and assessing argumentation.”

Osama Elsayed, Engineering PhD Program

“As per Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, the award covers the first two needs for any human being which are physiological needs and safety needs.”

In gas turbine research, Osama’s main objective is to control the temperature profile along the turbine blades to increase their lifespan and reduce maintenance costs. The goal of his research into biomass—which until now has mostly been made from livestock manure and rice husk—is to identify biomass species that generate maximum energy with low energy consumption.

Osama says he recognized the need for renewable energy while he worked as a sales engineer in the petroleum sector.
Distinguished Graduate Student Fellows (DGSF)

Dong Jin Kim, Linguistics PhD Program
“The award will facilitate not only my journey to earn my degree, but also my further academic career development.”

Dong Jin’s phonetics research “will be able to provide a deeper understanding of how we accomplish our goals in speech communication,” he says. “It begins with the knowledge about how we pronounce and perceive certain speech sounds and ends with whether such knowledge is coming from physiological vs linguistic or language-general vs language-specific constraints.”

Dong Jin became interested in the sounds of language through his diverse experiences as a volunteer and teacher in South Korea and the United States.

Amy Klemmer, Anthropology PhD Program
“I am incredibly honored to be recognized by my department and the university with this fellowship award.”

Amy studies prehistoric subsistence strategies practiced along the Ecuador coast and the impacts of short-term environmental stress on human ecology. Her specific interest is food security and the potential human response to El Niño events through the analysis of archaeological evidence. “Subsistence strategies of prehistoric humans over time can show which methods are better suited for ecological resilience and sustainability,” says Amy, a past Graduate Student Excellence Fellow and Tinker Pre-Dissertation Field Research awardee.

Haley Kolp, Psychology PhD Program
“This fellowship will allow me to focus significantly more of my time on research-related activities, which will help me better prepare for a research-focused career.”

Haley studies the overlapping effects of simultaneous alcohol and marijuana use, and how they influence intimate partner violence and high-risk sexual behaviors in young adults. In an online study, she is also developing a comprehensive measure of simultaneous alcohol and marijuana use. Haley’s involvement as an undergraduate in a laboratory that focused on substance use and risky behavior helped shape her current research interests.

Michael Lagerman, Art MFA Program
“Receiving the DGSF allows me the invaluable opportunity to wholly invest in finalizing my thesis and exhibition.”

Michael studies the history of contemporary art, the social impact of images, and queer phenomenology. “My practice as an artist is to research liminal relationships,” he says. “Through photography and installation, I observe, conflate, and construct environments that living and non-living actors occupy and affect.”

As a BA student studying philosophy and a photographer, Michael discovered “a desire to understand contemporary art’s role in the critique and creation of truths in the world.”

Eduardo Luiz Menozzo Da Rosa, Geosciences PhD Program
“The award will assist me with funding to cover my expenses and also will make more time available to focus on my research.”

Eduardo studies the sedimentation, stratigraphy, and paleogeography of the Late Paleozoic Ice Age in west-central Brazil and northwestern Namibia. Studying the rocks generated by glaciers about 300 million years ago in these regions will allow him to reconstruct the paleoenvironments and paleoclimates during the glaciation. “This field of study gives me opportunity to better understand the Earth’s past,” Eduardo says. He first conducted geosciences research as an undergraduate in Brazil.

Molly Poerstel, Dance MFA Program
“The DGSF will offer me a concentrated period of study where I can deepen my 20 years of choreographic and performance research.”

In her career as a dance artist in New York City, Molly has gained recognition for her work with dancers including David Dorfman, Susan Rethorst, Larissa Velez-Jackson, Ivy Baldwin, and Juliana F. May (UWM MFA, 2011), with whom she was a collaborating performer in May’s Bessie-nominated Folk Incest in 2018. Poerstel was a Sustained Achievement in Dance Performance nominee the same year. She has taught at The Eugene Lang College of Liberal Arts, The New School, and the SUNY Purchase Dance Conservatory, among others.
Distinguished Graduate Student Fellows (DGSF)

Han Gyeol Suh, Physics PhD Program

“With this award, I will have more chances to participate in multiple conferences.”

A theoretical physicist, Han has two subfields of study. One area is superconductors, which are types of material that can carry enormous current without loss. “I am trying to understand what is happening in those materials,” he says. He also studies gravitational waves, which are disturbances of spacetime caused by massive and energetic events in the universe. Han is interested in applying deep learning to analyze gravitational wave data collected from the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) Scientific Collaboration.

Ryan Sullivan, Psychology PhD Program

“This award affords me valuable time to continue working on projects and develop my skill set for a career in addiction research.”

Ryan examines the impact of substance use on adolescent neurodevelopment, from primarily neuroimaging, affective, health, and brain imaging perspectives. Through investigating brain-behavior relationships, he hopes to identify targets for prevention and intervention.

“After working on research involving heavy substance-using older adults,” Ryan says, “I realized that there is a lot of work that can still be done in the adolescent years to prevent the progression of substance use from turning into a lifelong disease.”

Beatrice Szymkowiak, English PhD Program

“This award will allow me to work “in the field”, and travel to different environments to conduct my research (pandemic aside).”

My research is a creative work of poetry, that investigates the new environmental trajectory of the Anthropocene and humanity’s environmental responsibility,” Beatrice says. “My current work is a project focused on The Birds of America—J. J. Audubon’s iconic ornithological and archival work. Through a process of lyrical erasure and reflection, I question the Western world’s impulse to archive nature and its heuristic approach to nature, when North America has lost 3 billion birds since 1970.”

Mania Taher, Architecture PhD Program

“Receiving this award puts me in the top 1.5% of graduate students, which is a great achievement.”

Mania’s research examines the cultural landscape and placemaking of new refugee communities in the United States, specifically the Rohingya Muslim community on Milwaukee’s south side. “My research will explore the process of placemaking in an already existing built environment and record their behavior patterns in everyday lives.”

Mania’s experiences in her native Bangladesh—as an architect and coordinator of community development workshops on infrastructure systems of poor communities—led her to study the built environment of communities in need.

Li Yang, Information Studies PhD Program

“The DGSF is an honor helping me rebuild confidence when I am frustrated with the progress in my research work”

Li studies knowledge organization. “Specifically, we seek to address how to describe information, how to build up knowledge structure, how to link knowledge for discovery,” she says. “For example, ontology, taxonomy, and classification are the instruments for knowledge structures. Linked data technology can help link knowledge together.”

