Louise and Michael Beldon Doctoral Scholarship Recipient

MAURO OLIVEIRA, Ph.D. Candidate, Finance

Mauro Oliveira will begin his doctoral program in Finance in Fall 2013 and is the recipient of the 2013-2014 Louise and Michael Beldon Doctoral Scholarship. Being a recipient of the Beldon Scholarship is very important to Mauro and his family since he will not be working during the time he is in his doctoral program, dedicating his time solely to his academic studies. His research interest is corporate finance, and he wants to focus on the areas of mergers & acquisitions, valuations, studies related to capital structuring such as the issuing of equity and debt securities, IPOs, financial restructuring, bankruptcy, and extend some of these analyses into the international arena. Mauro chose to pursue his doctoral work at UTSA due to the fact that he is very impressed with the quality of the faculty in the program. Mauro explains that during his master’s program at UTSA, “I had classes with exceptional professors both in the foundations and in the electives, such as International Finance, Corporate Valuation, Microeconomics, and Speculative Markets and Securities.” Ultimately, his goal in pursuing a Ph.D. in Finance is to “obtain important knowledge and experience in order to pursue a career in research and academics, contributing to society and to younger generations of students.” Mauro would also like to be a university faculty member.

Presidential Dissertation Fellowship Recipients

SARAH BOUKHRIS, Ph.D. Candidate, Biomedical Engineering

Sarah Boukhris is a recipient of the Fall 2013 Presidential Dissertation Fellowship Award. Sarah chose to pursue at Doctoral Degree in Biomedical Engineering at UTSA because of the top-notch research that is being conducted here. “I had the good fortune to work as a student researcher in the UTSA SiViRT Center which focuses on state of the art research in simulation, visualization, and real-time prediction. Her dissertation research topic is to develop a mathematical model to simulate tumor cell migration in a three-dimensional tumor with the hope of gaining insight into the mechanisms of cancer metastasis. Sarah attributes her success as a doctoral student to Dr. Yusheng Feng. According to Sarah, “He has been my research mentor since I was an undergraduate in 2008. His constant support, guidance, and encouragement has helped me become a successful Doctoral Candidate.” After she graduates she hopes to begin a career in industry where she would like to develop life-saving medical devices. Sarah feels that her experience at UTSA has helped her grow into a capable and knowledgeable member of the scientific and engineering research society.
ROBERT BUCKLEY, Ph.D. Candidate, Physics

Robert Buckley is a recipient of the Fall 2013 Presidential Dissertation Fellowship Award. He has focused his research, investigating a class of models one level more general, without any symmetries, to see if they may be more successful. Robert goes on to explain further about his findings. “My findings so far include that these models may be able to explain certain large-angle anomalies in the cosmic microwave background, and that, unlike the spherically symmetric models, they do not require the observer to be at the center of the universe, which is appealing at a philosophical level.” He attributes his success to his advisor, Dr. Eric Schlegel. “He uses a mostly hands-off approach, letting me work on my own and report to him periodically. When I hit roadblocks, he offers suggestions to guide my efforts while allowing me to figure things out for myself. As he is fond of saying, it is often the job of the graduate student to teach the professor instead of the other way around, and with this approach I am pushed to develop a deep understanding of my work so that I may explain it clearly.”

Post-graduation, Robert plans to enter post-doctoral study and continue his research, ultimately finding a permanent research position. “I wish to make meaningful contributions to the advancement of our knowledge of the universe, particularly in the field of cosmology.”

