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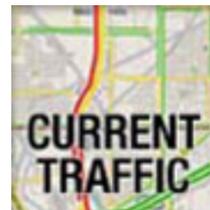
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## Student projects receive grants to complete research

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Posted: Wednesday, April 8, 2015 12:00 am

By Jasmine Faronbi, The Shorthorn senior staff | 0 comments

Posted on Apr 8, 2015 by Jasmine Faronbi

Three doctoral students' projects were chosen from a competitive pool of more than 100 to receive the National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Improvement grant.

Daren Card and Drew Schield were awarded \$19,695 each, and Alex Hall was granted \$16,993 to help the students complete their dissertation and provide support, Hall said.

The students had to be studying environmental or behavioral systems in biology, and improving existing research, according to the grant synopsis.

Hall studies an evolutionary lineage of parthenogenetic lizards, which have lineages or periods of life history where there are no males in the population, Hall said. Parthenogenesis is a type of asexual reproduction where the offspring are developed from unfertilized eggs.

"It's an indirect way of asking why animals have sex in general," Hall said. "When you have female parents producing female offspring without any males in the species at all, and there are no males from other species being sort of coaxed into mating behaviors, that's really, really interesting."

Hall said among the vertebrate species-animals with backbones, mostly lizards and a couple of species of snakes, are distinct in this way.



With his grant, two collaborators from Mexico will provide biological samples only found in Mexico to the lab, Hall said.

Schild focuses on a different type of vertebrate species, the North American rattlesnake, an evolutionary group that is highly diverse. Understanding the rattlesnake's diversity could impact venom evolution, Schild said.

Schild said he would like to answer what makes their phenotypes, outward appearances, different from each other.

Because rattlesnakes are highly venomous, knowing their evolution could impact how venom treatments come about, Schild said.

"It's always good to have a better understanding, a more complete understanding of the diversity of the system," Schild said. "Because if that's the case, that could have some pretty cool and interesting implications for the evolution of adaptation in groups like this."

Card will look at boa constrictor's genes, which have had their own unique example of evolution over time.

The changing sea level in islands around Mexico have caused boas' body lengths to shrink from around 9 feet to now nearly 4 feet, Card said.

Card said unlike humans, where 50 genes affect size, boa constrictors only have about 10 genes that affect size.

Card said this will uncover the locus, the specific location of a gene or DNA sequence on a chromosome, involved in the boa's dwarfism.

Schild said grants will support research to help students complete their dissertation.

He said he has always had an interest in the organism he studies and enjoys the happy medium between his own personal interest and answering impactful evolutionary questions.

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