Li enjoyed her previous job as a lecturer, but decided she wanted more. “I did not only want to be an actress to play others’ scripts,” she says. “I would rather be one of them who wrote the scripts.”

Tajammal Yasin, Social Work and Social Welfare/PhD Program

“The DGSF award is very helpful for me achieving my milestones as I progress in my PhD program.”

Tajammal is pursuing research and macro-level interventions to improve the lives of children and families. He is particularly interested in exploring the impact of parenting interventions and home visiting on child abuse and neglect. His current interests began as an undergraduate. “I always wondered how abusive parenting impacts child development and how families and their internal relationships are associated with adversities in the family and toward the children,” he says. “I wanted not only to explore but also find a remedy to these problems.”
This renewable award recognizes strong academic achievement and is designed to increase graduate education participation for underrepresented racial/ethnic minority students.

Who is eligible? Prospective or continuing UWM graduate degree students who are U.S. citizens or permanent residents and meet at least one of the following criteria:

- Underrepresented racial/ethnic minorities (Black, Latinx, American Indian, Statutorily defined Southeast Asian).
- First-generation college students with a FAFSA-defined high financial need.
- TRIO or TRIO-like pre-college program participants (Upward Bound, McNair, GEAR-UP, etc.)

This award is also based on a demonstration of high academic achievement and the potential to contribute to diverse perspectives in knowledge or practice.

This award includes an academic-year stipend of $15,000; tuition remission; health benefits; and a $1,000 travel award.

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Kristin Bailey, English PhD Program (Rhetoric & Composition)

“I believe this support indicates a belief in the value of the work that I’m doing and in my ability to accomplish it.”

Kristin is exploring how historically marginalized students in an academic culture center develop academic identities through culturally relevant methods of academic discourse.

“Through this work, I am troubling the notion that academic literacies and cultural literacies are distinct,” she says. “I am drawing attention to the literacy work that academic culture centers do in historically oppressive environments.”

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Felix Benzant, Philosophy MA Program

“This fellowship will provide immense help in alleviating the financial burden that usually comes with graduate school.”

“My research is based on the history of philosophy, particularly metaphysics [the examination of the fundamental nature of reality] and about how it informs contemporary philosophical debates,” Felix says. “Particular issues I research are personal identity (how we persist over time), ontology [the nature of existence or being], and cause-and-effect relationships.”

As an undergraduate, Felix says, “I came to notice that abstract philosophical subjects naturally called my attention, and philosophy seemed to fit me very well.”

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Emily Crain-Castle, Sustainable Peacebuilding MSP Program

“This fellowship gives me the privilege to explore new passions and the chance to devote all of my time and energy into my research.”

Emily examines how corporations, NGOs, and nonprofit organizations shape education, the impacts of international development practices, and national and international policies that harm marginalized communities.

“Flaws within western educational practices, on a micro and macro level, perpetuate inequality and oppression at the institutional level by those in position to improve these circumstances,” she says, citing the consequences of NGOs sending westerners who lack cultural competency to aid developing nations.

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Demotris De Valk, Physical Therapy DPT Program

“This award alleviates enormous financial stress and allows me to fully engage in my academics and any research groups available.”

Demotris will conduct research in kinematics—often called the “geometry of motion”—as well as clinical techniques and biomechanics.

As a high-school athlete Demotris suffered a devastating injury. By working tirelessly with a physical therapist, he not only recovered, but enjoyed great success as a high school and collegiate athlete. “This is what really pushed me towards physical therapy,” Demotris says. “I want to help others regain control of their active lifestyles.”
New Advanced Opportunity Program (AOP) Fellows

Sasheene Denny, English MA Program (Creative Writing)

“This award will give me some breathing room to really explore and develop my writing.”

Sasheene is working on a short story collection that combines horror with Haudenosaunee stories. The Haudenosaunee are a Native American confederacy comprising the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, Seneca, and Tuscarora peoples.

“I’ve always been fascinated with the stories we’d all tell each other growing up,” says Sasheene, a member of the Oneida Nation. “Learning how stories make up who we are and exploring my own particular set of stories (both created and inherited) shapes my perception of the world and often frames how that world perceives me.”

Joy D Evans, Public Health MPH Program (Community and Behavioral Health)

“This fellowship will give me the opportunity to be a better advocate for my community.”

Joy’s undergraduate research on food insecurity involved assessing the prevalence, distribution, and clustering of health risk factors among what she calls “racially minoritized” college students. Her goals were to benefit future interventions targeting food insecurity, improve students’ ability to succeed in school, and reduce behavioral health risk factors and long-term risk of chronic disease for racially minoritized populations.

As a Milwaukee high school student, “I saw firsthand how much young black children were struggling on a day-to-day basis,” she recalls.

Bernadette Gonzalez, Music MM Program

“The AOP Fellowship award will allow me to continue my education and to succeed without adding to the burden of debt.”

Bernadette’s research is in the field of music librarianship and organology—the science of musical instruments. Her current projects include repairing period instruments and determining their origins.

“As an experienced band instrument technician,” she says, “my interest in the historical development of musical instruments was a bridge to integrating my skills toward entering the field of organology. I feel that my skills will be transferable and able to diagnose any problematic issues pertaining to historical instruments.”

Mark Guzman, Public Administration MPA Program

“This fellowship affords me the opportunity to do research, concomitantly allowing me to pursue other avenues for professional growth.”

Mark explores public policy aimed at reducing economic inequality. His current focus is Universal Basic Income (UBI), a program proposed at the federal level and in some states, where the government provides unconditional recurring cash payments to citizens to supplement their incomes. He also examines the dematerialization and demonetization of society through the use of technology. For example, a user’s single smartphone has often replaced multiple devices, such as a computer, camera, and audio recorder.

Erica Haven, Occupational Therapy MS Program

“With this award, I feel valued for my insight and perspectives and empowered to overcome challenges to reach personal goals.”

Erica is exploring the benefits of incorporating trauma-informed care into occupational therapy with expecting parents who have experienced trauma. She hopes perinatal interventions emphasizing mindfulness and sustainable development practices can mitigate effects of trauma—from high adverse childhood experiences or complex post-traumatic stress disorder—for adults and stop intergenerational cycles of trauma.

“Greater impact can be accomplished to bolster developing families within a supportive environment,” Erica says.

