

Thursday, Jul. 18, 2013

## Eight Aggies Honored in NSF Graduate Research Fellow Search



(left) Kendall Becker, ecology and (right) Aleshka Carrion-Matta, watershed science.



(left) Kate Mendaesna Galbreath, ecology and (right) Mike Negale, physics.

Four Utah State University Aggies received 2013 Graduate Research Fellowships from the National Science Foundation and four more received honorable mentions in a renowned competition that rewards academic excellence in science, technology, engineering and mathematics disciplines.

USU's 2013 NSF Graduate Research Fellows are Kendall Becker and Kate Mendaesna Galbreath, both master's students in ecology in USU's Department of Wildland Resources and Ecology Center; Aleshka Carrion-Matta, a master's student in USU's Department of Watershed Sciences, and Michael Ray Negale, a doctoral student in USU's Department of Physics.

Receiving an honorable mention for the second consecutive year is Lexine Long, a master's student in ecology and bioregional planning in USU's Department of Watershed Sciences, Department of Environment and Society and Ecology Center. Also receiving honorable mentions are Leda Sox, a doctoral student in USU's Department of Physics, as well as entering ecology graduate students James Marty and Elsie Thomson.

"NSF Graduate Research Fellowships are the nation's most prestigious graduate awards in science and engineering," said USU President Stan Albrecht. "The fact that eight Aggies are among this year's honorees is a solid testament to the outstanding quality of our university's academic and research programs, as well as the high caliber of our students and faculty."

NSF GRFP recipients receive a three-year annual stipend of \$30,000, along

with a cost-of-education allowance of at least \$10,500 for tuition and fees, financial support for international travel and the freedom to conduct their own research at any accredited U.S. or foreign institution of graduate education they choose.

### **Kendall Becker, ecology**

Seattle native Kendall Becker is studying the effects of fire and climate on tree growth and carbon sequestration in the frequent-fire forests of the western United States. She'll conduct research with USU faculty mentor Jim Lutz, assistant professor of forest ecology in USU's Department of Wildland Resources and the USU Ecology Center.

"I will be examining tree growth patterns from increment cores," Becker says. "Along with this, I'll examine data describing the spatial arrangement of trees to determine how fire severity and climate impact carbon accumulation rates and the stability of forest carbon stocks in Yosemite National Park."

### **Aleshka Carrion-Matta, watershed science**

Aleshka Carrion-Matta earned a bachelor's degree in physics from the University of Puerto Rico-Rio Piedras, where she conducted undergraduate research on the ionosphere and solar cycles at Arecibo Observatory. At USU, she is a master's student in watershed science. With faculty mentor Sarah Null, assistant professor in USU's Department of Watershed Sciences, Carrion-Matta is studying hydrologic impacts of climate variability for Utah's Great Salt Lake.

### **Kate Medaesna Galbreath, ecology**

Kate Medaesna Galbreath completed her undergraduate studies at the University of Alaska-Anchorage. The master's student is working with USU faculty mentor Eric Gese, associate professor in the Department of Wildland Resources and Ecology Center, on a fisheries ecology research project in California's Sierra Nevada Mountains.

### **Mike Negale, physics**

A native of Gallup, N.M., Mike Negale is studying the characteristics and effects of short-period atmospheric gravity waves on the dynamics of the upper atmosphere. The doctoral student is working with USU physics professor Mike Taylor and Kim Nielsen, a physics professor at Utah Valley University, on the Mesospheric and Airglow Imaging project to investigate the presence and dynamics of short-period gravity waves over the interior of Alaska. Negale will compare findings from Alaska with data collected on

gravity waves from Norway and Antarctica.

This year's honorees join 31 Aggies who have received fellowships and 31 USU students who have received honorable mentions since 1999.

***Related links:***

- [NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program](#)
- [USU College of Science](#)
- [USU Quinney College of Natural Resources](#)
- [USU Ecology Center](#)

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