Student Success Stories
2012-2013

Presidential Dissertation Fellowship Recipients

NABRAJ BHATTARAI, Ph.D. Candidate, Physics

Nabraj Bhattarai is a recipient of the Spring 2013 Presidential Dissertation Fellowship Award. “After joining UTSA, I became part of a very good academic and research environment where I was able to explore my potential. I am focused in understanding the properties at nanoscale and exploring their impact in practical applications.” A research assistant for three years, he works under the supervision of Dr. Miguel Jose-Yacaman in the fabrication of different metallic and bimetallic nanoparticles and studies their properties using electron microscopy (TEM, SEM, STEM). According to Nabraj, “Dr. Yacaman is one of the top scientists in the natural sciences. He has provided an excellent academic and research environment.” Receiving this award has inspired him; the funds will assist him continue his research, complete his dissertation, and graduate in Spring 2014. Once Nabraj graduates, he plans to pursue a career in nanoscience and nanotechnology research.

SOVICETH BOUN, Ph.D. Candidate, Culture, Literacy and Language

Soviceth Boun is a recipient of the Spring 2013 Presidential Dissertation Fellowship award. His research interests include the areas of sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, specifically the sociocultural aspects and language acquisitions in both English as a foreign language (EFL) and English as a second language (ESL). Receipt of this award will assist Sovicheth with his dissertation research, including travel expenses to Cambodia, data collection and analysis, and dissemination of research results at conferences. When asked who has influenced his success most at UTSA, Sovicheth gives credit to Dr. Wayne Wright: “He [Dr. Wright] has been a wonderful professor and mentor. Working with him as a research assistant … has honed my research skills through collaborative research with him. His knowledge about Cambodia … including being a Fulbright Scholar to one of Cambodia’s most prestigious universities, is instrumental to my dissertation research.” Upon graduation, Sovicheth hopes to become a university professor where he can utilize his knowledge and expertise “to make a difference in the lives of … students, particularly those who are academically, culturally, and linguistically disadvantaged.”

ELIZABETH CALI, Ph.D. Candidate, English

Elizabeth Cali is a recipient of the Spring 2013 Presidential Dissertation Fellowship Award. Elizabeth focuses her research and writings on nineteenth-century African American literature and print culture, Black Feminist theory, and early American literary communities and nationalisms. Elizabeth is pleased to be a recipient of this award and explains, “The funds from [this award] will enable me to conduct research in special collections at Northwestern University and at the University of Connecticut … which include [documents] necessary to the completion of this dissertation project.” According to Elizabeth, the person most responsible for her success at UTSA is Dr. Joycelyn Moody, her dissertation advisor. “I came to UTSA from Chicago to work with Dr. Moody. Her dedication to my success … has profoundly and positively impacted my
work and success in the Ph.D. program.” Post-graduation, Elizabeth plans to teach and research early African American literature at the university level.

**BRIAN MUNKOMBWE, Ph.D. Candidate, Applied Demography**

Brian Munkombwe is a recipient of the Spring 2013 Presidential Dissertation Fellowship Award. His dissertation research examines childhood mortality and disease burden in sub-Saharan Africa. Brian decided to conduct his doctoral studies at UTSA because its Applied Demography program is one of two standalone programs in the country. One of his faculty members, Dr. Corey Sparks, has been instrumental in his success at UTSA. Dr. Sparks has assisted in honing Brian’s skillset in statistical research and the utilization of statistics software. This award will assist him in funding his research and attending a conference on child and maternal health in Ethiopia. Brian plans to graduate in the Spring 2014 semester. “My future plans are to continue my career in academia, with a position that combines teaching and research.”

**MADHUPARNA PAL, Ph.D. Candidate, Electrical Engineering**

Madhuparna Pal is a recipient of the Spring 2013 Presidential Dissertation Fellowship Award. The focus of her research includes modeling and characterization of smart and engineered materials for fabrication of nanoscale devices, such as sensors and actuators. The award will allow her to finance attendance at international conferences in Canada (MS and T) and Poland (IMF) to present her research. Madhuparna was selected to attend the Electrical Engineering doctoral program at UTSA due in large part to renowned faculty members such as Drs. Amar Bhalla and Ruyan Guo. Both of these faculty mentors have directly contributed to her success by providing financial assistance to attend conferences and offered NSF grant support for research. Madhuparna plans to graduate during the 2013-2014 academic year. “[My] career goals are to establish myself professionally in the field of engineering and engage in the research and development section of some prominent industry.”