Jessica Hinojosa, Psychology MS Program (Experimental Psychology)

“This award will allow me to give back to the community that has inspired me to work toward a career in health psychology.”

A member of the UWM Child Stress and Coping Lab, Jessica’s research interests include psychosocial adjustment to chronic health conditions, pediatric sleep health and sleep hygiene, and medical and family communications.

Jessica says her experience as a caregiver sparked an interest in psychology. Her undergraduate research experience and clinical placement at a children’s summer treatment program inspired her to become a clinical health psychologist. “I felt I was truly making a difference in the lives of others,” she says.
Karlies Kelley, Dance MFA Program

“In this program I am able to gain a greater understanding of who I am as a dance educator and minority leader in the community.”

Karlies researches dance and choreography emphasizing African and Latin styles. She hopes to advance teaching and cultural understanding in U.S. academic and corporate environments.

“I believe dance to not only be an art form one can appreciate on a stage performed by professionals,” she says, “but right in our neighborhoods, performed by bodies from all walks of life and stories. By listening and viewing these real and diverse stories, one can continue to create positive change and narratives among all communities.”

Kayla Kopinski, Geosciences MS Program

“This award will give me the time to decide what I would like to do in the future and make plans to complete that.”

Kayla’s research begins with sample and data collection in shear zones, which feature highly deformed rocks compared to the surrounding area. Then, laboratory analysis can include petrographic microscopy. Shining light through a thin sample of rock (about .03 millimeters), the microscope interprets light patterns to identify mineral composition, which may shed light on the history of the area.

Kayla says she embraces the challenges of geology research. “I thrive in the unknown and am very curious to learn more and find answers.”

Teddy Dean Lepley, Art MFA (Printmaking) Program

“I knew that this award would make or break my decision to further study at the graduate level.”

“My work in print and narrative forms is largely figurative,” Teddy says. “I use the figure to create a point of connection with the viewer in hopes that it will lead to a change of heart. In my most recent body of work, I created four large, brightly colored woodcuts in which my partner and I are cooking dinner, cutting our hair, taking a shower, and using the toilet. By showing my homosexual relationship in the context of everyday routines I am challenging the idea that gay people are not “normal.”

Teddy’s BFA exhibition was titled “People Love.”

Mariah Alexandria Lopez, Dance MFA Program

“This fellowship gives me a chance to embed myself in the classes and focus solely in an artistic capacity.”

As a teenager, Mariah’s art was realism oil painting. “Once I saw a dance performance,” she recalls, “I knew my calling was to build art on bodies and not just a canvas. I could feel all five senses through the dancers’ movement.”

Mariah’s late entry into dance allowed her “to gain a unique perspective and build my own idea of movement that was not inspired by anyone else.”

Learning from UWM teachers and fellow dancers, she says, “I will be able to improve my own style of movement and how I approach dance in performance and education.”

Khaila D Miles-Semons, English MA Program (Literary Studies)

“This award has gifted me the opportunity to continue my studies without external stressors like financial aid”

Khaila says her experience in the McNair Program at UW-Oshkosh in 2018 “helped me grow to see myself as a scholar.” She plans to build on that research—an interdisciplinary approach to investigating the interpersonal relationships between women during the Antebellum period—which produced the paper, “Together, But Unequal: Perceptions on the White-Black Sisterhood from 1830 to 1870.”

“I seek to uncover more information about Black women’s relationship to the world and the world’s perceptions of Black women,” she says.

Chinyere Obasi, Business Administration MBA Program

“I am honored to receive this award because it allows me to focus on my program of study while serving the community and collaborating with other fellows.”

Chinyere seeks to combine her backgrounds in business and nursing to enhance patient care experiences through improved patient safety and health care management.

“My passion has always been to utilize my skills to serve my community,” she says. “I have had truly remarkable role models that have guided me, and I would like to share all that I have learned to inspire and assist others.”
Alejandra Peralta-Werns, Physical Therapy DPT Program

“The AOP Fellowship allows me to pursue my dream while affording me the opportunity to continue my education.”

Alejandra is involved in a study evaluating energy expenditure by pregnant women during the three trimesters. Data is collected in a “free-living” situation—remotely via a body camera and an activity tracking band worn by each participant—as they perform normal daily activities with no researcher intervention. Alejandra’s interest in physical therapy began as an athlete rehabbing from a torn ACL. She says her positive experience “drove my desire to change the perspectives of physical therapy and ultimately led to my academic interest.”

Ivana Renteria, Library and Information Science MLIS Program

“Thanks to the AOP fellowship, I will be able to finish my program, and pursue a career as a librarian/archivist.”

Ivana seeks to be in a career “where I can teach others how vital information access is in education.”

“I would also like to teach others how to properly search for and acquire information that can provide a foundation for purposeful research,” she says.

In her 12 years of teaching middle and high school, Ivana saw many students with no idea how or where to find information for their projects. “I would like to be able to produce a curriculum based on research practices that will prove useful in middle and high school classrooms.”

Jacqueline Renee Reyes, Sustainable Peacebuilding MSP Program

“This fellowship gives me the opportunity to attain a degree that will give me extensive tools and knowledge to work toward my goal.”

Traveling to Kenya and Nicaragua as a teenager, Renee visited some of the most impoverished areas in the world. “The complete inequity I saw and knowledge of a world outside of my own shook me to the core,” she recalls. “It was then I decided to commit my life to working for a nonprofit and work towards creating lasting change. I believe that poverty and privilege should not be silent neighbors, but be actively working together to create a fair and just world for all.”

Eric Lane Schuemann, Geosciences MS Program

“The AOP Fellowship provides invaluable resources toward my educational goals of competent and thorough geoscience research.”

One geology class at a community college was all it took to ignite Eric’s passion for earth science and science education, and reveal his career path.

His research examines structural geology and plate tectonics, with an emphasis on shear zones at ancient tectonic margins and mountain belts in southwestern Spain.

As an undergraduate, he worked as a tutor and mentor, facilitated online learning programs, volunteered at Science Olympiad, and was a student representative in Washington, DC for the Geological Society of America.

Chloe Stallion, Public Health MPH Program (Epidemiology)

“This award keeps my dream alive of being a public health advocate when I become a physician in research.”

As a member of the Milwaukee Health Department’s Covid-19 task force, Chloe is working to create a real-time GIS map tracking needs of people who test positive.

“The idea is to keep the MHD continuously updated on the needs of people who have tested positive, such as water, food, medicine, comfort, and mental health,” she says.