ANNA COHENMILLER, Ph.D. Candidate, Interdisciplinary Learning and Teaching

Anna CohenMiller is a recipient of the Fall 2013 Presidential Dissertation Fellowship Award. Anna received her Master’s from UTSA in Bicultural-Bilingual Studies and was drawn back to UTSA for her doctoral program due to the program’s “…unique coursework and focus on integrating knowledge from multiple perspectives to provide support for the varied educational interests of their students.” Her research focus is on collaborative inquiry that integrates qualitative methodology with an interdisciplinary study of gender and learning in society. “Currently, I am researching gender in academia, with a particular focus on motherhood/mothering. My research examines new avenues to understand the topic through utilizing interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks and varying qualitative research methodologies.” Funding from the fellowship will assist Anna to continue her research. “Specifically, with this Fellowship, my dissertation research that examines doctoral student motherhood/mothering in academia, will be enhanced by allowing me to disseminate findings at an international conference and receive mentorship from a top scholar in the field.” Being a mentee of Dr. Elizabeth Pate has provided her with confidence and success as a doctoral student. “She [Dr. Pate] has never wavered in her belief in me, trusting that I will succeed. From Dr. Pate’s conviction and guidance, I have been able to embody the positions of successful doctoral candidate and emerging scholar.” For her future academic and career goals, Anna looks forward to continuing learning and bringing attention to gender in academia.
MICHAEL LEE GARDIN, Ph.D. Candidate, English

Michael Lee Gardin is a recipient of the Fall 2013 Presidential Dissertation Fellowship Award. Her dissertation research focus concentrates on Queer Studies. She explains that with one of her guiding research questions, “I seek to address how Queer Studies can function as activism and help eradicate the inequalities and violences faced by queer people in the US.” The funds from this award will assist her research in ways that were previously impossible. “Being one of very few instructors and researchers specialized in Queer Studies at UTSA leaves resources and possibilities for networking scarce. The funding from the Presidential Dissertation Fellowship will provide me with opportunities to develop and fine-tune my research through travel. Now I will be able to travel to national cutting-edge conferences and workshops and contact leading teacher-scholars in the field for interviews and course observations.” Michael Lee is inspired by Dr. Sonia Saldivar-Hull, Professor in the Department of English and Director of the Women’s Studies Institute. “Dr. Saldivar-Hull has played a key role in my success. “Not only has she paved the way for the research and advocacy of women, people of color, and queer people with the Women’s Studies Institute, but her teaching and mentorship have been invaluable. It is because of the time and energy she has dedicated to me and other graduate students that I have come to know rigorous, creative, and ethical scholarship and pedagogy.” After graduation, Michael Lee hopes to secure a tenure-track position teaching and researching in the fields of Queer Studies and Women’s Studies.

CHENGWEI LEI, Ph.D. Candidate, Computer Science

Chengwei Lei is a recipient of the Fall 2013 Presidential Dissertation Fellowship 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.”
MILENA MELO, Ph.D. Candidate, Anthropology

Milena Melo is a recipient of the spring 2014 Graduate Student Research Award. She is committed to conducting research that reduces barriers facing poor, marginalized Mexican immigrants (documented and undocumented) when trying to access healthcare on the U.S. side of the border. Her dissertation research will critically examine the moral, political, and wellbeing dimensions of existing health care services that can maintain life but do not improve wellbeing for advanced stage diabetic, undocumented patients needing dialysis. According to Milena, she chose UTSA to conduct her research because, “UTSA's anthropology doctoral program offers a unique four-field approach that I felt would better prepare me to be a more competitive and competent candidate when I applied for academic jobs in the future. UTSA also is a wonderful minority-serving institution with a lot of research potential and connections”. Milena attributes her success in the program to Dr. Jill Fleuriet. “She [Dr. Fleuriet] has been the most amazing and supportive advisor and professor, guiding me through the various deadlines, requirements, research opportunities, grant writing, and all the other stresses and unknowns that come with grad school. Dr. Fleuriet inspires students with a passion for research and teaching and is the ideal role model for women in academia.” Post-graduation, Milena plans to secure a faculty position in medical anthropology and to continue her research on access to specialty healthcare for undocumented immigrants in the U.S.-Mexico borderlands.

