HONORING OUR 2019-20 FELLOWSHIP RECIPIENTS

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2019

4:30 – 6:30 p.m.

Golda Meir Library, 4th Floor Conference Center
Program

4:30 Opening Remarks
1. Mark Mone, Chancellor
2. Marija Gajardziska-Josifovska, Dean of the Graduate School
3. Johannes Britz, Provost

Featured Speaker: Chad Cotti

Recognition of 2019-20 Fellowship Recipients
1. Distinguished Dissertation Fellows (DDF)
2. R1 Distinguished Dissertation Fellows (R1 DDF)*
3. Distinguished Graduate Student Fellows (DGSF)
4. New Advanced Opportunity Program (AOP) Fellows
5. R1 Advanced Opportunity Program (R1 AOP) Fellows*
6. Dr. Tomás Garrett-Rosas Research Award
7. The Jeannette Seloover Johnson ('62) and R. Douglas Johnson Women in Science & Technology Fellowship
8. Graduate Student Excellence Fellows (GSEF)

5:30 Social Hour

*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 2019-20 award year.
Dr. Cotti is a professor of economics and the Oshkosh Corporation Endowed Professor at UW-Oshkosh, as well as an adjunct professor of executive education in the UWM Lubar School of Business. His research interests lie broadly within applied microeconomics, with specific interests within health economics and public policy. His research into federal SNAP benefits explores the correlation between the timing of their distribution and such factors as educational success in mathematics, drunk driving fatalities, Medicaid utilization, health outcomes, and crime patterns. In October at UWM, he will present an Economics Department seminar titled “Hunger Pains? SNAP Timing and Emergency Room Visits.”


Prior to UW-Oshkosh, Cotti held faculty positions at the University of Connecticut and University of South Carolina, and was a lecturer at UW-Whitewater.
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 have either dissertator status or will achieve dissertator status by the start of the award year.

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

Robert Ahlrichs, Anthropology PhD Program
BS: UW-Oshkosh, 2010 • MEd, 2005; BS, 2003: Northwest Missouri State University

“The award will help provide both time and money to process the data I’ve collected about these artifacts and finish writing my dissertation.”

Robert is studying the procurement and use of copper artifacts in Wisconsin during the Archaic period (6,000-3,000 years ago). “I am working to determine where Native Americans got their copper from, and how much it was moving around the larger region, in order to test the long-held hypothesis that there was a trade network here during that time,” he says. “I have always been interested in discerning and telling true stories of the past to both learn from and be amazed by what has happened before our time.”

Hamideh Sadat Bagherzadeh, Linguistics PhD Program
MS, 2014; BS, 2001: Islamic Azad University

“Thanks to this fellowship, I will have more time and energy to spend on my dissertation and to free up my mind to concentrate on writing my ideas.”

Hamideh studies the acquisition of Farsi (Iran’s official language) by heritage language speakers in the United States—bilinguals who acquired Farsi naturally at home from their parents, but who live in a society where English is dominant. Many scholars consider heritage language acquisition to be incomplete, Hamideh says, but her research has revealed a “productive, dynamic, and independent system,” whose unique features make the Farsi heritage language comparable to other recognized varieties.

Chandrima Ghosh, Biological Sciences PhD Program
B Tech: Heritage Institute of Technology, 2012

“I am honored and humbled to receive the DDF. I am grateful that my efforts have been recognized.”

Chandrima studies how proteins—what she calls “the workhorses of our body”—fold and function at the molecular level. She points out that diseases such as Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, and mad cow arise from aberrant protein folding. “To counter these stress conditions, our cells activate several stress response pathways. My research is focused on proteins involved in one of these pathways.” Chandrima recently published findings on the activation mechanism of a protein and is preparing a manuscript describing how that protein transmits the stress signal.

Ashleigh Harvey, Psychology PhD Program
MS: UW-Milwaukee, 2018 • BA: College of William and Mary, 2013

“This award allows me to focus on my dissertation, as well as on clinical work through the UWM Psychology Clinic and community placements.”

Ashleigh studies anxiety disorders and obsessive-compulsive and related disorders (OCDs). She has examined the relationship between OCDs and individuals’ ability to inhibit their impulses, particularly whether poorer response inhibition capabilities contribute to the development or maintenance of OCDs. Ashleigh also examines the clinical and treatment implications of such a relationship. “OCD is often joked about as a silly personality quirk, when it is actually a seriously debilitating condition,” she says.

Ashley Huggins, Psychology PhD Program
MS: UW-Milwaukee, 2018 • BA: University of Southern California, 2013

Ashley is a research assistant on a five-year National Institute of Mental Health research grant in Professor Christine Larson’s Affective Neuroscience Laboratory. The project seeks to identify predictors of long-term post-trauma distress, such as PTSD and depression. Ashley is a UWM Psychology Clinic student therapist and a 2016 recipient of a Department of Psychology Summer Graduate Research Fellowship.
Elizabeth Ives, Geosciences PhD Program
MS: Iowa State University, 2016 • BS: Northern Michigan University, 2013
“This fellowship gives me the freedom to wholly focus on publishing my dissertation works, professional development opportunities, and scientific outreach.”
Through research, Libby tells the stories of glaciers in what is now Antarctica, Tasmania, and Argentina during the Late Paleozoic Ice Age (370-230 million years ago). By examining “geologic archives”—sedimentary rocks—she hopes to “infer the size, behavior, and persistence of those ancient glaciers.” Libby says, “This work is vital to helping us better understand the global and regional climates during the late Paleozoic—a critical period in the evolution of life on our planet.”

Jessica Johnston, English PhD Program
“The DDF travel stipend gives me the opportunity to present research at conferences and network with scholars in my field as I prepare for the highly competitive job market.”
“My research focuses on media representations of achieving girlhood in the 21st century, focusing on discourses of confidence, anxiety, and hope in the ways we understand and value certain images of successful girls,” Jessica says. “As a feminist media studies scholar, I examine depictions of tween and teen girls on reality TV, social media, and lifestyle celebrity branding, and I consider how race, class, sexuality, and ability inform popular notions of girlhood achievement.”

Ae Hee Lee, English PhD Program
MFA: University of Notre Dame, 2016 • BA: Calvin College, 2013
“This award gives me, as a poet, 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,” says Ae Hee, who is inspired by poet Gloria Anzaldúa’s notion of the “new mestiza.” Her poems “will dramatize the liminal space that we can occupy as we negotiate cultural constructs such as citizenship, ethnicity, religion, and gender norms.”

Seung Youp Lee, Architecture PhD Program
MS: Seoul National University, 2007 • BE: Yeungnam University, 2003
“This award made me feel that I get credit for my previous endeavors and gain confidence.”
Studying and working as an architect in Korea led Seung Youp to a realization about the architecture history books he read as a student. “They list taxonomies of fancy building and stylistic periods, while they ignore most of the built world we meet in our daily lives,” he says. After reading some articles by UWM Associate Professor Arijit Sen, Seung Youp realized he had found a new mentor. He quit his job and moved to Milwaukee. Seung Youp is exploring the interpretation of relationships among power, performance, and identity in the built environment.

So Hyung Lim, Geography PhD Program
MA: Seoul National University, 2013 • BA: Dongguk University, 2006
“The fact that I have been recognized for my efforts gives me the confidence that I am on the right track as a qualitative researcher.”
A “political and qualitative health geographer,” So Hyung studies governmental response to sudden events or disasters, and the emotional and material impact on people when their government mishandles such events. She is examining the 2014 Sewol Ferry Disaster and the 2015 MERS outbreak in South Korea. “My dissertation not only contributes to geographies of emerging authoritarianism (illiberalism) and public health, but also suggests policy recommendations for contemporary liberal states,” So Hyung says.
Shima Mehrvar, Engineering PhD Program
MS: Amirkarbir University of Technology, 2013 • BS: Shahid Beheshti University, 2011

“Being a recipient of DDF is a great honor that boosts my resume.”