Always wanting a medical career, Chloe says her anthropology and gender studies courses, and personal experiences with marginalization, “have pushed me to dedicate my career to helping uplift disenfranchised peoples.”

John Thurgood, English PhD Program (Creative Writing)

“This award will give me the time needed to work with local organizations, build community and conduct research.”

John says his project is “a body of creative work that looks at inclusivity and barriers of entry” into skateboarding. “One of my goals is to examine the relationship between skateboarding and educational programming for children, and the narrative modes that represent those relationships across genres. I’m interested in what those different modes of storytelling say about the locations and peoples being represented.”

While at UWM, John would also like to create a safe space where LGBTQ+ students can skateboard and find support.
Marlo Vasquez Gonzalez, Economics PhD Program

“The fellowship will enable me to continue my schoolwork while providing support to my family and my two children.”

“Plain and simple, I believe everything that happens in the world can be explained by economics,” says Marlo, who is interested in using game theory in his research. “Economics enables us to learn from past events, apply the learnings to the present, and, hopefully, provide insights to predict the future.”

Esrom Williams, Dance MFA Program

“This award allows me to be an advocating voice for the field of dance within my cultural and social environments.”

Esrom performs dance as research. “I engulf myself into the physical and cognitive explorative experiences that offer in-depth insight to the topics of race, gender, equality, culture and social practice,” he says.

Esrom says many of his research practices have helped school systems integrate dance into their curricula, “so that dance can be an interdisciplinary platform offered to all students.”

His work also influences choreography, he says, “inspiring the topics and themes to align with those of the research findings.”

Kyle Williams, Business Administration MBA Program

“This award will enable my educational experience to be much more fulfilling.”

Kyle was drawn to the holistic approach of the entrepreneurship concentration within the UWM MBA program. “Entrepreneurship encompasses both elements of business and finance along with other elements, including new product development, venture capital procurement, marketing research, organizational leadership solutions, and many more,” he says.

“Being inherently business minded, coupled with the knowledge and skills that my parents, friends, associates, and other family members had taught me, is what initially inclined me to want be a businessman.”

New Advanced Opportunity Program (AOP) Fellows and Graduate Student Excellence Fellows (GSEF)

AOP
This need-based, renewable award recognizes strong academic achievement and potential.
Who is eligible? Prospective or continuing UWM graduate degree students who meet the AOP guidelines (see page 12).
This award includes an academic-year stipend of $15,000; tuition remission; health benefits; and a $1,000 travel award.

GSEF
The Graduate Student Excellence Fund was established in 2015 by the Dean of the Graduate School, Marija Gajdardziska-Josifovska, as a philanthropic effort to provide advanced degree students the support they need to pursue their research endeavors, complete their studies, and share discoveries with others in their fields.

Enthusiastic supporters of this fund represent a myriad of interests such as business, industry, law, medicine, and public service. Gifts received from individuals, foundations, businesses, and the Graduate School Leadership Cabinet have allowed us to provide more students, across all disciplines, with fellowship awards.
New Advanced Opportunity Program (AOP) Fellows and Graduate Student Excellence Fellows (GSEF)

Kitonga Alexander, History PhD Program
“The AOP Fellowship would allow me the capabilities of providing more quality research in my field of study in an enhanced timeframe for the period.”

Kitonga’s research connects the generational crisis of joblessness in the city of Milwaukee to three historical events that impacted employment rates of African American males: deindustrialization, the destruction of the African American neighborhood known as Bronzeville, and Urban Renewal policies. “My research explains the historical aspect to the plight of those who migrated from southern states, yet struggled to benefit from the sough-out opportunities perceived to be in existence,” he says.

Audra Rebeka Attaway, Social Work MSW Program
“The AOP Fellowship will allow me to wholly focus on my studies and pursue educational opportunities I may not have been able to pursue without it.”

“While using an empowerment-based approach, I am focusing on creating macro-based change and addressing social injustices within organizational and community-based systems,” says Audra, who was also awarded the Bader School’s 2020 Max and Kay Kurz Scholarship. “The lack of access to appropriate resources for minority-majority communities leads to a cycle of oppression.” She says social work allows her “to make a change in systems that otherwise ignore marginalized and oppressed populations.”

Azia Barner, Mathematics MS Program
“The AOP gives me the opportunity to truly dedicate the time to solidify my research interest and learn mathematics with exuberance.”

During her graduate studies, Azia hopes to collaborate with Medical College of Wisconsin researchers to use differential equations to develop a working mathematical model of treatment efficacy for viruses such as hepatitis. Growing up, Azia liked math classes the most. “I loved how my final answer could be definitely right or wrong—there wasn’t an in between,” she says. After her bachelor’s degree in physics, Azia is glad to be returning to math. “I am on a new adventure in my journey, for which I am truly excited.”

Vanessa Bravo, Occupational Therapy MS Program
“AOP means opportunity; to increase diversity and representation in my field and disseminate my research.”

The high cost, lengthy rehabilitation, and functional limitations caused by rotator cuff tears can leave patients vulnerable to psychological distress, Vanessa says. Her research seeks to determine potential benefits of integrating mindfulness-based interventions with standard physical rehabilitation. Working as a rehabilitation technician as an undergraduate helped Vanessa see she was on the right career path. “Through occupational therapy, I can help individuals develop, improve, and maintain skills necessary for daily living,” she says.

Alisa Davis, Communication MA Program
“I have never had the opportunity to fully focus on research without balancing multiple jobs for financial stability.”

“I use a rhetorical approach to study Black feminism,” Alisa says, “which allows for an in-depth analysis of textual artifacts that resemble different elements of Black womanhood and their contributions to society as a whole.” Her research includes analysis of Lupita Nyong’o and Danai Gurira’s speeches at the Black Women in Hollywood event. Alisa’s thesis will analyze Black women’s epideictic rhetoric in the #SayHerName campaign. “My lived experience as an African American woman has influenced my academic interest,” she says.

Paul Lee, Geography MS Program
“This fellowship will help me stay on track and put me in line with my goals of graduating in two years.”