ANDREI RETERIA, Master’s Candidate, Fine Arts

Andrei Reteria is a recipient of the spring 2014 Graduate Student Research Award. His work reflects his longstanding interest in socio-political issues along the U.S./Mexico border. “I've begun to investigate how painting might address and embody broader political issues (including torture and violence) beyond international borders. I’ve realized that there are parallels between divisions created by borders and that of discrimination, persecution, unlawful imprisonment and human rights abuses that continue unabated. As we face the challenge today of worldwide recognition of human rights and freedom, my experimental approach to material helps me in developing my own aesthetic ideology.” Andrei chose the Master of Fine Arts program at UTSA because of its multidisciplinary approach to learning and attributes his success in the program to Professors Connie Lowe, Teresa Eckmann, Judith Sobre, Scott Sherer, Ron Binks, and Libby Rowe. “All of them have also helped me place my work in relationship to art history and theory, the art world and the times.” Andrei's goal is to become a practicing public artist who not only engages in, but also contributes to the world by teaching, working with, and learning from diverse cultures within each community.
LAURA SHIPLEY, Master’s Candidate, Architecture

Laura Shipley is a recipient of the spring 2014 Graduate Student Research Award. Her research focuses on the challenge that every country has in preserving their historic cultures and structures. “Because my research presents a foreign country’s solution to a universal problem, it enriches the global understanding of historic preservation. It is my great interest to see preservation become a more relevant topic, as it is currently associated with tired battles over arguably significant properties.” Laura owes a debt of gratitude to Dr. Rick Lewis. “Professor Lewis first agreed to supervise my independent study in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He connected me with local experts in the city. He sacrificed his time and energy to review my progress throughout the summer. I would never have received this award without his incredible support and meticulous supervision.” Laura’s goal is to become a licensed architect. She wants to create new and innovative preservation methods and also hopes to foster her preservation-focused research interest in a doctoral program sometime in the future. The receipt of this award means that Laura will be able to fund archival research for her Master’s project in Washington D.C. at the Library of Congress.

CHRISSEY LEOPOOLD WAGER, Ph.D. Candidate, Cell and Molecular Biology

Chrissy Leopold Wager is a recipient of the spring 2014 Graduate Student Research Award. Her research focus is on the protective immune response to the fungal pathogen, Cryptococcus neoformans. “Specifically, I study the response of macrophages, immune cells that are capable of capturing the fungal cells, killing them, and promoting a protective immune response. We hope to use this data for development of novel immune therapies.” Chrissy was pleased to accept admission to UTSA for her doctoral work because it meant being a part of a smaller program that gives its students more one on one attention and provides an atmosphere of collaboration while teaching students to be independent thinkers. She attributes her success in the program to her mentor, Dr. Floyd Wormley. “He [Dr. Wormley] guides my research, challenges me to think critically and develop new ideas. He inspires me to work hard to make advances in our field by exploring areas that have not previously been studied in fungal research.” Post-graduation Chrissy hopes to begin a post-doctoral fellowship with a government agency. “Ultimately, my goal is to lead a laboratory for a federal agency such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention or the National Institutes of Health.”
QINGJI ZHENG, Doctoral Candidate, Computer Science

Qingji Zheng is a recipient of the spring 2014 Graduate Student Research Award. His research focuses on Secure Cloud Computing via designing provably-secure cryptographic protocols, which aim to hold the cloud accountable and preserve data confidentiality of outsourced data while allowing meaningful operations at the cloud end. Qingji chose UTSA’s Computer Science program to conduct his research because, “Cyber Security is one of the important issues in the literature, and UTSA computer science department has many renowned professors performing cutting edge research, especially in the Institute of Cyber Security.” Qingji would like to express his gratitude to his doctoral supervisor, Dr. Shouhuai Xu. “Dr. Xu is solely responsible for guiding me into and through this fantastic field of Cyber Security.” Post-graduation Qingji hopes to find a research position in industry.