Shima designs and implements optical devices to diagnose and treat human diseases. “For example, I have been able to build a device that can detect diabetic wound healing progress,” she says. “I enjoy exploring ways that can make an impact on improving the health of people. This leads me to a multidisciplinary major: biomedical engineering.”

Jennifer Moody, English PhD Program
MFA: University of Alaska Fairbanks, 2012 • BA: University of Alabama, 2004

“This fellowship will help me immerse myself in the world of my novel and make time for important self-care that will help me finish my project.”

Jenni is writing an “image-text novel” in which printmaking techniques “complicate and disrupt the written text.” “My work explores the possibilities and boundaries of relationships between humans and animals,” says Jenni, whose rescue of an abandoned puppy in 2013 helped her develop empathy for animals. “In my writing, I want to include animals who are full characters, so that when my readers meet animals in the real world, they have empathy and respect for that animal’s desires and boundaries.”

Kainbi Park, Geography PhD Program
MA: Sungshin Women’s University, 2013 • BA: Sungshin Women’s University, 2011

“This award will allow me to fully focus on my research, complete my dissertation, and participate actively in the discipline of geography for my future career.”

Gainbi (her future legal name) explores vulnerability and resilience to hurricane damage for people and places along the U.S. Gulf and East Coasts. Studying the period 1950-2018, she uses geospatial analysis to examine locational vulnerability to storm surge and wind damage, as well as residents’ socio-demographic characteristics, “to fully understand the unequal impacts of hurricanes on society.” Working on the Korean Climate Atlas as a research assistant in Korea led Gainbi to pursue her current research.

Jeffrey Peterson, Kinesiology PhD Program
MS: UW-Milwaukee, 2015 • BS: UW-La Crosse, 2007

“This award will allow me to focus entirely on my research in the coming year.”

Jeffrey investigates the underlying neuromuscular system changes that increase the risk of falls in older adults. Specifically, he studies how the control of motor units—the functional units which make up a muscle—changes with age. He says his long-term goal is to identify factors that best predict fall risks and interventions that can best reduce the risk. In his previous work as a personal trainer, Jeffrey found a lack of available information on reducing falls in his older adult clients with balance issues. He focused his research on the topic to help fill the void.

Jessica Skinner, Anthropology PhD Program
MS, 2015; BA, 2012: UW-Milwaukee

“This award will enable me to use time-intensive, open-source methods that will make my research more accessible and democratic.”

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.”
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 2019-20 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.

**Morgan Stevenson, Psychology PhD Program**
MS: UW-Milwaukee, 2016 • BA: Wartburg College, 2012
“This fellowship will allow me to dedicate more time towards my dissertation experiments, accelerating my progress towards completing my degree.”

“Stroke is a leading cause of disability, with motor impairments being a common symptom,” Morgan says. “Recovering movement is an essential part of regaining independence after stroke. I aim to better understand how motor skills are learned in the healthy brain, so this knowledge can be used to better treat motor impairments caused by stroke.” For Morgan, neuroscience is a combination of two interests she discovered as an undergraduate student: biology and psychology.

**Xiaoyu Sui, Engineering PhD Program**
ME, 2013; BE, 2010: Shanghai Dianji University
“This award is really a great honor. It helps me concentrate on my research field without burden.”

Xiaoyu studies nanomaterials and nanomanufacturing technology for sensor and energy applications. “In my studies, I gradually noticed that various properties of materials always depend on their microstructures,” he says. “So, if we can design materials in nano scale, we could create amazing things. This drives me to the nanomaterials research field. My graduate study at UW-Milwaukee teaches me many skills in nanomaterials synthesis and device fabrication. These enable me to investigate the real performance of nanomaterials in devices.”

**Yihan Xu, Engineering PhD Program**
MS: Shandong University, 2014 • BAC: Harbin University of Science and Technology, 2011
“Since I don’t need to spend my time to make money because of the DDF, I can spend all my time doing research.”

Lithium-sulfur (Li-S) batteries could be one of the most efficient energy storage devices of the future. Yihan is working to eliminate the main hurdle, the shuttle effect—transport of polysulfides between the electrodes that drastically reduces efficiency. “Unlike other scientists, I will employ molecular dynamics and quantum chemistry computations,” says Yihan, a 2018 UWM Distinguished Graduate Student Fellow. “These methods require the researcher to have a solid theoretical basis, but it can save time and funds for doing research.”

**Adam Barnas, Psychology PhD Program**
“The support will enable me to expand my project to include more research from international sources and trade journals.”

“My research is in the neurobiology of attention and perception, and their relation to the brain,” says Adam, a 2018 UWM Graduate Student Excellence Fellow. “I use psychophysical and neuroimaging methods, such as functional magnetic resonance imaging, to understand how our behavior and attention are guided by the world we perceive.”
Alexis Jordan, Anthropology PhD Program

MS, 2009; Cert, 2009: UW-Milwaukee • BS: Loyola University of Chicago, 2006

“The R1 DDF will provide the financial resources to complete my data collection and spend more time focused on writing my dissertation.”

Alexis is investigating the formation of communities in southwestern Britain during the Iron Age and Early Roman periods (c. 800 BCE-200 CE)—as revealed within the burial practices and associated population demographics of the interred dead. “Burials contain the material remains of funerals,” she says, “which are ubiquitous social practices in which the living create shared community identities by making deliberate choices in the construction and organization of burials, as well as who is deposited in them.”

Daniel Knutson, Chemistry PhD Program

MS: UW-Milwaukee, 2009 • BS: Rockford University, 1997

“This fellowship is a great honor and very humbling, as it recognizes the quality and value of this research.”

Inspired by the loss of his first wife to a prescription drug overdose, Daniel joined the Cook Group in 2015 to “do something about it.” He explains, “The problem with current neurological drugs on the market is that they lack functional selectivity, meaning that in addition to the desired receptor or receptor subtype of interest, these drugs also target undesired receptors, causing serious side effects.” As an example, he cites the anxiety and panic disorders drug alprazolam, whose side effects include sedation, ataxia, and amnesia.

Siwar Masannat, English PhD Program

MFA: George Mason University, 2012 • BSc: University of Jordan, 2009

“This award allows me to dedicate my final academic year at UWM to completing my creative dissertation and presenting my scholarly work at conferences.”

“I am working on a poetry manuscript that gives voices to human and nonhuman characters,” Siwar says. “The manuscript incorporates prose, verse, and photography, and its voices cross the boundaries of histories, geographies, and languages. I am interested in creative writing’s capacity to help us remember our pasts and reimagine our futures outside of hegemonic narratives.”

William Tchakirides, History PhD Program

MA: American University, 2011 • BS: Suffolk University, 2006

“This award will allow me to finish writing my dissertation and, after eight long years, graduate.”

Will’s dissertation “historicizes the elusive nature of police accountability for African Americans in Milwaukee since World War II.” He writes, “It traces the imperfect, contested process by which Black-led community organizations, individuals, allies, municipal institutions, and law enforcers themselves labored to make the city’s police bureaucracy more accountable to the rights and needs of all citizens during the autocratic reign of Police Chief Harold Breier (1964-1984).”
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.

Ahmad Abbas, Engineering PhD Program
MSc: Hashemite University, 2015 • BE: Al-Balqa’ Applied University, 2012

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

Ahmad’s primary research project involves optimizing the performance of hydraulic turbines (used in dams, rivers, and man-made facilities) at very low water levels. He is the lead student at the UWM Industrial Assessment Center, which is funded by the U.S. Department of Energy and promotes energy efficiency and sustainable manufacturing through energy assessments for medium and small manufacturing facilities. Ahmad’s undergraduate project involved energy auditing for buildings. His master’s focus was energy efficiency and renewable energy.

Comfort Adebayo, Communication PhD Program
MA: Western Illinois University, 2015 • BA: University of Ibadan, 2010

“This award will give me time to sit and properly do my research without the extra work of teaching or other jobs.”

As the rate of African American maternal mortality increases, Comfort (who goes by her middle name, Tosin) is studying how physician-patient interactions impact prenatal care experiences and health outcomes within this population. Initially interested in U.S. immigrant experiences, the Nigeria native discovered that “other minority groups also experience communication challenges, especially in power-driven contexts.” Tosin adds, “The more I read about Black women’s experiences, the more I was drawn to examining communication issues peculiar to us.”