Paul is particularly interested in cartographic visualization, human geography, and the geography of race in the United States. At UWM he will research the role of race in the development of communities of color. Raised in a Hmong-speaking household, Paul saw the study of geography as a way to explain a question from his childhood: Why do kids who attend school less than a mile apart—as he and his cousins did—have such different experiences growing up? Paul says he hopes his work will have a lasting impact on how geography and race are viewed.
New Advanced Opportunity Program (AOP) Fellows and Graduate Student Excellence Fellows (GSEF)

Ashley Lopez, Educational Psychology MS Program
“With this award, I will now be able to dedicate my time and attention to my coursework and research.”
Ashley’s work focuses on the mental health and quality of life of transgender people, and the intervention programs developed to address the health disparities they face. “I have examined the relationship between mindfulness, living in one’s affirmed gender, and quality of life and well-being of transgender youth,” says Ashley, who conducted much of her previous research as a 2019 UWM McNair scholar. “Helping my friends and family work through their problems throughout my adolescent years is what initially drew me to counseling and psychology.”

Anthony Luis Magdaleno, Kinesiology PhD Program
“The fellowship will provide the freedom to focus completely on my education and the development of my research..”
Within sport and performance psychology, Anthony is interested in mental fatigue and the impact it may have on human performance. He also seeks to improve and expand applied interventions used to help performers from a wide array of backgrounds. “My interest in kinesiology, and the subfield of sport and performance psychology, largely come from my own experiences as an athlete and a desire to help those in similar situations,” Anthony says. “I was once the person that needed the services and help that I now train to provide others.”

Patricia Mendoza, Social Work MSW Program
“The Advanced Opportunity Program (AOP) Fellowship is an investment in my future and an investment in the community.”
Patricia’s undergraduate research experience with UWM Psychology Professor Christine Larson led her to pursue an MSW with a Behavioral and Mental Health specialization. As a 2019 McNair scholar majoring in psychology, Patricia examined whether physiological arousal, as measured by sweat levels, and a history of childhood maltreatment predict the onset of PTSD in adulthood after a traumatic event. “It is my goal to help those in my community overcome adversity and lead a quality and holistically fulfilling life,” she says.

Joseph Ryan Moore, Urban Studies MS Program
“The fellowship affords me the opportunity to travel and present my research at major conferences around the country.”
Joseph traces his interest in the structural causes of inequality—particularly in urban inner cities— to his childhood in public housing projects. As a University of Oregon undergraduate, Joseph completed an intersectional analysis of heroin use in the United States, examining how heroin use differs by race/ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status, and predicting the probability of future use within these demographics. At UWM, Joseph looks forward to continuing his research and finding opportunities for community engagement.

Karina Moran, Social Work MSW Program
“The amazing opportunity that the AOP Fellowship will provide me is to continue my education without having to worry financially.”
“Growing up in the South Side of Milwaukee, I have been a witness to minorities lacking resources. This is especially true for the older adult population,” says Karina, whose undergraduate field placement was with older adults. She says the elderly and their families are often unaware of very helpful resources, such as memory clinics. In addition to helping people with Alzheimer’s and dementia, Karina wants to examine determinants of social isolation, to lessen or eliminate its impact on the older adult population.

Emily Munoz, Psychology PhD Program (Clinical Psychology)
“This fellowship allows me to further develop my research skills, submit manuscripts for publication, and present research at conferences.”
Emily’s research focuses on a type of intimate partner violence called reproductive coercion, in which one partner tries to control the autonomous reproductive decision making of the other. “Latinx women are at an increased risk of experiencing reproductive coercion,” she says, “and my dissertation research hopes to identify cultural risk and resilience factors associated with reproductive coercion, in order to develop culturally sensitive interventions for women who’ve experienced this form of violence.”
Kathryn Reuter, Library and Information Science MLIS Program

“This award is entirely validating for the years of effort I have put into my studies.”

“My research focuses on the historical causes, responses to, and framings of homelessness and hunger/food insecurity in the United States,” Kathryn says. “I am also interested in animal studies, which explores how humans have used/abused and (mis)understood non-human animals throughout time.”

“I have wanted to be a librarian for many years because I am passionate about the democratization of information and the democratization of knowledge. Growing up witnessing intense inequalities, I knew that social disparity is a product of our history.”

Jessianne Skierski, Art MFA Program

“This fellowship will allow me to be able to do the work I am meant to do.”

“I have been able to watch my community come together to support each other through donating and gathering resources, proving that when we work together, we can survive a lot,” Jessianne says of life during COVID-19.

“I am capturing these historical moments in pen and ink. Part of my work is to document what is happening today in my community. So much of my passion for being a community artist is being able to share the stories of our past, of our ancestors, of my grandparents. These stories can be erased and destroyed if we do not keep records of our existence.”

Elizabeth Stinson, Psychology PhD Program (Clinical Psychology)

“This award is a huge honor, and will provide me with additional resources so I may better focus on research and coursework.”

Elizabeth is interested in examining how substance use and other health behaviors impact neurocognitive development in adolescence, and how experiencing early life adversity and other socio-cultural factors may influence that relationship.

“I am interested in making an impact in individuals’ lives and on a larger group scale,” she says. “Clinical psychology provides the unique opportunity to work with individuals one-on-one clinically and conduct research that will have a large impact on groups of people.”

Amara Tang, Communication Sciences and Disorders MS Program

“These awards allow me to concentrate more intensely on my education and maximize my experience as a graduate student.”

Amara is working to become a speech-language pathologist with a focus on adults with traumatic brain injury and neurodegenerative diseases.

Her interest in speech-language pathology started at home. “Learning of my older brother’s late speech production evoked realization,” Amara recalls. “It is not a skill that comes effortlessly to every person.” She wanted to help people who struggle with the gift of speech. “This is how I found myself pursuing the same profession that helped bring my brother’s language to life.”

Gregory Thomas, Performing Arts - Film MFA Program

“Receiving the AOP Fellowship gives me the security to leave my current position outside of school.”

Through his research as a film student, Gregory is exploring different communication techniques and methods, with a focus on using his body as a subject.

“I am learning to employ gestures to communicate vulnerability with an audience. My field of study grants me the privilege and freedom to explore vulnerability as a method for connecting with those who see themselves in my work.”

Gregory says, adding, “Throughout high school and my undergraduate studies, I never saw queer people of color presented as creators in films or curators of content.”

Tashea West, Educational Psychology MS Program

“This award motivates me to keep moving forward and allows me to increase my networking skills by connecting with others at conferences.”

In her effort to improve education for underrepresented students, such as minorities and those with learning disabilities, Tashea is developing an experiment that examines how children’s peer social interactions affect what they learn from their teachers.