Graduate Student Teaching Award Recipients

ROBERT BONNER, Ph.D. Candidate, Organization and Management Studies

Robert Bonner is a recipient of the spring 2014 Graduate Student Teaching Award. The funds received through this award will help Robert alleviate stress involved with management of finances. “This award will help me complete my degree by allowing me to focus on academic success rather than financial burdens. The resulting peace of mind goes a long way in maintaining a cognitive load that mitigates the potential of burnout due to non-school related tasks and worries.” According to Robert, his academic success can be credited to many people at UTSA including Dr. Cynthia Lengnick-Hall. “Before I applied to UTSA, I made an impromptu visit to UTSA from Lubbock to get information about the program. Dr. Lengnick-Hall talked to me about the program, the expectations, and the application process. Several years later, Dr. Lengnick-Hall continues to give me guidance. She also inspires me to become a great researcher and faculty member. In addition to the graciousness of the College of Business staff and faculty, Robert also was influenced to attend UTSA for an altogether different reason. “UTSA was very appealing because of its diverse student population. I believed that the way for me to succeed as a first-time instructor was to teach students that I felt comfortable interacting with and was intrinsically motivated to see succeed. I identify with many aspects of what I feel to be an under-served population and UTSA offered me the opportunity to serve that population.” Post-graduation, Robert’s goal is to become a faculty member at a research university that embraces quality teaching as a valuable capability rather than an indication of a lack of focus on research. According to Robert, “UTSA does a great job of rewarding faculty members for excelling at both teaching and research. Success in this program will help put me in position to be able to choose to work in a great university like UTSA.”
LU LIU, Ph.D. Candidate, Computer Science

Lu Liu is a recipient of the spring 2014 Graduate Student Teaching Award. He is honored and grateful to receive this award. The funding from the Teaching Award will allow Lu to purchase more advanced technology so that he can increase productivity especially when using software such as Cytoscape to analyze his data. Lu chose to attend UTSA due to a recommendation from an alumnus. “UTSA is a fast expanding university providing abundant resources, facilities and funding for me to thrive. The people here are so kind and friendly.” Lu attributes most of his achievements and successes to Dr. Jianhua Ruan. “He[ Dr. Ruan] is a good advisor who always encourages me and guides me to do better research. His mentoring is effective with patience, which makes me learn and feel comfortable at the same time. I also owe a lot to Dr. Steven Robbins. I am blessed to be his TA.” After he graduates Lu plans to find employment as a university faculty doing bioinformatics research and would like to teach at the same time.

ANDREA NEELY, Ph.D. Candidate, Organization and Management Studies

Andrea Neely is a recipient of the spring 2014 Graduate Student Teaching Award. Andrea expressed great excitement on notice of receipt of her award. She plans to use the funding on an experiment to test her dissertation research hypothesis. In addition, the funding can help her attend conferences related to her research field. After Andrea graduates, she wants to pursue a career in higher education in order to have an impact on organizational behavior through both research and teaching young business leaders. When asked who she would thank for her successes in her program, Andrea stated, “There is no one person I can thank for my success in academics. Countless individuals have had a profound impact on my success as a doctoral student. However, I would like to thank Dr. Mark Lengnick-Hall and Dr. Cyndy Lengnick-Hall for their continued support, encouragement, and ability to challenge me. I would like to thank Dr. Rick Utecht for instilling within me a passion for teaching students.” Andrea had many reasons for choosing UTSA to study organization and management. “As a university approaching R1 status, UTSA provides both research opportunities to publish with well-known faculty members and more opportunities to teach than other programs. As a new professor, I will be more accustomed to managing the dual role as a researcher and instructor.”
SARAH ROCHE, Ph.D. Candidate, Marketing

Sarah Roche is a recipient of the spring 2014 Graduate Student Teaching Award. She feels very blessed to be recognized for her teaching efforts and plans to use the funds to aid with her dissertation research. “The funds will allow me to pay for subjects and study supplies as well as software for data analysis.” Sarah chose UTSA’s Marketing doctoral program because there is a strong research focus on consumer behavior and she also appreciates the “family” atmosphere in the department among faculty, staff and students. Sarah attributes her success in the classroom to her teaching mentor, Dr. Richard Utecht. Dr. Utecht praises Sarah in his award recommendation letter. “Sarah is a compassionate teacher and is concerned with student learning. She learns the names of her students on the first day to connect with and motivate them. She changes her delivery in class to accommodate different student learning styles.” Sarah points out that success in the program also depends on her research. So, she would also like to thank her faculty advisors, David Silvera, Jill Sundie, Tina Lowrey, Li Shrum, and Matthew Joseph. After Sarah graduates her goals include making her academic life her professional life. “I hope to have a successful career as a university or college professor and research in consumer behavior.”