Monika Ganguly-Kiefner, Sustainable Peacebuilding MSP Program
BA: Green Mountain College, 2014

“This award offers me an incredible opportunity to home in on my interest in nonprofit organizations and deeply listen to the systems that hold them up.”

In her previous nonprofit work, Monika was a case manager for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. Her two years in the field “led me to seek ways to dismantle a system that creates a self-perpetuating cycle of domestic violence and applies Band-Aid solutions,” she says, also noting nonprofits’ scarce funding, high turnover, and unresponsive management. “I want to understand how to build sustainable nonprofit organizations through a transdisciplinary systems thinking approach.”

Cong He, Mathematics PhD Program
MS, 2010; BS, 2006: Huazhong University of Science and Technology

“I have more time to discuss problems with our professors, and I can focus on my research, which I love very much.”

For his dissertation, Cong is studying geometry and partial differential equations. Specifically, he is focusing on the geometric aspect of the Coxeter group of linear operators and the Boltzmann equation. “I think geometry is intuitive,” he says. “We could get insight from the pictures. This is one of the factors that drew me into my field. My math teacher at the university influenced me; his smart proofs of some problems interested me.”

Kenneth Ildefonso, Jr., Kinesiology PhD Program
MA: Minnesota State University Mankato, 2015 • BS: Southern Connecticut State University, 2011

“It is a privilege to be recognized as a Distinguished Graduate Student Fellow. This award will have a positive, substantial impact on my doctoral studies.”

A life-threatening asthmatic injury Ken suffered as a high school football player and the athletic trainer’s life-saving skills sparked a passion. “The emergency treatment I received on the football field that day embodied the foundation on which I built my athletic training philosophy and has directed my course of study,” he says. Ken studies the psychological aspects of sports medicine, with a focus on better understanding the psychological aspects of chronic athletic injury.
**Distinguished Graduate Student Fellows (DGSF)**

**Jessica Kahlow, Communication PhD Program**

**MA, 2017; BS, 2014: UW-Oshkosh**

“Because of this award, I will be able to prioritize my research while being able to maintain better work-life balance.”

Jessica’s research focuses on new media in interpersonal and organizational contexts. She studies how personality type influences a person’s choice of communication technologies—e.g., talking on the phone, texting, and/or using apps such as Snapchat or Facetime. What she calls her “somewhat unconventional route” to the field of communication began during her time working in the Writing Center at UW-Oshkosh and developed during research for her MPA degree, which examined emotional labor.

**Elaheh Kheirandish, Engineering PhD Program**

**BS: Shiraz University, 2014**

“This fellowship is highly encouraging and inspires me to pursue my passion for research.”

Elaheh’s research is focused on fabrication and characterization of electrical and 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.”

**Gayantha Loku Kodikara, Geosciences PhD Program**

**MTech: Andhra University, 2012 • MS: International Institute of Geo-information Science and Earth Observation, 2009 • BS: University of Peradeniya, 2007**

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

A remote sensing geologist, Gayantha studies the provenance and diagenesis of paleo lacustrine evaporite deposits—in other words, ancient sediments formed by the evaporation of brine—on Mars. He studies similar environments on Earth (the Lake Tecopa basin in southern California near Las Vegas and Lake Natron in Tanzania) and applies that knowledge to identify and characterize similar Martian environments using remote sensing data. As a master’s student, Gayantha performed similar studies of Lake Magadi in Kenya.

**Thomas Ladendorf, Philosophy MA Program**

**BA: Indiana University Bloomington, 2013**

“This award is a great boon to me as I enter the second year of my MA program, in which I will be finishing a paper that I will use to apply to PhD programs.”

Thomas explores the foundations of moral and political philosophy, in particular the nature of moral requirements. “Are obligations not to harm others merely conventional?” he asks. “If, as is probably the case, they are not, what bearing do natural facts, like facts about human nature, have on such obligations?” Thomas’s interest in philosophy began when he discovered political philosophy as an undergraduate history student while writing his BA thesis on the history of political thought.

**Michael Miner, Sociology PhD Program**

**MA: UW-Milwaukee, 2017 • BA: St Joseph’s College, 2015**

“As a first-generation college student, it is especially encouraging to see my efforts recognized.”

Michael studies the relationship between inequality and institutions. He specializes in the sociology of education and quantitative methodology. His research examines school segregation at the metropolitan level, as well as how public confidence in education has changed over time. Outside of academia, Michael investigates the intersection of technology and society to help identify and mitigate inequality on social media.

**Greta Minor, Psychology PhD Program**

**BA: College of Wooster, 2017**

“The DGSF award will ensure that I have the time and resources to defend my master’s work by Spring 2020.”

Greta focuses on the interaction of fear, memory, and attention. She works in a lab that has used differential fear conditioning to show that a neutral stimulus (e.g., a colored shape) that researchers had previously paired with a negative event (e.g., an electrical shock) is more likely to capture subjects’ attention than a stimulus not paired with a shock. Greta’s master’s work will further elucidate this research. In the future, she hopes to adapt it for sufferers of clinical anxiety, which is thought to develop through a similar process.
**Kaley Ozminkowski, Dance MFA Program**

BFA: Florida State University, 2010

“This fellowship will allow me to delve deeper into my research and choreography enhanced by supplemental classes outside the dance curriculum.”

Kaley is among many established professional dancers and choreographers who choose UWM for their graduate studies. Her performance company, Kaley Pruitt Dance, “investigates the nuances of the human experience and explores the intrinsic communication between bodies in space,” Kaley says. Her research that influences her dance pieces involves “looking at the cultural implications of human movement, the body’s role in protest and social change, and how dance cultivates empathy and shared understanding.”

**Joshua Rivers, Anthropology PhD Program**

MSc: University of Amsterdam, 2017 • BA: George Washington University, 2013

“This fellowship demonstrates that the university and my department appreciate work that pushes disciplinary boundaries while aiming to answer broader questions.”

“Residing at the nexus of social scientific work on video games, cyberspace, and institutions, my research aims to understand how the culturally situated nature of corporations impacts how they architect websites, virtual worlds, and other slices of cyberspace,” Josh says. Using participant observation and interview data from massively multiplayer online game developer CCP Games, he “demonstrate(s) that technology, and more specifically virtual worlds, are never outside of culture.”

**Heather Sheets, Art History MA Program**

BS: UW-Madison, 2013

“This award shows me that the study of art history and museum studies is valued by my institution as having high stakes in community development.”

Heather’s museum studies track prepares her for research, education, and programming in the museum setting. She has a particular interest in curating outdoor or interactive spaces and programming for participatory institutions that rely on community efficacy. Heather’s thesis will be an exhibition and catalog that examines the state of decorative arts in museum practice and how word choice and programming can help bolster the value of how people interact with art in the home, commercially, and in museums.

**Richard Ward, Psychology PhD Program**

MA: Ball State University, 2017 • BS: Morehead State University, 2015

“Receiving this fellowship is a tremendous honor, allowing me to dedicate more time to my research.”

Richard investigates the neural mechanisms underlying anxiety-induced cognitive impairments, with a focus on electrical brain activity believed to reflect various cognitive processes such as short-term memory. Using electroencephalography (EEG), Richard can isolate neural correlates that represent cognition deficits in anxious individuals. “I’ve always been interested in alterations in cognition resulting from anxiety,” he says. “It is critical to understand these aspects in order to better inform therapeutic treatments.”

**Carissa Weis, Psychology PhD Program**

MS: UW-Milwaukee, 2019 • BS: Calvin College, 2016

“This award means that I will have even more time in the next academic year to pursue my research goals.”

Carissa is part of a lab that uses neuroimaging techniques such as MRI and functional MRI to understand the structural and functional differences in the brains of those with anxiety and PTSD. Her current project uses MRI to investigate structural changes over time in a population of individuals at risk for developing PTSD after a traumatic event. “As scientists, we need to do a better job of shedding light on the realities people face and help provide insight into treatment and patient care,” Carissa says.