As an undergraduate, Tashea says, “I chose to use my bachelor of arts in psychology to help teachers ensure that their students are performing well academically. That is when I decided to study School Psychology in graduate school.”
Brianna Young, Clinical Psychology PhD Program

“I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to devote substantial time and effort to research effective clinical approaches for children with neurodevelopmental disabilities.”

In the UWM Child Neurodevelopment Research Lab, Brianna’s research includes development of a play-based intervention for young children with Williams syndrome, a neurodevelopmental disorder often associated with elevated levels of anxiety and fears that disrupt daily life.

One promising approach is to adapt behavioral interventions intended for more prevalent developmental disorders, such as autism, through systematic examination with children with Williams syndrome.

Kao Yang, Engineering PhD Program (Material Science and Engineering)

“This award is the first step toward achieving my professional goal of one day becoming a director of a research program.”

Kao is exploring the use of austenitic stainless steels to prevent corrosion inside the steel reactors used in petrochemical industries. Austenitic stainless steels do not harden under heat treatment and are essentially non-magnetic. Oxidizing their surface before operation forms a protective layer of aluminum oxide, which further protects against corrosion from carbon by-products from the chemical process.

“I had always had an interest in designing technological equipment,” Kao says. “This has led me to engineering.”

Allison Kotowicz, Anthropology PhD Program

“This fellowship will assist me in successfully completing my doctoral dissertation fieldwork, writing and defense.”

In many parts of the world, societies must navigate the complex relationships between conservation, development, and tourism. Allison is studying how life within this nexus is reshaping the Maasai people of Tanzania.

“Maasai identity is at a crossroads,” she says, noting the challenges they face trying to maintain their pastoral culture and lifestyle. “Scholars need to examine what strategies and techniques are being used by the Maasai in the maintenance, manipulation and reconstruction of Maasai identity in the 21st century.”
The Graduate Student Excellence Fund was established in 2015 by the Dean of the Graduate School, Marija Gajdardziska-Josifovska, as a philanthropic effort to provide advanced degree students the support they need to pursue their research endeavors, complete their studies, and share discoveries with others in their fields.

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**Kelly Allen, Urban Education PhD Program**

“Receiving this award will help me focus on my academics as I finish my degree requirements.”

Kelly’s research examines how to prepare educators to be more responsive to “minoritized and marginalized” students. When I was in school, I often wondered why I never saw people that looked like me in the curriculum,” she says. “When I got to college and was able to take classes about Black, Asian, Latinx, and Indigenous history, it became apparent that people who looked like me needed space in our curriculum.”

Kelly is involved in efforts to diversify the teacher workforce to accompany the increased diversity of P-12 students.

**Dammar Badu, Physics PhD Program**

“This award has given me encouragement and boosted my self-confidence to pursue my goals.”

Dammar’s research focuses on determining association or dissociation of a human secretin receptor, and understanding how a type of molecule called ligands affects it. Found mainly in the small intestine, the secretin receptor stimulates secretion of bicarbonate and electrolytes in the pancreas, and helps to neutralize gastric acid in the small intestine. “The association mechanism of receptors might be altered by some human diseases,” he says. “The information from our study could be useful for diagnosis and management of such disorders.”

**Navid Bahmani, Management Science PhD Program**

“This award further motivates me to pursue my research interests, and I am honored to be recognized!”

Navid studies the impact of social media metrics—word of mouth, page followers, etc.—on brand outcomes. He also examines how consumers shop on their mobile phones, how companies should handle customers when a mistake has been made, and the internet of things (IoT).

Navid says he became interested in marketing because “many consumers don’t do their homework” when making purchase decisions, due to money and time costs. “They even make decisions based on subconscious factors that companies can use to their advantage,” he says.

**Michael Coker, Communication PhD Program**

“This fellowship is a rewarding manifestation of the hard work graduate students put into their programs and careers.”

Michael’s research focuses on social support interactions within online communities for individuals with marginalized identities and disenfranchised experiences.

“I am interested in how individuals curate their communities with like-minded individuals and utilize technological affordances to gain support,” he says. “I hope my research will assist individuals with marginalized experiences experience bonding and positive social support as they navigate a complex array of communication technologies.”

**Todd Ebling, Anthropology PhD Program**

“My goal is to complete my degree this academic year. This award offers freedom to focus on writing to reach that goal.”

Todd is exploring the front-line work of homeless care in the urban Midwest. “Little research has been undertaken that focuses on the experiences of front-line workers at homeless shelters,” he says. “My research fills this gap by illuminating the work stories, moral difficulties, and everyday hardships that workers face.

“Since my first anthropology course in 2006, I knew that I wanted to be an anthropologist,” Todd recalls. “It was an exciting and incredibly interesting field. I have slowly become a budding anthropologist.”
Cui Fu, Engineering PhD Program
“The award is a great honor that allows me to have more time to spend on my research and encourages me to continue my road on the research.”

In steel-reinforced concrete girders, each type of concrete has a minimum cover requirement—the minimum allowable thickness of the concrete layer above the steel. Cui is working to establish minimum cover requirements for ultra-high-performance concrete bridge girders, based on durability, bond strength, and manufacture tolerance.

“What most intrigues me about being a PhD student in engineering,” Cui says, “is not just the math or the technology, but the possibility of changing the world and helping people.”

Karaline Fusco, Educational Psychology PhD Program
“This scholarship provides the opportunity for me to access research and clinical training that I could not otherwise afford”

Karaline’s research seeks to explain racial health disparities in weight-loss surgery outcomes—specifically, why minority patients have poorer post-surgical weight-loss outcomes than their white counterparts. She is studying whether psycho-social variables play a role in creating the disparity.

Karaline says her experiences with marginalized communities led her to the field of counseling psychology. “I saw what a great need there was for counseling, and the limited resources in the community.”

Brittany Grafton, Nursing MN Program
As a student in the Direct-Entry Master of Nursing program, Brittany uses critical thinking to improve the care of her patients and also to improve the environment of care.

Muhammad Istiaque Haider, Engineering PhD Program
“It is an outstanding advantage to be able to add a prestigious award like this to my profile.”

Muhammad studies shape-memory alloys SMAs, a class of metallic alloys with the capacity to recover their original shape after being highly deformed, by simple thermomechanical regulation. “The repeated regeneration of the newly invented residual stress provides a new way for the SMAs to be used as actuators,” he says. “This may create a paradigm shift in smart materials design.” Muhammad is also involved in research to develop and design new self-healing metallic materials.