YILIN ZHANG, Ph.D. Candidate, Electrical Engineering

Yilin Zhang is a recipient of the spring 2014 Graduate Student Teaching Award. Yilin is honored to be selected to receive this award. In addition she explains, “It will remove financial barriers and make me able to focus on my research and course work. It takes me one step closer to finishing my education and to move forward with my career goals.” After graduating, Yilin plans to apply a faculty position in a college. She would like to give back by becoming an instructor and teach other students similar to how she has been taught by amazing faculty in her program. She also hopes to make a difference by contributing further to her research. Yilin was pleased to start her doctoral program at UTSA. “UTSA is a fast-growing university with lots of excellent professors and scholars. Especially in my area -- Electrical Engineering -- we not only have top professors and researchers who are exploring the frontier of the technology, but also have close collaboration with industry.” Ultimately, Yilin attributes her achievements in the Electrical Engineering program to her adviser, Dr. Wei-Ming Lin. “I've always been impressed by his [Dr. Lin] patience, caring, and consideration towards students, as well as his motivation, enthusiasm and immense knowledge on the research. He is an open person to any ideas, and he is always encouraging and helping me to shape my interests and ideas. I would not be who I am without his help and support, and I could not have imaged having a better adviser for my doctoral study.”
Diversity Recruitment Fellowship Recipients

MARLEY CABALLERO, Ph.D. Candidate, Cellular and Molecular Biology

Marley Caballero is a recipient of the 2013-2014 Diversity Recruitment Fellowship award and will start her doctoral program in Cellular and Molecular Biology in fall 2013. Marley is interested in host pathogenesis and biodefense research along with the development of antivirals and vaccines. Post obtaining her doctoral degree, Marley’s goals include becoming an Independent Investigator in academia and mentoring the next generation of scientists. Receiving this award means that Marley will be able to purchase a new laptop along with data analysis and reference manager software to use for future research projects. Marley has high expectations for an institution that will host her for this terminal degree. Ultimately, she chose UTSA. “After talking with faculty and taking a tour of the campus during my interview, I immediately felt the encouraging atmosphere. Faculty members emphasized students input in continually improving the program and ensuring maximum training and education to successfully complete our program.”

GREGORIO ORTIZ, Ph.D. Candidate, Anthropology

Gregorio Ortiz is a recipient of the 2013-2014 Diversity Recruitment Fellowship award. He is thankful for receiving this award, stating, “The Diversity Recruitment Fellowship has helped with deferring most of my tuition and fees, allowing my additional funding to go towards my research—the social and environmental impacts of fracking on the Eagle Ford Shale.” Gregorio graduated with his Master’s in Anthropology from UTSA in Spring 2013 and chose to continue with his doctoral studies at the University because he is confident that the Department’s expertise in resource management, conservation, and development of resource frontiers will guide his research to productive and influential means. In addition, his advisor, Dr. Jerry Jacka, will contribute to his ultimate success in his program. “Dr Jacka has assisted in bringing my research interests to fruition and continues to guide my research with his vast knowledge and experience in ecological anthropology.” Once he graduates, Gregorio plans to continue with his research interests in the private sector or in academia.
KAELA PUENTE, Master’s Candidate, Fine Arts

Kaela Puente is a recipient of the 2013-2014 Diversity Recruitment Fellowship award. She has been accepted to the Master of Fine Arts program and will focus on ceramics. "My interest is becoming a self-supporting ceramic artist and producing a larger amount of work. My professional goals are to make a name in the art world and become an emerging artist at NCECA (National Council on Education for the Ceramic Arts)." As a recipient of this award, the funds will assist Kaela to not have to worry about funding for school and instead focus solely on her work. "I will be able to spend more time in the studio producing artwork and less time trying to come up with money to pay for school." Kaela is excited to attend UTSA after exploring the facilities that UTSA offers ceramic students. In addition, she is looking forward to working with Dr. Ovidio Giberga who she feels will be a huge influence on the growth of her work. "He [Dr. Giberga] is a big name in ceramics and I look forward to learning from him."