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New McKearn Fellows

EMMA BELL
Emma Bell is an anthropology major with a focus in archaeology. She wanted to become a McKearn Fellow because doing research is something engaging that brings her a lot of joy. In Emma’s senior year of high school, she presented research with her school’s science club, and in college she has been a Research Rookie and part of the Office of Student Engagement and Experiential Learning’s Undergraduate Research Funding. Research is fulfilling to her because she knows she is contributing to something larger that can lead to good for society. Emma hopes through being a McKearn Fellow she will be able to continue growing as a researcher and will be able to connect with other students that have the same passion as her!

MEGAN GRAY
Megan Gray is a biological sciences major and a chemistry and psychology minor. She wanted to be a McKearn Fellow to have the opportunity to contribute to professional research and build her professional network. Megan has always loved the science field along with research, and she plans on attending medical school after graduation, which will require a lot of research experience. She wants to expand her education during her undergraduate years through research to be able to gain the experiences necessary for medical school. This Fellowship will help Megan create a plan for her career goals and meet people in her professional field of study. Megan’s previous research experiences are in her chemistry and biology classes. These experiences benefited her college career by expanding her education through research and hands-on investigations, while enabling her to make connections with professors in the field. Megan hopes to make connections with professionals in the field and further her research experiences and knowledge.

AVA KRALL
Ava Krall is a biological sciences major. She wanted to become a McKearn Fellow to challenge herself in new ways while also doing something she is passionate about. Ava doesn’t have significant research experience. She hopes to grow through this experience and learn more about research. What research project experience Ava does have, provided her with an understanding of how beneficial and important research is in the academic world. Ava has also gained friendships and connections with professors and other people passionate about research. She requires research hours to help her get into her future profession as a doctor. As a McKearn Fellow she hopes to become more familiar with research, to make connections with fellow researchers, and to give back to her community.
New McKearn Fellows

ELIZABETH NOWAK
Elizabeth Nowak is an anthropology and theatre studies double major. They want to be a McKearn Fellow because they want to learn how to be a better researcher and expand upon the research they have conducted. Elizabeth has conducted an interdisciplinary research project through Research Rookies. The project looked at the impact exhibits have on the audience of a theatrical production. They loved combining museums and theatre and they are planning on conducting similar research projects soon. Elizabeth has conducted historical research as the dramaturg of NIU School of Theatre and Dance’s production of Witch by Jen Silverman. They researched gender roles, class, and witchcraft accusations of early modern England. Their research benefited the production, their Research Rookies project, as well as their understanding and perception of gender roles. Elizabeth decided to start researching their freshman year because they love research, and it will be a big part of their post-college career in museum curation. They hope to gain confidence in their research skills, get support for their research, and further their research project.

ZOEY PROPER
Zoey Proper is a health science - pre-physical therapy major. She wanted to become a McKearn Fellow to continue her research journey while improving her professional skills and participating in new experiences. She participated in the Research Rookies program and explored speech and bimanual coordination in autistic and non-autistic children using the video analysis software, DeepLabCut. This experience allowed Zoey to work on an interdisciplinary team, learn new skills, and step outside of her comfort zone. Starting early to gain professional and research skills, Zoey was also able to make meaningful connections with professors and other student researchers. She is excited to continue working on this project. She hopes to continue to improve her critical thinking, communication, and research writing skills for her future career. Zoey also looks forward to learning new information and making a positive impact on the community.

New McKearn Fellows:
Elizabeth Nowak, Emma Bell, Megan Gray and Zoey Proper (not pictured, Ava Krall).
Farewell
McKearn Graduates
YOUSUF KHAN FALL 23
This semester Yousef was fortunate to explore his passions in both biological sciences and business. It presented him with the opportunity to engage with the Professional Sales Program where he learned to apply real world business skills. In Yousef’s fourth semester in the Singh Microbiome Lab, he continued to research the pathogenic bacteria Clostridium perfringens, the cause of nearly 1 million foodborne illnesses in the United States annually. The research focuses on the zoonotic spread of Clostridium perfringens from bison to humans.