“I find immense pleasure when I can finish the design of something meaningful.”

Patrick Hall, History PhD Program
“Receiving the GSEF has gone a significant way towards relieving my worries about how I will fund my research.”

Patrick is researching how the forced incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II—including his grandfather—has affected members of today’s Japanese American community. “I am particularly interested in the effect it has on Japanese Americans who did not directly experience the incarceration, including Yonsei—4th generation Japanese Americans.”

Most research has focused on first- and second-generation Japanese Americans, Patrick says. “I believe that my work will fill an important gap in the current literature.”

Dahai Han, Engineering PhD Program
“This fellowship will ease my financial burden and allow me to concentrate more of my time on my dissertation research.”

Han is designing a simulation system integrating various alternative transportation modes in rural areas. His goals are to better serve at-risk populations—older adults, adults with disabilities, and low-income people—as well as save money for rural transportation providers.

In 2014 Han worked on the World Bank-sponsored Jiaozuo Green Transport and Safety Improvement Project. “I started to realize public transit is not just transporting people, but also helping shape communities and benefit both riders and non-riders,” he says.
Elaheh Kheirandish, Engineering PhD Program

“This award is highly encouraging and grants me the opportunity to pursue my passion for research and development.”

Elaheh’s research is focused on fabrication and characterization of optoelectronic properties of novel nanomaterials. Her goal is to improve performance of nanomaterial-based devices. “Altering matter in atomic and molecular scale enables unique properties that are not seen in traditional bulk materials,” she says. “Investigating the properties of novel nano-materials is key to development of high-performance electronic and optoelectronic devices, such as solar cells, photodetectors, lasers, and sensors.”

Kathryn Klein, Women’s & Gender Studies MA Program

Kathryn combines scholarship and research with social justice initiatives, particularly concerning gender-based violence and children. She is involved with a number of campus and community organizations, including Panthers Against Sexual Assault, the Zeidler Center of Public Discussion, and the Milwaukee Childcare Collective. Kathryn actively seeks to improve lives on campus, in the community, and in the world at large.

Amir Kordijazi, Engineering PhD Program

“This award will lighten my financial burden and inspire me to help others and give back to the community.”

To help reduce agricultural water pollution, Amir is enlisting steel slag—the leftover byproduct of steel smelting—to remove and recover phosphorous discharge from agricultural drainage systems. The slag does this through adsorption— it collects and retains the phosphorus as it passes by. “The slag can be reused several times,” Amir says, “which creates a circular economy where waste production is aimed to be eliminated and resources are continually reused.” Amir has developed a statistical approach to identify the best adsorbent materials.

Martin Kozon, History PhD Program

“I am honored to accept this award; it will contribute toward funding my travels to the Silesian province in Poland.”

Martin’s dissertation explores the post-World War I governance of Polish Upper Silesia, a region split between Germany and Poland. “Polish officials sought to make their half look and function more Polish in an effort to integrate it into the Second Polish Republic and disqualify German irredentist claims,” says Martin, the son of Solidarity-era Polish immigrants. But he says there was resistance within the multicultural Upper Silesia, which historically had rejected national identities in favor of religious and regional ones.

Alycia Lewis, Anthropology PhD Program

“Financial stress can impede progress at both the personal and professional levels. This award helps to mitigate that stress.”

Alycia is examining the impact of anthropogenic interference on the ecosystem, population, and overall lives of South African vervet monkeys. Using biological material, she will study their exposure to agricultural chemicals, heavy metals, and other receptor-disrupting agents. “This work will aid in the understanding of this species and how they interact and handle chemical interference, while simultaneously addressing larger questions about primates and anthropogenic occurrence, as a whole,” Alycia says.

Jordan Ludyan, Geosciences MS Program

“Awards such as these instill pride and accomplishment to students in pursuit of an advance degree.”

To better understand the very early Martian surface—which evidence suggests included warm, wet environments, including hot springs—Jordan conducts fine-scale chemical and mineral analyses of similar environments on Earth: the hot springs, geysers, and steam vents of Iceland.

Enrolling in Geology 100 as a freshman at UWM soon revealed to Jordan an exciting field of study and career path. He says asking questions and conducting studies about the Earth and other planets “is a fulfilling privilege that I never grow tired of.”
Abel Mathew, Psychology PhD Program
Abel is working to train people with obsessive-compulsive and anxiety-related disorders—such as skin picking—to break their habits. The computerized avoidance training he developed—in the form of a simple game—has shown promising results in participants’ behavior.
Working with his advisor, associate professor Hanjoo Lee, they are integrating brain imaging to track what happens in the regulatory center of the brain as people go through their approach or avoidance training.
Abel won the 2019 UWM Three-Minute Thesis competition, which challenges graduate students to deliver a brief, compelling summary of their work to a general audience.

Tania Mutchie, Chemistry PhD Program
Tania is doing work on the vitamin D receptor (VDR) that will ultimately result in the development of chemical probes. This will help enable research into the biology of vitamin D metabolism.
“VDR has been identified as an important pharmaceutical target for the treatment of metabolic disorders, skin diseases, cancer, autoimmune diseases, and cardiovascular diseases,” Tania says.

Qussai Obiedat, Health Sciences PhD Program
“This award provides some recognition of all the efforts that I have invested during my PhD journey.”
Qussai hopes to develop a brain-computer interface (BCI) system to help people with ALS—and other severe motor impairments—perform basic control and communication tasks.
Toward that end, he is studying a non-invasive, EEG-based BCI and its efficacy as an interface with CVSA, a mechanism for directing visual attention that does not require eye movement—essential for advanced-stage ALS patients whose voluntary muscles are paralyzed.
Qussai says his field combines his love of learning new technologies with the promise of improving quality of life.

Md Shadiqur Rashid Roni, Chemistry PhD Program
“This award is a recognition of my hard work and dedication, and it also adds value to my resume.”
To overcome steroid resistance of inhaled asthma medication, facilitate accurate administration, and provide long-term relief of asthma symptoms, Roni and a team of scientists lead by UWM chemistry Professor Arnold are developing an oral drug for asthma. Roni’s analytical work has demonstrated that the drug is effective over a period of 12 hours, is not reaching the brain and forms harmless metabolites enabling secretion.
“I believe we are not able to identify our strength until we are challenged to do something new,” Roni says.