**Bradley Wiles, Information Studies PhD Program**

MLIS: UW-Madison, 2008 • MA, 2004; BA, 1999: Western Illinois University

“This award acknowledges the work that I’ve done and sets a high standard for me to aspire to in the remainder of my program.”

Brad is interested in the sustainability of local and regional institutions of information and culture—libraries, archives, and museums—that are largely comprised of history and heritage collections. “In particular, I am looking at how these collections contribute to community identity, formal educational practice, and economic development or revitalization,” Brad says. “My primary focus is on archival collections and institutions, which I believe are largely underutilized outside of narrow research purposes.”
Distinguished Graduate Student Fellows (DGSF)

Nicolas Zahn, Chemistry PhD Program
BS: UW-Milwaukee, 2015
Nicolas double majored in biochemistry and kinesiology. As an undergraduate he gave three poster presentations and was a co-author on two published articles. As a graduate student, he has given two poster presentations, submitted one article for publication as lead author, and co-authored seven published articles.

New Advanced Opportunity Program (AOP) Fellows

This need-based, renewable award recognizes strong academic achievement and potential.

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

- Individuals from racial or ethnic populations underrepresented among students of higher education.
- First-generation college students and individuals from financially disadvantaged backgrounds or circumstances.
- Individuals with disabilities.
- Recent immigrants (must be U.S. citizens or permanent residents of the U.S.).
- Participants in TRIO pre-college or undergraduate programs (e.g., McNair, Student Support Services, Talent Search, Upward Bound, Upward Bound Math-Science, Veterans Upward Bound) or other approved programs (Project 1000, etc.).

This award is also based on merit, where the student’s studies and contributions indicate high potential for achievement in their chosen disciplines.

Annual stipend is currently $15,000.

Lorenzo Backhaus, Sustainable Peacebuilding MSP Program
BS: UW-Whitewater, 2018
“This award will provide me the opportunities to focus on research and networking, which will strengthen my professional skills.”
Lorenzo studies food insecurity (the state of being without reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food) in urban environments. He also seeks ways to alter food production to increase sustainability and create food sovereignty, a system in which food producers, distributors, and consumers—rather than markets and corporations—control the mechanisms and policies of food production. “In the MSP program, we look at all the parts of a system and the complexity which empowers it,” Lorenzo says.

Ashely Carlos, Sustainable Peacebuilding MSP Program
BA: Alverno College, 2019
“The AOP fellowship allows me to focus on my degree, achieve my professional goals, and be active in my community without being emotionally and physically pulled in many directions.”
Ashely works to implement change in the 53206 ZIP code—home to Milwaukee’s highest rates of incarceration, poverty, poor health outcomes, and black infant mortality—and in the immigrant and refugee population. Her primary tool: art therapy. For Ashely, who also seeks to improve anxiety about food insecurity, the MSP offers an opportunity to combine her undergraduate specialties: art therapy major, Spanish and psychology minors, and an elective studies focus on health.
New Advanced Opportunity Program (AOP) Fellows

Raymond Deeren, English PhD Program (Creative Writing)
MFA: Columbia College-Chicago, 2016 • BA: Saginaw Valley State University, 2012
“This fellowship is the first time I have experienced an institution reaching out to first-generation students, telling them not only that they belong, but that their work is important.”
“I’m a fiction writer whose published work illustrates the lives of Americans victimized by the Great Recession: families selling firewood after GMC layoffs and factory closures; parents forced to poach deer when the cost of meat outpaced their paychecks; men mowing the lawns of bank foreclosures. As a scholar in a polarized America, I want to continue my investigation into how and why the working class has bought into a wholesale belief in the ‘American Dream.’”

Michele Gloede, Educational Psychology PhD Program
MS: UW-Milwaukee, 2018 • BS: UW-Parkside, 2014
“This award will now give me extra time to get my homework done during the day so I can rest at night and be at 100% while attending school.”
Michele is leading experiments to compare the similarities between hypnosis and mindfulness meditation. Previous research suggests similarities, but Michele’s work will be the first published empirical study to test this supposition. She says both methods are proven to be effective mechanisms for psychotherapy interventions, so it is likely that they could be integrated in treatment. Michele says her first psychology course in community college was all it took to reveal her passion and future academic path.

Michael Gonzalez, Jr., Public Health MPH Program (Epidemiology)
BS: UW-Milwaukee, 2016
“The AOP Fellowship will allow me to work less and fully invest my time and energy into my coursework.”
As an intern at The City of Milwaukee Tobacco-Free Alliance, Michael’s projects include LGBTQ+ tobacco cessation programs, a cigarette butt litter prevention program that addresses the environmental health impacts at Lake Michigan beaches, and data collection on how the tobacco industry targets sexual, gender, and racial minorities, which further increases the health disparities within these populations. Michael says he was drawn to public health by “the values of diversity and inclusion, health equity, and social and environmental justice.”

Sarah Gonzalez, Dance MFA Program
BFA: Sam Houston State University, 2015 • AAS: Del Mar College, 2011
“This award represents acceptance of diversity in my field of study, when Latinx culture is so underrepresented in the performing arts in higher education.”
As a “dance maker, choreographer, teacher, mover, and human expressionist,” Sarah’s research “resides in the world of concert dance in relation to socio-political issues and cultural behavior.” She says, “As a Hispanic artist and teacher, it is important to ensure I have the capability to provide knowledge and understanding of dance as an art form for human expression, particularly for communities with at-risk youth and a large minority demographic.” Initially, Sarah classically trained as a vocalist.

Lindsey Hieber, Psychology PhD Program (Experimental Psychology)
BS: University of Michigan-Flint, 2016
“As someone who has struggled financially, this award really helps take away some of the stress associated with living expenses.”
Lindsey is studying the ongoing Flint Water Crisis in Michigan, which began in 2014 when the water was contaminated with lead and Legionella, a bacterium linked to a serious type of pneumonia. She is investigating the emotional impact of the water crisis and the knowledge people have accumulated on the topic. Lindsey is also examining how participants’ water usage behavior has changed over time, how they feel they’ve coped with the crisis, and whether they have lingering fears about their water.

Michael Huynh, Coordinated Library & Information Science MLIS and Information Science and Technology MS Program
BS: UW-Milwaukee, 2018
“The AOP Fellowship allows me to devote more of my time to my graduate studies and allows me to fully pursue my career goals, when I thought my financial hardship would prevent me from fully continuing my studies.”
Michael’s job shadow at a library and his love for the library environment led him to enroll in the MLIS program to become an information technology librarian. Michael’s fieldwork this fall is a project at the Kenosha Public Library.
New Advanced Opportunity Program (AOP) Fellows

David Lee, Communication MA Program
BA: University of Minnesota-Duluth, 2017

“This award is special in that it alleviates additional responsibilities so that I can unlock my full potential as a scholar.”

David’s research examines the rhetoric of Asian American activists during the 1960s and ’70s. “Essentially, I am investigating the discourse of leaders in the Asian Pacific Islander American community and their messages communicated to their respective communities and other communities of color,” he says. David was a Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement Program Scholar in 2017.

Ignacio Magana Hernandez, Physics PhD Program
BS: University of California-Santa, 2017

“This award will allow me to continue to focus on research full time without the distractions of teaching.”

Ignacio is using gravitational waves from merging binary neutron stars and black holes to measure the expansion history of the universe. Detected and measured by the LIGO (in Louisiana and Washington) and Virgo (in Italy) facilities, “these signals provide us with a direct distance measurement of their location; they are ‘standard sirens,’ with which we have a direct probe of cosmology and thus a direct measurement of cosmological parameters,” he says. Ignacio participated in the Caltech LIGO Research Experience for Undergraduates program.

Briana Magruder Bustillo, Occupational Therapy MS Program
BS: UW-Milwaukee, 2018

“The fellowship allows me to stay involved with community programs and learn about my role in contributing to the well-being of children and their families.”

