UDiscover Scholars Research During Summer Months

Students representing multiple disciplines will spend their time researching as part of the UDiscover Scholars program.

Nine University of South Dakota students representing various disciplines and majors were selected to participate in the UDiscover Scholars program sponsored by the Council for Undergraduate Research and Creative Scholarship.

“The highly selective program is designed to give undergraduate students from any discipline experience conducting a scholarly research project under the guidance of a faculty mentor during the summer,” said Kim Albracht, assistant director of academic engagement.

Students applied to participate in the program during the spring semester and went through a rigorous application review and interview process before being selected as a UDiscover Scholar and awarded a $3,000 stipend.

Each student scholar commits to at least 300 hours of research over a 10-week period between May and August. As part of the summer program, the students meet bi-weekly on campus to discuss their experience and attend professional development sessions related to conducting research and creative scholarship.

Students present their findings along with SPURA students during a poster session held by the USD Center for Brain and Behavior Research Aug. 9-10. Students will also present their research at IdeaFest in the spring, April 3-4, 2019.

2018 UDiscover Scholars

- Danielle Brown - Medical Biology
- Tasha Determan - Art
- Seth Gerberding - Mathematics
- Dustin Heiden - Medical Biology
- Meredith Jenkins - Music Education History
- Lucas Lund - Spanish, International Studies, Political Science
- Paris Schroeder - Biology
- Megan Swets - Communication Studies, English, Spanish
- Elizabeth Skye - Art
Several faculty associated with the Missouri River Institute (MRI) at the University of South Dakota are part of a new $30,000 grant funded by the National Park Service to study the impact of a backwater restoration project on plant and animal biodiversity on the 59-mile District of the Missouri National Recreational River (MNRR).

The National Park Service owns property at Bow Creek Recreation Area, near Wynot, Nebraska, and will be restoring a backwater area at this property during the fall of 2018. The restoration project will involve excavation of a former backwater channel to reconnect it with the Missouri River along with seeding of terrestrial and aquatic plants along the restored backwater area.

Backwaters are wetlands that are connected to the river, but are not in the river channel proper. These habitats provide important low-velocity habitats that are crucial for river biodiversity, especially for use as nursery habitats for fish and amphibians. Because of the changes in river flow regulation by the upstream dams on the Missouri River, the occurrence and extent of off-channel habitats, such as backwaters, has been greatly reduced. Many former backwaters have lost their connection with the river channel so they cannot serve the critical nursery function, especially for river fish. The research project will assist with an understanding of how plants and animals respond to the restoration of a critical backwater area along the river.

MRI faculty Jeff Wesner, Mark Dixon and David Swanson, along with some undergraduate student field technicians, will work with National Park Service-MNRR biologists to sample aquatic and terrestrial plant, aquatic invertebrate, fish and amphibian populations in and around the backwater before and after the restoration project. Sampling will be conducted during the summer of 2018 to gather pre-restoration biodiversity measurements and again in the summer of 2019 for post-restoration biodiversity measurements. The project will also capitalize on the current cooperative internship program between the MRI and the MNRR to use the interns for the pre-restoration data collection.

Marisa Cummings has been named director of Native American Student Services (NASS). She will begin her work as such later this month.

Cummings has been with the University of South Dakota for the past year and a half as a project coordinator, administering the Department of Justice Office of Violence Against Women grant, and serving as a key member of the campus iCARE team. During this time, she has shown a proclivity for collaborating with staff and faculty in developing and delivering an array of cultural programs and events.

The NASS/Native American Cultural Center (NACC) directorship will afford Cummings the opportunity to draw upon her educational preparation, in particular from the University of Iowa’s American Indian/Native Studies program, as well as her past professional experiences. Among them, her work at Iowa in student educational support and outreach, as well as in student recruitment and admissions at Little Priest Tribal College directing public and governmental relations, and as an executive officer for tribal operations with the Omaha Tribe of Nebraska.
Cwach Named Director of Communications

The University of South Dakota has named Michelle Cwach director of communications.

Cwach is a Vermillion native who holds a master’s degree in journalism and communication from Iowa State University and bachelor’s degrees in contemporary media and journalism and English from USD. Most recently, she served as senior web editor for USD’s marketing communications and university relations department.

Prior to coming to USD in 2016, Cwach served as media relations manager for KPI-JCI and Astec Mobile Screens, an international heavy equipment manufacturer based in Yankton. She succeeds Tena Haraldson, who retired June 21.

As director of communications, Cwach is responsible for promoting the mission, vision and reputation of the university. She also serves as the university liaison to media outlets.

“We are excited to have Michelle Cwach step into a greater leadership role after two years of managing digital communications and online retail at USD,” said Scott Pohlson, vice president of marketing, enrollment and university relations. “Michelle met every requirement for us. She brings a wealth of experience in marketing and public relations from both a major private corporation and a Division I higher education institution. She’s been an energetic leader on USD’s strategic communication team and has demonstrated her ability to work with other campus leaders to elevate USD’s brand. She’s a proven and effective communicator who takes prides in uncovering stories of innovation and success at USD.”