Georgina Rutherford, Art MFA Program
“The Graduate Student Excellence Fellowship award couldn’t have come at a more crucial time in my degree”
Georgina practices printmaking, book arts, and collage.
“My artwork is currently exploring concepts of invasiveness, impermanence, and the unseen in relation to the Great Lakes,” says Georgina, whose practice includes lithography, intaglio, screenprinting, letterpress, and block printing. “The transparent surface of the lake is a deceptive indicator of the health of the ecosystems below the surface. With climate change, invasive species, and polluted waters, the lakes are quickly devolving into a water desert at the heart of the Midwest.”

Leila Saboori, Architecture PhD Program
“This award provides inspiration for working harder toward finishing my dissertation and will lighten my financial burden.”
Leila’s research examines modern urban and architectural history of Iranian oil cities. “At the intersection of oil and space,” she says, “my dissertation highlights the role of oil as the key agent in socio-spatial transformations of the landscape during the first half of the twentieth century. It explores how the radical transformations of the landscape influenced everyday lived experiences of the local population.”
Leila says her historic hometown in Iran drew her to study architectural history and historic preservation.
Jacob Sapir, Philosophy MA Program

“With this award, I will be able to continue my studies and engage in continuing education online that will provide sources for my dissertation.”

Jacob’s research focus is the study of knowledge and the philosophical study of society, exploring such questions as, “Can you coherently believe you know the answer to a question that you are wondering about,” “Why do people value truth,” and “To what extent can existing social norms alone justify practices of believing what others say on mere say-so?”

“What makes philosophy distinctive,” Jacob says, “is that the data, and the tools needed to interpret it, can usually be accessed from the armchair. It is the most accessible of the sciences.”

Renee Scampini, Urban Studies PhD Program

“A PhD school can be a long, difficult journey, and this award provides some monetary stress relief during this tenuous time.”

Integrating her experience as a dietitian with social scientific scholarship on race, gender, and urban inequality, Renee brings a unique perspective to studying hunger and food policy.

“I emphasize the food system as a whole and I connect with Milwaukee residents in all stages of the food system process: from soil, seed, and farmer, through communing around food, and returning to the soil,” she says. “I see my dissertation as an opportunity to contribute to heightened discussions about a racialized food system.”

Clinton Sergi, Biological Sciences PhD Program

Clint is studying the genetic and environmental variation in the cognitive capabilities of black widow spiders.

“Web-building spiders are excellent species to test hypotheses about cognitive phenotypes,” he says, noting that webs are the product of the spider’s behavior and its immediate environment, in addition to being easily modified through cognitive processes and easily measured once constructed.

Mingwei Shang, Engineering PhD Program

“This award is reducing some financial pressure, allowing me to focus on my study and research, and providing great motivation.”

To improve the performance of lithium-ion batteries, Mingwei is developing new materials for the electrodes. Advanced materials can increase the batteries’ capacity and charge speed, improve their stability across different environments, and make them much safer, he says.

“Material is one of the key factors affecting the performance of lithium-ion batteries.” While most researchers are focused on improving the batteries’ energy density, Mingwei says safety is also an important research area.

Jessica Skinner, Anthropology PhD Program

“This award will allow me to afford fees and other education expenses so I can complete my dissertation without additional debt.”

Jessica is working to identify individuals interred between 1882 and 1925 at the Milwaukee County Poor Farm Cemetery (MCPFC). Her dissertation employs 3D scanning to create digital representations of the skeletal remains. “This project also reveals their embodied life experience,” she says. “Rather than focusing on specific anatomical features, pathologies, or trauma, this dissertation utilizes holistic analysis, maintaining personhood for these individuals with an ethically situated, person-centered approach.”

Lisa Sun, Architecture MArch Program

“Without the support of this award, I would not be able to dedicate the time to pursuing a coordinated master’s.”

With an undergraduate degree in both computer science and studio art, Lisa felt limited by her software development job. “Since I also liked making things, architecture made perfect sense,” she says. “I’ve finally found a great fit.”

“A coordinated master’s [architecture and urban planning] will enable me to bring a broad perspective to the table and see how those two fields influence each other as part of a larger system,” says Lisa, who volunteers with Habitat for Humanity, Riverwest Food Co-op, and Mr. Bob’s Under the Bridge.
Nathan Tokarek, Kinesiology PhD Program

“With this support, I will be able to explore new approaches to conducting research, which is very meaningful in light of recent events.”

Nathan wants kids to spend less of their school day sitting and more time being physically active. He recently completed research with preschoolers on the benefits of nature-based education, and he hopes to apply some of those approaches to traditional classroom environments.

As an undergraduate, Nathan had an internship in clinical comprehensive weight management for children and adolescents. “This experience opened my eyes to the importance of developing healthy lifestyle behaviors from a young age,” he says.

Carly Wahl, Health Sciences PhD Program

“This award will allow me to prioritize my dissertation, teaching, and community engagement rather than additional work outside of the university.”

Carly studies the psychological aspects of rest and recovery among sport athletes and tactical athletes such as firefighters. “I am also interested in the integrative approaches to facilitating performance and decreasing injury in athletes and firefighters,” she says.

Carly has done research and has had applied experiences with local firefighters. She has been co-investigator on interdisciplinary research studies, with primary responsibility for sport psychology research design.

Chelsea Wait, Architecture PhD Program

“My field has few awards for students aside from dissertation awards, and so this is meaningful as an honor.”

Chelsea “studies how people make their world, modify it, and write their values into the physical world—collectively and individually.” Observing Milwaukee’s streetscapes, Chelsea says she explores “specific vernacular features at the scale of the home and street: porches, stoops, yards, sidewalks, pocket parks, and the street corner.”

“For many who live in small single- or multi-family homes,” she continues, “this is the public sphere that we transition into as we move to the front of our house and open our front door into the world.”

Yi Yin, Sociology PhD Program

“This award creates an opportunity for me to make a difference in ethnic-minority communities.”

Recent crises—COVID-19, Brexit, the Great Recession of 2008, the war on terrorism, climate change—have eroded confidence in administrative functions, institutions, and leadership, Yi says, and led many scholars to declare a global “legitimacy crisis.”

Yi examines changes in the sociocultural meaning of institutional trust across various contexts and whether these patterns are global or only in certain societies. She says her work will “help us trace the stability of political regimes and the responsiveness of large-scale institutions to public demands.”