**CHAO SHI, Ph.D. Candidate, Applied Statistics**

Chao Shi is a recipient of the Spring 2013 Presidential Dissertation Fellowship Award. Chao is currently conducting research on measuring the reliability of electroencephalography (EEG) through statistical modeling. During his time at UTSA, he attributes his success to his mentor, Dr. Nandini Kannan. Chao explains that Dr. Kannan has been integral to his growth as a researcher in applied statistics. “I have learned so much from her,” he states. Following his graduation in Fall 2013, Chao’s career goal is to become a renowned statistician in industry. Chao further explains that the fellowship funds could not come at a better time with his 4-year stipend coming to an end. “The funds will assist me with supporting my family so that I may complete my dissertation research and graduate.”
Graduate Student Research Award Recipients

JEFFREY HOWARD, Ph.D. Candidate, Applied Demography

Jeffrey Howard is a recipient of the Spring 2013 Graduate Student Research Award. His research focuses on biodemography. He is interested in identifying how chronic stress biomarkers are related to morbidity and mortality processes, and how these processes differ across various demographic and socioeconomic factors. The person that has had the most significant impact on Jeffrey’s success is his dissertation chair, Dr. Johnelle Sparks. “[Dr. Sparks] has been instrumental in helping shape my academic career by providing tremendous support and feedback on my research ideas, and always pushing me to reach a little farther with my research questions in ways that contribute to new knowledge to my field of study.” Jeffrey will be able to utilize the funds as financial support to pay tuition in the Fall 2013 semester. His future career goals include being an assistant professor, teaching in the areas of health disparities, mortality and statistics, and continuing his research agenda. Jeffrey was recently named recipient of the prestigious 2013 Jess Hay Chancellor's Fellowship.

CHENGWEI LEI, Ph.D. Candidate, Computer Science

Chengwei Lei is a recipient of the Spring 2013 Graduate Student Research Award. His research interests lie in the broad area of bioinformatics, data mining, network topology analysis, and clustering problems. Ultimately, he is interested in developing data-analytical methods and tools to make complex biological data more understandable and useful. When asked who he would attribute the ultimate success in his program to, he responded, “That would be John Shaffer. Thank you, John, for your hard work to help graduate students. You made our graduate research much easier and our UTSA life more colorful.” Chengwei plans to use the funds from this award to attend several high-level conferences and meet top scientists in his area of research. He explains that the funds are crucial to him can have the opportunity to learn about the work of other researchers in this field. His career goal is to get a faculty position at a research university. When asked why he chose to attend UTSA, he was very clear, “First, I love Texas. Second, I like San Antonio. Third, UTSA is the rising star.”

LISHU LIU, Master's Candidate, Information Technology

Lishu Liu is a recipient of the Spring 2013 Graduate Student Research Award. Her research focuses on applying information retrieval technology in digital forensics. The one person that Lishu can attribute to her ultimate success in her program is Dr. Nicole Beebe, who she calls the “best advisor.” Dr. Beebe also highly praised Lishu stating, “[Her] research contributions as a Master’s level student are unparalleled in my estimation. Her keen intellect, work ethic, and loyalty have earned my utmost respect.” The award will assist Lishu to complete her degree by assisting to offset the expense of tuition and fees. Once she graduates, Lishu’s career goals include research oriented work in either industry or academics.
THOMAS MOORE, Master’s Candidate, Sociology

Thomas Moore is a recipient of the Spring 2013 Graduate Student Research Award. His research focuses on white southern identity and cognitive dissonance; specifically changes in southern social environment during the 1860’s to 1890’s. Dr. Christopher Ellison has been the person that has had the most influence on Thomas’s success in his program. "Dr. Ellison has been a good mentor and resource and is very interested in his students’ work. He has allowed me to co-author research papers with him and has provided me experience in quantitative research." This award helped fund Thomas's trip to the Southern Sociological Society Conference in Atlanta where he had the opportunity to present his research. In addition, the funds will help him collect sources for his thesis research. Post-graduation, Thomas looks to continue research in social psychology and sociology, publish in journals, and perhaps enter a doctoral program.

ANAND SRINIVASAN, Ph.D. Candidate, Biomedical Engineering

Anand Srinivasan is a recipient of the Spring 2013 Graduate Student Research Award. Anand chose to attend UTSA due to the newly-formed biomedical engineering program and the opportunity to work closely with the principal investigators. His graduate research focuses on bringing in a proverbial paradigm shift by moving microbial cell culture to nano-scale level. In addition, Anand has had the unique experience of developing a collaborative project from scratch for a new faculty, which has taught him the challenges and rewards of starting an independent laboratory. He attributes his all-around success in his program to his two mentors, Drs. Anand Ramasubramanian and Jose Lopez-Ribot. “They have been my mentors all along the boulevard of academic and research training for four years. If not for them, the journey would not have culminated.” Anand’s career goal is to establish a productive interdisciplinary research program to address infectious disease issues related to biomedical protheses.