Cwach said she is thrilled to have the opportunity to further USD’s brand, elevate its reputation and increase enrollment.

“As the state’s flagship university, USD plays a critical role in South Dakota, particularly when it comes to building the state’s workforce and educating tomorrow’s leaders,” she said. “I’m excited by the forward momentum and transformational change occurring on campus. As an alumna of the university, this is an extra special role for me, and I’m eager to get to work and continue building the USD brand.”

Laura Renee Chandler, Ph.D., has officially begun her work as the new director for USD’s Center for Diversity and Community.

After having sampled Midwest hospitality during her undergraduate years at Macalester College, Chandler comes to USD most recently from South Dakota State University, where she served as an assistant professor of history. She brings a great deal of expertise in intercultural development along with a research agenda focused on African American women’s social and political activism, black transnationalism and feminist theory. She earned her doctorate at Rice University.

She is, among other honors, a grant recipient from the South Dakota Humanities Council and a TEDx speaker presenting “Silence Will Not Save You: Mobilize Against Hateful Ignorance” to a Brookings audience and online.
Parking Permits Now Available

The 2018/2019 parking permits are available for purchase for $162 and are valid from now until Aug. 15, 2019. There are three options in which you can purchase a permit:

1. Register and pay online at http://parking.usd.edu. You will need to enter your vehicle and credit card information. You will also need to indicate if you want the permit mailed to you or if you will pick up the permit at the Business Office. (Please allow two business days for processing.)

2. Stop by the Business Office at Slagle Hall 207 to pay by cash, check or credit card. Please complete a vehicle registration form (available in the USD portal) and bring it to the Business Office.

3. Complete a payroll deduction form for authorization to have the parking permit deducted from your paycheck. Bring the completed authorization form to the Business Office at Slagle Hall 207 and a vehicle registration form must be completed as well.

For more information regarding parking permits, rules and regulations, go to: www.usd.edu/administration/university-police/parking.cfm.

If you have any questions, please contact the Business Office at 605-677-5613 or email us at businessoffice@usd.edu.

Credit Hour Features Newseum Institute's Policinski

The University of South Dakota podcast Credit Hour interviewed Gene Policinski, Newseum Institute president and First Amendment Center of the Freedom Forum Institute executive director.

Policinski spoke about a wide range of subjects, including the First Amendment and state of the media. “If I had to take away one thing from my career, it’s the sort of wonderment that there are so many good people in the process,” Policinski said.

Policinski discusses how free speech impacts protests, the impact of technology on media and his favorite Al Neuharth story. “Gene’s knowledge and experience of issues related to the First Amendment is unparalleled,” said Michael Ewald, host of Credit Hour. “USD is fortunate to have Gene as a supporter as he has been critical helping us invite some of the most acclaimed figures in media and journalism to campus in recent years.”

The First Amendment Center released on June 28 its 2018 survey on the state of the First Amendment, finding respondents generally supportive of concepts like free speech. A majority consider “fake news” more objectionable on social media than hate speech.

Credit Hour is available on Apple podcasts, Stitcher, Google Play and www.usd.edu/podcast.
USD Opera Awarded Honorable Mention at Competition

USD Opera’s production of “The Marriage of Figaro” was awarded an honorable mention for the American Prize in Opera Performance on June 21. The American Prize is a series of national competitions that recognizes professional, university-level and community performances.

USD Opera’s previous accolades include being awarded second place in opera performance in 2016 and 2013 at the collegiate level, as well as a third place award for collegiate opera production from the National Opera Association in 2012.

The production’s artistic team included stage and music director Tracelyn Gesteland, conductor David Holdhusen, technical director and designer Brian Adams and stage manager Josh Rolling.

“It is truly exciting for USD Opera to receive national recognition for the seventh year in a row,” Gesteland said. “I am honored and humbled for our opera program and for my work as a director to be included in the company of some major operatic powerhouses across the country. That inclusion speaks highly of our music students and their dedication to their art. I am very proud of all associated with this production.”

In addition, Gesteland was awarded honorable mention in the stage direction category of the American Prize for her direction of “The Marriage of Figaro.”

USD Inventor Patents New Drug Injection Method

The United States Patent and Trademark Office has granted the University of South Dakota two patents for a new biopolymer drug loading method.

The lead inventor is Daisy Deng, Ph.D., from USD’s biomedical engineering department.

The technology relates to the field of oxygen generating microparticles containing biodegradable thermo-responsive hydrogels and methods for their use. The invention covers a process of making an injectable oxygen-generating scaffold, as well as a method used for regenerating lost bone and damaged tissue.

It is an inexpensive new method to load a wide range of drugs into a polymer that can be implanted and absorbed into the human body.

It also has the advantage of slowly releasing the drugs to prolong the function period and can be loaded at room temperature.