Briana’s projects include applying research and development related to technology and disability in the UWM Rehabilitation Research Design and Disability Center and evaluating the effectiveness of the revised SMILE curriculum, designed to improve the efficacy of mothers of preterm infants following the transition from the NICU to home. Briana was drawn to OT because “I liked the idea of how functional rehabilitation can be, rather than just emphasizing different exercise techniques.”

Winter Maravillas, Dance MFA Program
BFA: Jacksonville University, 2013

“This award allows me the availability to cultivate relationships and have space to continue my research within the dance field.”

Winter is researching what authentic movement looks like for individual dancers, “taking the previous knowledge and history of their predecessors and crafting that into energy within their own body,” she says. “Their unique bodies take in information and transform the movement into choreography that will embody their own needs and the wants of the choreographer. The relationships that humans have with others and with themselves is fascinating. Cultivating growth within oneself is a lifelong pursuit.”

Sara Pardej, Psychology PhD Program (Clinical Psychology)
BA: Marquette University, 2018

“I hope to become a professional researcher in an academic setting. This fellowship allows me to focus on my research.”

Sara is exploring early detection of attention deficits in young children who have the inherited neurological disorder Neurofibromatosis type 1. She seeks to identify psychometric measures that indicate attention issues, as well as a biomarker that could help recognize inattention within this population. Sara became interested in working with children with chronic conditions as an undergraduate research assistant. “I knew that I wanted to be a part of a research field that was contributing positively to a community.”

Danielle Paswaters, Art History MA Program
BA: UW-Milwaukee, 2008

“This fellowship will afford me time to focus on my graduate studies and to spend more quality time with my eight-year-old son.”

Danielle is “exploring the ways in which multiple forms of art can be combined to create more collaborative and immersive experiences.” She says, “My research will help inform the discipline of art history by exploring ways in which modern and contemporary art can utilize community and collaboration to help shape and mold our experiences and interpretations. By drawing parallels between community and art, I hope to educate the public on how these collaborations can translate into productive and empowering societies.”
Cindy Petros, Occupational Therapy MS Program
BS: UW-Milwaukee, 2019 • BA: California State University Northridge, 2013
Cindy received Support for Undergraduate Research Fellow (SURF) awards in the fall and summer of 2018 to examine the role of dynamic vision in balance and fall risk. Her bachelor’s degree was in liberal studies.

Jamee Pritchard, History MA Program
MLIS: UW-Milwaukee, 2018 • BA: Ball State University, 2008
“The AOP Fellowship for me means time—time to research and write, time to publish and present at conferences, and time to fully focus on my education.”
An aspiring cultural historian, Jamee’s research focuses on black women in print culture. She examines black identity and the expression of sexuality, desire, and romantic love through the creation and consumption of romance literature. “My aim is to understand how black women wrote back against the oppressive perceptions of black womanhood in American history and culture.” Jamee is also pursuing graduate certificates in museum studies and women’s and gender studies.

Sarah Reed, Public Health MPH Program (Epidemiology)
BS: UW-Oshkosh, 2019
“With the AOP Fellowship, I am able to pursue opportunities I would not be able to otherwise; the program becomes a preparatory, yet transitional experience.”
Sarah studies how land use and planning factors impact social and mental well-being, specifically in experiences of loneliness and social isolation. Her other research interests include health disparities, social determinants of health, and spatial, social, and environmental (natural/built) epidemiology. “As a sociologist, I naturally look for patterns, target social inequalities through social/environmental justice, and look at the influence of society on individual outcomes,” Sarah says.

Margaret Tovar, Public Health MPH Program (Epidemiology)
BS: Northern Arizona University, 2018
“The AOP fellowship grants me the opportunity to focus on academic goals and research while helping to better serve our community.”
Following undergraduate work in exercise science, Margaret seeks to demonstrate the benefits of consistent exercise and proper nutrition, especially in aging adults. Citing decreasing physical activity and increasing unhealthy food consumption in the U.S., Margaret says, “This imbalance of healthy habits in our nation is causing preventable diseases such as diabetes and obesity to become epidemics. Being able to be a part of exciting research done in this school and city while studying epidemiology is a dream come true,” she adds.

Amber Van Galder, Art MFA Program
BA: UW-Whitewater, 2007
“Without this incredible opportunity, I was facing the decision to leave due to financial constraints.”
Amber is a mixed media artist, incorporating found objects with drawing, painting, and traditional wood and metal fabrication. “My research is focused primarily on memory and grief, and how the act of creating, and the art itself, can be used to pull the experience out of the body and manifest into substantive form,” she says. “I’ve always been an artist. It’s something that’s inside of me, and that was nurtured by my family’s culture and, in particular, my dad’s support of my need to create with my hands.”

Kentrell Washington, Social Work MSW Program
BA: UW-Whitewater, 2016
“It will help me study and experience my field placement and keep my energy and attention on those things.”
Using a dignity-based approach, Kentrell explores mental health care within marginalized communities, a field he was drawn to by his experiences with therapy and growing up as a black man in America. The lack of mental health care in these communities “is no coincidence, but by design,” Kentrell says. I will study to care for myself and be there to support others as they continue to exist in a country that continues to marginalize them. I view myself as working alongside the populations I work with, not as a hero trying to save them.”
New Advanced Opportunity Program (AOP) Fellows

**Naomi Wilson, Media Studies MA Program**

BA: UW-Milwaukee, 2019

“This award helps me demonstrate the relevance and importance of my academic research in media studies.”

Naomi examines televisual representations of black femininity and identity on American reality television shows. “My goal is to study the maternal figures on black reality television shows and television viewing as a cultural practice,” she says. As a first-generation college student, Naomi says growing up watching black American television sitcoms helped shape her academic interests.

**Jada Woodley, Sustainable Peacebuilding MSP Program**

BS: Illinois State University, 2015

“With the AOP Fellowship, I have more time to dedicate to studying, researching, and taking part in academic and professional development activities.”

Jada credits the MSP program for helping her hone her holistic and systems thinking skills. Thus far, she has used these skills to better understand the deep structures of de jure segregation, and how de jure impacts the health and well-being of marginalized communities. Jada says, “I was drawn to the MSP program because my professional aspirations aligned with the program’s notion that ‘healthy and sustainable communities lead to long-term positive change.’”

**Imari Woods, Library and Information Science MLIS Program**

BS: UW-Milwaukee, 2017

“This award allows me the ability to achieve my academic goals and to have financial freedom while taking classes. It will have an impact on my degree, for it will allow me the capability to keep moving positively forward with taking classes, which will ultimately lead to my graduation.”

“I chose to pursue a degree in library information science, with an information technology concentration, for it allows me the opportunity to give back in a field that I love,” Imari says. “Being able to empower others in my academic profession is an honor. Even today, working as a tutor (previously as a TA), I continue to help students be successful.”

**Trina Worby, Physical Therapy DPT Program**

BS: UW-Milwaukee, 2016

“With this award, I will be able to forgo employment for the remainder of my doctoral education, which involves full-time clinical placements.”

Trina’s research is a systematic review of the role that neurocognition—memory, spatial processing speed, attention—plays in increasing the risk for an injury to occur. “We know that there are many factors that contribute to injuries, but research has not yet compiled and examined the impact that adding a task, history of concussion, and baseline neurocognition play in increasing injury risk,” she says. “We hope our findings will impact the design of future injury prevention programs.”

**Va Xiong, Biological Sciences PhD Program**

BS: UW-Madison, 2007

“This award allows me to stay in the lab to begin and continue my research. The research is very time-consuming, requiring a lot of experiments that take up my entire day.”

Va studies the molecular interactions in plants to determine how cells differentiate from being normal cells and reproductive cells. “My interest in the biological field came from failure,” he recalls of his high school course. “I knew the material and found it engaging, but believed I could pass without doing the work.” Upon repeating the course, Va discovered his love for the field. “Since then, I have been driven to understand how the world works through the lens of biology.”

**Derek Zike, Health Sciences PhD Program**

MA, 2016; BA, 2014: Miami University

“The AOP fellowship will provide me with a sense of financial security and allow me to increase the time allocated to my studies.”