As a student in the Professional Sales Program, Yousef was selected to participate in the National Team Selling Competition hosted at Indiana University. He is extremely grateful for the coaching, mentorship, and investment of those involved with the sales program including Professor Jenny Redisi and Ryan Schaap. In his extracurriculars this semester he continued to be involved with interfaith and intercultural dialogue via his involvement with the Asian American Resource Center and as President of the Muslim Student Association.

AIDAN BENGFORD SPRING 24
Aidan will be graduating with full university honors. As a part of earning that designation, he took an independent study for his capstone where he wrote an essay about his time in the Boy Scouts of America and contrasted it with the negative experiences people across the country have had in the program. Aidan asked what scouting’s place is in an evolving American landscape and whether it can achieve its goals to the best of its ability without compromising safety. One of the biggest appeals for a kid is going on an adventure in the wilderness with little adult supervision, learning how to do things for yourself, which may be incompatible with ensuring the safety of these kids. That and other difficulties are addressed, but not always solved, in the reflective essay. Aidan has also started studying for the LSAT to get a score that can get him into the best schools in the country. After he graduates, he plans to continue his studies to prepare for the June, and possibly September, LSATs so he can apply for the 2025-2026 school year. In the meantime, Aidan wants to work as a paralegal or at the local courthouse in DeKalb County to maintain his work ethic and keep his mind sharp for when he begins law school.
Graduating McKearn Fellows

CAITLIN HENSLEY SPRING 24
Caitlin has spent her senior year working on her capstone project “Exploring Geographical Risk in Financial Markets.” Caitlin is graduating with a Bachelor of Science in statistics with minors in business administration, business analytics, and sport analytics. She will also receive a SAS joint certificate in business analytics. After graduation, Caitlin plans to attend graduate school and work as a data analyst. She aspires to one day become a sports data analyst for the National Football League.

EMILY HERBERT SPRING 24
After graduating from Northern Illinois University with her bachelor’s degree in biomedical engineering, Emily plans on pursuing her Ph.D. at the University of Southern California (USC). She has committed to working as a research assistant in the lab of Dr. Maral Mousavi, who aims to fabricate point-of-care diagnostics in the area of women’s health. Emily is so grateful for the opportunities she received from NIU that allowed her to secure this position.

MERVEILLE “YVETTE” MUYIZERE SPRING 24
Yvette has written her dissertation paper about her research on house flies and will soon publish a paper on the experiments she has done on them in the past. Yvette has also organized and helped her STEM sorority grow in numbers, solidarity, and professionalism as the sorority president. In the meantime, she has been working towards her post-graduation plans by studying for the MCAT and her application towards medical school. Yvette has also applied to several M.D./Ph.D. training programs which she plans to do during the gap year. She is grateful to the McKearn program which has made her the student she is today. Because of this program, the dream Yvette always thought was unreachable has now become a possibility.
DIANA ALVAREZ
Diana was able to attend the January in London program. Studying in London offered Diana a unique opportunity to integrate her nursing background with her passion for computer science.

Diana said, “A key highlight of this experience was the opportunity to meet with Ernesto Ocampo, a senior software engineer at Google, whom I met at the National Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers convention, who invited me to privately tour the London Google Headquarters. Visiting the Google office in London and interacting with the team there aligns perfectly with my career aspirations. This experience is not just about academic learning; it’s about building a network and setting a foundation for my future in the tech industry, particularly at a dream company like Google, where my passion for technology and programming can be fully realized. This study abroad program, therefore, is not only academically enriching but also a crucial step towards achieving my long-term career goals in technology and understanding healthcare systems.”

AMIT CHAUDHARY
Amit is conducting in-depth research on autonomous cars using a robot operating system and a scaled chassis. The primary objective of the research is to build an advanced autonomous car that can sense the surroundings and navigate precisely.