Graduate Student Teaching Award Recipients

JESSICA INOCENCIO, Ph.D. Candidate, Organizational Management

Jessica Inocencio is a recipient of the Spring 2013 Graduate Student Teaching Award and a past recipient of the Louise and Michael Beldon Doctoral Scholarship. Jessica sees herself as an academic trainer. “My ultimate goal is to help students asses their own level of academic fitness, learn how to establish successful habits, and ultimately learn how to train and develop their skills independently.” Jessica attributes her success in her program to her students, who motivate and inspire her to continually improve her teaching techniques and style. The funds from this award will assist in funding attendance at statistics workshops at UT Austin, which will help with the methodology and research design for her dissertation. Once Jessica graduates, she wants to be a professor at a university that values research and teaching, equally.
SHERVIN JAHANIAN, Master’s Candidate, Biomedical Engineering

Shervin Jahanian is a recipient of the Spring 2013 Graduate Student Teaching Award. He chose UTSA’s Biomedical Engineering program since it is a unique collaborative program with UT Health Science Center, San Antonio. Through his teaching philosophy, Shervin believes, “If effort is put forward in trying to teach students how to use resources as opposed to focusing efforts on getting them to regurgitate material, students will become much more well adept at research and real-world problem solving.” Shervin gives credit to his ultimate success in his program to Drs. Liang Tang and Anand Ramasubramanian. “Both have done a great job at discreetly pushing me towards success and becoming a great researcher.” The funds from this award will assist with rectifying financial pressures and allow him to focus more on research and coursework. Post-graduation, Shervin plans to work in the biomedical engineering industry and go back to school for an MBA.

TIMOTHY KRAUSE, Ph.D. Candidate, Finance

Timothy Krause is a recipient of the Spring 2013 Graduate Student Teaching Award. His teaching revolves around problem-based learning, and the fundamental principle of his teaching philosophy is that ‘learning by doing’ is the best way to understand finance. “I attempt to simplify some difficult concepts and work with students on ‘real world’ business applications.” The faculty housed in the Finance Department is the main reason he chose to pursue his doctoral degree at UTSA. He considers Drs. Donald Lien and Yiuman Tse instrumental to his success in the program. Dr. Richard Utecht played a large role as well, providing guidance in teaching, which Timothy claims played a part in his receiving this award. He plans to use the funds to travel to the FMA Conference in October, where he will present a paper that will eventually become part of his dissertation. Timothy’s career goal is to obtain a position as an Assistant Professor of Finance at a college or university.

WILLIAM ROBERTSON, Master’s Candidate, Anthropology

William Robertson is a recipient of the spring 2013 Graduate Student Teaching Award. His teaching philosophy is, “to create a safe space for students to exercise critical and reflective thinking. I do not approach students as empty vessels to be filled with knowledge; rather, I approach teaching as an opportunity for both instructor and student to learn from one another.” William attributes his success as a teacher to Dr. Deborah Wanger. “Deborah gave me many opportunities to engage with students as her TA. She also pushed me to lecture on topics I was unfamiliar with, which helped me improve my lecturing skills and learn how to prepare for a lecture. She has been an amazing mentor and a close friend, and I would not be the person that I am today without her influence.” The funds will assist William to solely focus on completing his thesis this summer. Once he graduates, William will begin applying to PhD programs in Anthropology and, in the meantime, look to for teaching opportunities at UTSA and elsewhere.
Yeng Yang is a recipient of the Spring 2013 Graduate Student Teaching Award. The funds will assist Yeng in purchasing new academic journals and publications that will prepare him for his upcoming qualifying exams. When asked about his teaching philosophy, Yeng states, “I strongly believe in a learner-centered approach to teaching and learning. Working with pre-service teachers who will soon be teaching socially and culturally diverse students, I want them to recognize that this learner-centered approach is especially crucial, because it puts the students’ needs to the forefront.” He holds his mentor and advisor, Dr. Wayne Wright, in the highest regard, stating, “My success thus far would not have been possible without his guidance and compassion—both at the professional and personal levels.” Yeng’s career goals include becoming a university professor, as he hopes to influence Hmong-American communities and other communities that have been historically underserved and disenfranchised.