Derek explores the psychology of sport injury and rehabilitation, with particular interests in the psychosocial impact of spinal cord injury, athletes’ lived experiences of leaving able-bodied sports, and psychosocial aspects of adapted physical activity among individuals with acquired disabilities. For Derek, this research is a way to understand his own spinal cord injury, which ended his promising hockey career as a junior in high school, as well as the subsequent rehabilitation and life experience.
Chandler Zolliecoffer, Psychology PhD Program (Clinical Psychology)
BS: Loyola University Maryland, 2015
"This fellowship will help ensure success within my program as well as future success as a competitive applicant for future positions."
In neuropsychology research spanning the domains of attention, executive functioning, and intelligence, Chandler seeks to characterize the mechanism through which the stereotype threat phenomenon impacts test performance on measures of intelligence and athletic ability. Chandler’s interest in clinical neuropsychology started with a research assistantship for an Alzheimer’s disease clinical trial at an academic medical center, where she had first-hand experience in the world of a clinical neuropsychologist.

R1 Advanced Opportunity Program Fellowship (R1 AOP)
The R1 AOP is for current UWM PhD students who are eligible for AOP funding and who plan to finish and defend their dissertation, complete all requirements for the PhD degree, and graduate with their doctoral degree by the end of academic year 2019-20. The R1 AOP is a one-year, non-renewable fellowship. The academic-year fellowship stipend for 2019-20 is $16,500. Fellows receive full tuition coverage and are eligible for health benefits.

Delany Allen, English PhD Program (Creative Writing)
MFA: University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, 2014 • BA: Washington University, 2010
"My dissertation depends on extensive research and archival work, for which the time and funding provided by this fellowship is invaluable."
"I believe the way we tell stories can facilitate greater understanding between worldviews,” says Delany, whose dissertation is “a multimodal poetry manuscript which maps the intergenerational journey of family, Oneida and non-Native, across state and national borders.” She says, “Like our ancestors, for whom the rivers were like roads, Native peoples have never been static. My work seeks to dismantle colonial paradigms, expand the reader’s imagination, and revision ‘Indianness’ toward modern Indigenous experiences.”

Shaheen Christie, Anthropology PhD Program
MA: University of Chicago, 2010 • BS: UW-La Crosse, 2009
"This fellowship will allow me to travel to the United Kingdom to collect data and to complete the writing phase of my dissertation research."
Shaheen examines how decapitation practices, as part of the complex mortuary program in Roman Britain, were deployed and possibly used to distinguish difference, through the bodies of individuals, within and between communities. She also explores ways modern scholars have conceptualized marginalized ancient populations. Shaheen traces the evolution of her academic and teaching pursuits to her upbringing in a conservative community, “where topics such as diversity and inequality were simply not discussed.”

Allison Nickel, Psychology PhD Program (Experimental Psychology)
MS: UW-Milwaukee, 2014 • BS: UW-River Falls, 2011
"The AOP fellowship will allow me to devote time to completing my doctorate and give me the opportunity to work on reaching my post-doctorate goals."
In eye movement-based attention tasks, salient objects or those associated with reward capture participants’ attention. What about an object lacking salience or reward that is encoded into a participant’s memory? To find out, Allison prepared an attention task in which a target item appeared among an array of homogeneous items. When a member of the array was replaced by an object previously encoded by participants, that item captured more attention than others in the array.
Victor Williamson, Engineering PhD Program (Computer Science)

MS, 2010; BS, 2005: Massachusetts Institute of Technology

“It helps me become a published doctorate in computer science to aid my goal of becoming a force in the gaming and animation industry as a computer graphics professional.”

In his PhD program, Victor uses artificial intelligence and computer graphics to aid medical personnel to visualize medical images in 2D and 3D. As an undergraduate, he studied computer science to build software for African American communities. “Previously, I had a strong background in the arts, specifically drawing and painting, and I’ve always believed computer graphics would be my ultimate career,” he says.

Sarah Reed, Public Health MPH Program (Epidemiology)

BS: UW-Oshkosh, 2019

Sarah is the recipient of the 2019 Dr. Tomás Garrett-Rosas Research Award. She will receive an additional stipend of $1,500 each year of her fellowship and be asked to present her research publicly in the final year.

Nancy Duque, Geosciences MS Program

BS: UW-Milwaukee, 2018 • BS: University of California, Merced, 2013

“This award will keep me motivated in continuing my love for science as I climb the academic ladder.”

Nancy is analyzing the kinematic partitioning and fluid flow in the Pulo do Lobo metasedimentary rocks along the Southern Iberian Shear Zone in Andalusia, Spain. “Strain localization is essential to understand plate tectonics and the construction of the crust,” she says. “A shear zone is a localized zone that is comprised of rocks that are more highly strained than rocks adjacent to the zone. They give us a detailed record of the deformation history and may allow us to determine the sense and amount of displacement, kinematics, and strain.”
The Graduate Student Excellence Fund was established in 2015 by the Dean of the Graduate School, Marija Gajardziska-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 Education Campaign Cabinet have allowed us to provide more students, across all disciplines, with fellowship awards.

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**Taraleigh Davis, Political Science PhD Program**

MA, 2019; BA, 2017: University of Central Florida • AA: Florida State College at Jacksonville, 2014

"Being a recipient of the Graduate Student Excellence Fellowship allows me to focus more on my studies and research interests."

Taraleigh’s research examines how political institutions such as an independent media or independent judiciary impact political stability in a country. "Throughout my academic career, I have been interested in studying what factors have an impact on political stability and the onset of revolutions," she says. Taraleigh is also interested in increasing gender diversity in political science research and teaching at the university level. "It is challenging for the next generation to be what they cannot see."

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**Ashley De La Paz, Language, Literature & Translation MA Program**

BA: UW-Madison, 2015

"This award grants me the opportunity to devote more time to learning about and performing archival research."

Marie (she uses her middle name) is interested in using local government archives and personal documents to trace family roots for use as genealogical evidence in the former Soviet region. "This is of particular importance to religious and ethnic minorities in the Caucasus, such as Georgian Muslims, who have been repeatedly displaced throughout the Soviet and post-Soviet period," she says. Furnishing translated documents could prevent further displacement, offer citizenship to nationless peoples, and return seized land, Marie says.

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**Azam Elyasigorji, Engineering PhD Program**

MS, 2007; BS, 2004: Shahrood University of Technology

"This fellowship provides a great opportunity to allocate my time to the research and publish some papers to share my small step to the science world."

The main objective of Azam’s project is to detect corrosion (or flaws) in prestressed concrete girders, commonly used in bridge construction. Using finite element simulation, mathematical data analysis, and magnetic flux leakage—a method that has been successful in finding corrosion in pipelines—will help to better detect corrosion-related signals, she says. Azam’s future plans include designing and patenting a football helmet that offers greater protection against brain injuries.

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**DaJuan Ferrell, Sociology PhD Program**

MA: Middle Tennessee State University, 2014 • BA: Jacksonville State University, 2012

"This fellowship will allow me to advance my dissertation research, which will put me one step closer to achieving my ultimate goal of becoming a tenure track professor."

DaJuan explores how individuals cognitively encode and organize information from their social realities to inform their perceptions and behaviors. He has examined medical decision-making processes, organizational survival tactics, and labor experiences. For DaJuan, sociology reveals how factors such as race, class, and gender influence patterns of social relations. He says his research "can offer theoretical bridges within sociology and provide practical and policy implications."

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**Michael Gonzales, History PhD Program**

MA: UW-Milwaukee, 2015 • BA: UW-Madison, 2000

"This award will fund a research trip and allow me to visit a number of historical archives in Colorado."

Michael’s dissertation examines union activism in coal mining communities in southern Colorado in the early 20th century, particularly a prolonged and bloody strike in 1927-1928 led by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). With its special focus on immigrant and U.S.-born Spanish-speaking workers, his work highlights transnational, multicultural, multilingual, and internationalist elements of this history. Michael’s connection to this research is his paternal extended family, which included miners in southern Colorado during this period.
Jacob Grothjan, Biological Sciences PhD Program
BS: Augsburg College, 2012

“With the financial backing that fellowships provide, I can attend and present research at national and international conferences.”

