Six Smithies Awarded NSF Graduate Research Fellowships in 2015

Five recent Smith College graduates and one graduating senior were among the 2,000 individuals offered 2015 NSF GRFs. An additional seven Smithies were recognized with honorable mentions in this year’s competition!

NSF received over 16,000 applications for the program, designed to attract, recognize, and support outstanding graduate students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics who are pursuing or will pursue research-based Master’s and doctoral degrees at US universities. The award funds three years of graduate study and each fellow may use the award at the university of her choice. Students may apply as graduating seniors or in their first two years of graduate study.

The Smith College graduates offered NSF GRF awards:

**Wanda Feng, ’15**, a double major in astronomy and geosciences, receives her award as a graduating senior. (She joins Emily Flynn, ’14 and Sarah Lim, ’12 in obtaining her NSF GRF before starting graduate school!) Winning the award was “a validation” of Wanda’s hard work and also created new possibilities for graduate study. She will be attending Arizona State University to pursue a Ph.D. in astronomy. Where better than in the great stretches of Southwest sky to study planet formation! Wanda’s Smith College mentors were Professors Suzan Edwards and John Brady. Dr. Cynthia Evans, Director of Astromaterials Acquisition & Curation at the NASA Johnson Space Center has also been a mentor.

**Stevie Bergman, ’09**, a graduate student in physics at Princeton University, writes that the award “will enable me to pursue the research I’m most interested in... as well as ensure I can continue to separate time for science education activities that are very important to me.” Among Stevie’s Smith College mentors are Professors Gary Felder and Suzan Edwards, but the whole of the physics and astronomy departments at Smith get credit for being “a powerfully positive force” in Stevie’s life!

**Janet Burke, ’14**, biological sciences, is a first-year graduate student in paleontology at Yale University. She writes: “I was an Ada Comstock Scholar at Smith, and I worked while completing my first two years at community college. Also, for summer internships, I could only take paid opportunities rather than unpaid experiences such as field camps and other training. Because of this, I have always worried that I lagged behind other scientists in experience. Getting the GRF was the final blow to my ‘impostor syndrome’ and confirmed that my non-traditional experience is an asset and not a burden. Sara Pruss wrote me a recommendation letter, and she is also the professor who inspired me to pursue paleontology and academia.”
Maya Lewin-Berlin, ’13, physics, is a graduate student at the University of California-Berkeley. Her field of study is physics and astronomy – atomic, molecular, optical physics. She writes: “This fellowship will give me the freedom to pursue projects that may otherwise not have been funded, including efforts to support undergraduate women in physics and girls interested in science.” Professor Nalini Easwar was one of Maya’s Smith College mentors and wrote a letter of recommendation for the NSF GRF.

Angela Oliverio, ’12, a double major in philosophy and biology, will use her NSF GRF to begin graduate school in ecology at the University of Colorado at Boulder. The award, she says, “will let me devote more of my time to both research in the lab and outreach (such as improving microbial literacy and working with K12 educators).” Biological sciences professors Laura Katz and L. David Smith and philosophy professor Jeffry Ramsey were prominent among Angela’s Smith College mentors.

Maggie Sawdy, ’13, biology, will use her award to begin graduate school in zoology at Michigan State University. She will work with University Distinguished Professor Kay E. Holekamp (Smith College, ’73!) and will study spotted hyenas in the Masai Mara, Kenya. Maggie writes: “I am most excited about the independence the award will give me to focus on research and conservation.” Maggie’s Smith College mentors have been Professors Virginia Hayssen, Sara Pruss, and Laura Katz.

As Janet Burke said, “I am so glad (although not surprised) to hear that so many other Smithies received the award!” Congratulations to our talented Smithies and thanks to their many Smith College mentors.

Margaret Lamb
Administrative Director
Clark Science Center
May 2015