Jacob studies pitcher plants, passive carnivores that trap insects, drown them in rainwater, and break them down with “a food-web of microscopic organisms,” Jacob says. “My research characterizes this microbial community, identifying who is there and their functions within the pitcher community. When I was young, I would be routinely found in the dirt, experiencing nature.” As an undergraduate, he researched plant microbes and insect larvae. Graduate school has allowed him to combine his interests.

Darcy Guenterberg, Art MFA Program
BFA: Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design, 2015

“With this generous award, my financial worries will be lessened, allowing me to put that energy towards creating a fantastic thesis!”

“My academic goal is to research and create art objects that allow physical interaction,” Darcy says. “I strive to use these objects to generate space for collaboration and dialogue. Thematically, my work addresses anxiety and mental health disorders. The dialogue and collaboration are created through interactive objects that create an anxious or calming experience in the physical world through questions and puzzles and, in turn, address mental health issues by raising awareness.”

Princeton Hampton-Jackson, Information Science and Technology MS Program
BS: UW-Milwaukee, 2014

“This award shows that there are people out there who are watching and willing to help students who are committed to their craft and making sacrifices to reach their goals.”

Princeton says his IT interest is not limited to a niche. “It’s more tailored towards educating others who are not savvy about the world of technology and the opportunities it provides,” he explains. Growing up in Milwaukee’s inner city, Princeton’s only computer access as a child was in the home office of his grandfather, a computer engineer. “From that point on, technology always seemed to be in my life to some capacity as I naturally gravitated towards it.”

Xiaowei Hu, Engineering PhD Program
MBA: UW-Milwaukee, 2016 • MS: UW-Madison, 2009 • MS: University of Nevada-Reno, 2007 • BS: Shanghai University, 2006

“It will help me achieve greater things immensely.”

Xiaowei is using quantitative methods to make smart decisions about managing scarce resources, investing in firms’ expansions, and adopting new technologies. He views his specific area of study as part of a bigger picture. “Our humanity depends on the Earth’s physical resources and natural systems for water, energy, and food,” he explains. “But because of the increasing demand and climate change, these resources are under increasing stress. Ultimately, humans will have to find a way to adapt to these stressors.”

Marzieh Karami, Engineering PhD Program
MS, 2012; BS, 2009: Sharif University of Technology

“The recognition of my work from this fellowship made me motivated to work harder and accomplish more goals.”

Marzieh’s research explores power electronics. She is working to model the problem of power converter designs mathematically to find optimal designs. “New semiconductors are a game changer in the power electronics world,” she says. “I am currently working on the issues related to these new devices. The joint between scientific work, math, and hardware implementation made me interested in power electronics,” she recalls. “Seeing the world transformed by technology motivated me to learn about electronics and drive the technology forward.”
Graduate Student Excellence Fellows (GSEF)

Jackline Kirungi, African and African Diaspora Studies PhD Program

MPH, 2016; MPhil, 2010; BA, 2005: Makerere University

“The award is a sign of commitment by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee towards enabling me to achieve my academic goal.”

Jackline explores systems of thought in the formation of the marriage institution across time in African and African American communities. “I focus on the structures that oversee marriage in these communities,” she says, “and examine how communities have negotiated marriage within the public and the private realm and how this has influenced the marriage institution in Africa and African American communities.” Jackline’s observations of the rigidity of gender roles within the marriage institution led her to study it.

Amy Klemmer, Anthropology PhD Program

MS, 2018; BA, 2015: UW-Milwaukee

“It is personally fulfilling to know that my years of study and hard work at this institution are being recognized in this way.”

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/La Niña 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,” she says. Amy received 2016 and 2017 Tinker Pre-Dissertation Field Research awards.

Risha Narayan Kuthoore, Philosophy MA Program

BA, 2018; LLB, 2018: Jindal Global University

Risha earned a dual undergraduate degree in 2018 in arts and law. As a teaching assistant, she has taught moral problems, epistemology, and introduction to philosophy. Risha is part of the legal team representing the Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board before the Supreme Court of India and is a contributor to the Tagore Law Lectures on the Hindu Law of Religious and Charitable Endowments, 6th Edition.

Tae Hee Lee, Information Studies PhD Program

MS: Syracuse University, 2008 • BLS: Sung Kyun Kwan University, 2004

“This award is not only a great help reducing my financial burden but also a chance to focus on my studying and researching.”

With a focus on marginalized groups, especially blind users and immigrants, Tae Hee studies information- and help-seeking behavior of digital library users and how digital library design guidelines support blind and visually impaired users. He also wants to find out how immigrants’ information-seeking behavior with social media changes as their adaptation to social media improves. After earning his bachelor’s degree, Tae Hee studied and worked in information and technology for more than 15 years before beginning his PhD.

Hui Lin, Freshwater Sciences PhD Program

MS, 2016; BS, 2013: Xiamen University

“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. It will support me doing the fieldwork in the lakes and rivers.”

Hui is using optical instruments to observe the size of organic matter and investigate its composition in the freshwater ecosystem. Hui was drawn to his field of study by the fundamental importance of a healthy freshwater ecosystem and the influence of dissolved organic matter on the system. “I think my work will help to understand the mechanisms and dynamics of freshwater systems,” he says.

Salahadin Lotfi, Psychology PhD Program

MS: University of Tehran, 2013 • BS: University of Shahid Beheshti, 2010

“It will be a tremendous advantage to have a prestigious award like this on my CV when I enter the job market.”

Sala tries to understand the underlying brain mechanisms behind normal and abnormal functioning—such as anxiety, PTSD, and depression—from a cognitive, neuroscience perspective. “I design computerized and other technology-based experiments and training to attempt to understand and improve the brain’s malfunctioning in psychological disorders,” he explains, “using cutting-edge neuroimaging techniques such as electroencephalography (EEG), functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS), and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI).”
Graduate Student Excellence Fellows (GSEF)

Rae-Ann Maclellan-Hurd, Freshwater Sciences and Technology MS Program
BS: Unity College, 2017
“The award shows that I am on the right track to make an impact in my field in the future.”
Rae-Ann studies the impact of invasive mussels on Lake Michigan’s nutrient cycle. Their effect on phosphorus levels has allowed nuisance algae nearshore to flourish while reducing the phytoplankton population offshore. She became interested in environmental studies as a Mississipi resident during Hurricane Katrina. While an undergraduate, she studied harmful algae blooms in a nearby lake. “I have been studying water quality ever since,” she says. Rae-Ann is president of the UWM Student Water Council and is a water ambassador through her graduate program.

Melissa Maki, Physical Therapy DPT Program
BS: UW-Milwaukee, 2016
Melissa has been a rehabilitation aide at Athletico Physical Therapy since 2016. She was featured in a 2018 Shepherd Express article on childcare options in Wisconsin for working mothers. “Most of my family does not live in the area, so the struggle is all-too-real at times,” she told the Shepherd. Melissa received a 2016-17 Outstanding Non-traditional Student Award from the UWM Student Success Center.

John Malone, Geosciences MS Program
BA: Augustana College, 2018
“Receiving recognition for my hard work and passion is an immense honor and a major stepping-stone as I move towards obtaining my degree.”
John studies glaciogenic sedimentary rocks in northwest Argentina during the Late Paleozoic Ice Age (370-230 million years ago), and how these formations correlate with others of similar age within the region. “I’ve had an enduring curiosity about the natural world and what makes it tick for as long as I can remember,” he says. “Most of my early mentors and role models were involved in earth sciences in some shape or form. This exposure helped solidify my passion for geosciences, and it persists to this day.”

Shanae Martinez, English PhD Program
“This award will help me afford my final semester at UWM as an unfunded dissertator.”
Shanae’s dissertation, “Guides and Guidance: Subverting Tourist Narratives in Trans-Indigenous Time and Space,” examines how Indigenous writers model decolonization at various sites of knowledge production. “Indigenous literary studies enables me as a Chicana from California to interrogate the institutions and systems that have displaced my ancestors and historically excluded people like me from academia,” says Shanae, a 2016 AOP fellow and Dr. Tomás Garret-Rosas Research Award recipient. Her work has appeared in the journal Studies in American Indian Literatures.

Mohammad Qandil, Engineering PhD Program
MSc: Hashemite University, 2015 • BSc: Al-Balqa’ Applied University, 2012
“This award is a great honor and high encouragement that will strengthen my resume and make me more competitive in the job market.”
Mohammad’s primary research seeks to increase efficiency and performance of water turbines by minimizing the formation of air pockets in areas of low pressure where the blades churn through the water. Known as cavitation, this process can produce unwanted noise, vibrations, and equipment damage. He also is a member of the UWM Industrial Assessment Center—funded by the U.S. Department of Energy—which promotes energy efficiency and sustainable manufacturing through energy assessments for manufacturing facilities.

Brianna Quade, History PhD Program
MS: West Chester University, 2018 • MA: Villanova University, 2016 • BA: UW-Milwaukee, 2014
“With this award, I will be able to continue my studies and engage in continuing education online that will provide sources for my dissertation.”
Brianna examines urban conditions of African Americans in the 1970s and ’80s and the use of hip-hop “as an outlet for self-expression—for both artist and listener—to convey their thoughts on their place in American society.” Brianna traces her desire to research, write, and teach history to a first-year ethnic studies class at UWM. “It is not just about looking at the past, but examining patterns and thinking critically about the world around me to understand others’ struggles, challenges, and successes.”
Ashley Ruiz, Nursing PhD Program
BS: UW-Milwaukee, 2015 • ASSOC: Madison Area Tech College, 2013
“This award enables me to further engage in opportunities to present, collaborate, and engage to ultimately refine improving nursing practice.”
Ashley’s PhD program is focused on improving nursing care delivery, specifically through addressing nursing practice interactions that increase trauma among victims of sexual trauma. Ashley, a “multiracial, second-generation woman” practicing nursing in the area of trauma, says a major challenge in her field is “the need to engage the next generation of nurses in recognizing historical contributions that create health inequalities, and the ways in which nurses can mitigate these effects.”

Mandana Sheikhzad Saravani, Engineering PhD Program
ME: University of Wollongong, 2015 • BE: University of Guilan, 2012
“Receiving this award will help me to reduce my financial burdens, which allows me to focus more on my goal and pursuing my PhD.”
Mandana is developing a new internal cooling system for gas turbines, which power such items as aircraft, ships, and electrical generators. Unlike most research on removing heat from the blades, she investigates flow behavior both numerically and experimentally. “My new design has shown a significant increase in heat transfer ratio for internal cooling channels of the rotating gas turbine blade,” she says. “The experimental results from this study can be used as a reference in future studies.”

Alyssa Sheeran, Social Welfare PhD Program
MS, 2015; BS, 2012: UW-Milwaukee
“With the GSEF award, I can continue to excel in my graduate career and eventually achieve my Doctor of Philosophy in Social Welfare at UWM.”
Alyssa is examining outcomes of a group of former Milwaukee County House of Corrections inmates over a three-year period after their release, to see if an ex-jail inmate’s individual and neighborhood characteristics influence the likelihood of receiving a subsequent charge, conviction, or incarceration. She is also a researcher on a project funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration that provides treatment service enhancements for the Milwaukee County Adult Drug Treatment Court.

Roza Smagulova, Business Administration MBA Program
BEd: East Kazakhstan State University, 2011
“Your scholarship supports my dream of equal education rights and job opportunities for immigrant women.”
After promoting libraries and education in her native Kazakhstan, Roza says enrolling at UWM fulfilled her dream of studying marketing at a top American business school. “There is a constant need for knowledge about new marketing tools, software, practices, case studies, etc.,” she says. “The Lubar School gives me the necessary methodology and base to prepare me for a managerial position.” At UWM, Roza has participated in the La Macchia Entrepreneur Internship Program and established marketing campaigns as an intern at a local IT company.

Morgan Teel, Dance MFA Program
BFA: University of Southern Mississippi, 2014
“This award will help me achieve my professional goals: expanding my dance company to include creative career coaching and organizational growth consulting.”
“I am drawn to making dances to build community around conversation and critical thinking,” says Morgan, who is researching how dancers’ Enneagram personality types are embodied in the ways they build their identity in movement. “Through this thesis research, I hope to identify new ways that companies and educational systems can coach dancers in rehearsals, as well as cultivate happier and healthier artistic work environments.”
Dulay Manuel Trujillo, Engineering MS Program
BS: UW-Milwaukee, 2018
“This award not only helps financially, but it also expresses that my hard work is being noticed and appreciated.”
In collaboration with a UWM geology student, Dulay is monitoring eight specific pesticides in groundwater samples. This research involves using liquid chromatography and tandem mass spectrometry to separate and identify components in the water, concentrating the samples, and analyzing data. His ultimate goal is to help “make water more accessible, affordable, and healthier for the public and the environment.” Dulay’s undergraduate research projects included determining levels of arsenic species and testing for lead in water samples.

Caitlin Vosberg, Nursing MN Program
BS: UW-La Crosse, 2005
“The Graduate Student Excellence Fellowship confirms that I am going into a field that I have a strong passion for and that I love what I do.”
Seeing nurses in action during a hospital stay sparked Caitlin’s desire to join their ranks. “I enjoyed the hustle and bustle of the hospital,” she recalls, “but I most enjoyed the impact the nurses were making on patients and their families’ lives. It was so amazing to see them wearing the many hats nurses wear—provider, nurturer, and advocate to their patients.” During her undergraduate studies, the mother of two worked full time as a New Berlin recreation supervisor and volunteered at Froedtert Hospital.

Nemanja Vuksanovic, Chemistry PhD Program
MA: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2015 • BA: Luther College, 2013
“Being a graduate student can sometimes be financially stressful, and receiving this award will allow me to worry less about finances and remain fully focused on my research.”
Nemanja performs structural and kinetic studies of enzymes involved in the biosynthesis of L-enduracididine. This amino acid is a component in several antibiotics that show high activity against MRSA, an antibiotic-resistant strain of staph.
“Emerging antibiotic resistance represents a major global threat,” he says. “Having a full understanding of how bacteria produce this molecule will allow for the synthetic development of more potent antibiotics.”

Alexander Wallace, Psychology PhD Program
MS: UW-Milwaukee, 2019 • BS: University of Iowa, 2013
“As I continue my education into my community placement rotations, this award with help to attenuate transportation costs between UWM and the Children’s Hospital of Wisconsin.”
Alex studies how substance use and health factors such as exercise influence cognition and neurodevelopment in adolescents and young adults. Specifically, he is exploring how cannabis use during adolescence and young adulthood impacts cognition and brain behaviors. “As more and more states are starting to change laws around cannabis,” Alex says, “there is a desperate need for research to help better understand the potential implications of legal cannabis use.”

Xueling Yi, Biological Sciences PhD Program
BS: Peking University, 2017
“The fellowship will help me concentrate more on my projects with less worrying about living expenses.”
Xueling aims to improve population management and conservation of two common North American house bats. In little brown bats, she is analyzing the immune genes to identify potential mechanisms of resistance to white-nose syndrome, a deadly fungal disease that attacks the bats as they hibernate. In big brown bats, Xueling is characterizing patterns of population genetic structure and relating them to environmental factors to predict future population expansion and gene flow. She also plans to reconstruct the big brown bats’ evolutionary history.
Learn About UWM Graduate School Fellowships for Full-Time Study

Fellows are nominated by their programs in a competitive process. In addition to their stipends, all DGSF, DDF and AOP fellows are eligible to receive:

- Tuition remission
- Health insurance
- $1,000 travel award
The Graduate School would like to extend a special thank-you to everyone involved in the 2019 Graduate Student Fellowship Celebration.
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.