Amit said, “As a student in the field of mechanical engineering with a concentration on robotics, this experience represents a pivotal steppingstone in my education. It will allow me to bridge the theoretical knowledge I have acquired in my coursework with practical, real-world applications, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of self-driving car algorithms and their implementation. This experience aligns perfectly with my aspirations to contribute to the development and optimization of autonomous vehicles, making transportation safer and more efficient. Furthermore, it provides a unique opportunity to apply my academic knowledge in a practical context, thereby fostering my growth as a future technology professional. The simulation model is an ideal environment without any inaccuracies. However, the real environment is not ideal and will have a ton of issues.” Amit wants the wisdom to be able to code and manipulate the sensors that are attached in the car and be able to navigate autonomously.
Sophomore McKearn Updates

VANA DAKARIAN
This past year, Vana continued her work with fruit flies in Dr. Olivier Devergne’s lab in the Department of Biological Sciences. Her research project is focused on characterizing genes associated with epithelial tissue formation. Epithelial cells are the most abundant cell type in the human body, so it is incredibly useful to improve understanding of the mechanisms responsible for healthy and functional tissue formation. Though fruit flies seem quite distant from humans, we share over 75% of our genetic material with them! The physiology of these tiny insects can teach us a lot about ourselves.

Outside of research, Vana is a Huskie Food Pantry student leader. Working alongside other volunteers, she assists in facilitating a collaborative and positive atmosphere. Vana has a sincere passion for serving fellow students by contributing to the food pantry’s mission of providing sustainable and nutritious food to all NIU students. She is constantly working on projects with Huskie Food Pantry staff and student leaders to increase student involvement and awareness.

HANNAH HAVEL
As a sophomore pursuing a B.S. in Computational Software with a minor in mathematical sciences, Hannah has had the opportunity to work on a team with talented faculty from both the Mathematical Sciences department and Computer Science department. This year, Hannah is working on a team with Dr. McCord, Dr. Karonis, Dr. Duffin, as an extension of her independent research last year regarding the Newtonian N-body problem.

Hannah said, “I believe that the support I have received and the experiences I have had as a McKearn Research Fellow helped me secure an undergraduate research internship at Argonne National Laboratory this summer. There, I will engage in quantum computing research with applications in nuclear engineering, specifically in simulating fluid dynamics. Overall, in pursuing research for another academic year, I have strengthened my passion for computer science and mathematics and solidified my intentions to pursue a graduate education in computational mathematics and eventually a research career.”
ALIA MORAN

Alia Moran is an anthropology and art history major, with history and French minors, currently conducting research with Dr. Kanjana Thepboriruk. Alia is joining this five-year project to explore material culture, local newsletters, school clothes, etc., as it relates to the Thai diaspora in the Chicagoland area. Her role was to explore the connection between history, archaeology, and ethnoarchaeology and how it relates to this project. She was tasked with going through the material culture physically to digitize, catalog, and understand it. A valuable aspect of her work was to explore the ethics and best practices within this research study based on the standards within the discipline used to frame the project.

Outside of her project, she is participating in the History Club and Anthropology Club, a founding member of the Historia Arte Club, a member of Tri Sigma holding the position of co-manager of Philanthropic Initiatives for the spring, and works two jobs on campus as a writing consultant and a tutor for numerous subjects. In the spring semester, she participated in the SAA Ethics Bowl in New Orleans, Louisiana on a team of seven with Dr. Dana Bardolph coaching.

EMANUEL NAUMANN

Emanuel is continuing his research with Dr. Tao Li’s research group. By joining Dr. Li’s group, he has been able to use his prior computational experience from Dr. Wheeler’s group to further his understanding of the same overall lithium-ion battery project from a hands-on laboratory perspective. In Dr. Li’s group, he is now working directly with electrolyte solutions and preparing samples of the solute compound denoted “LiTFSI” in water, methanol, and a mixture of water and methanol.

Being an aspiring research chemist has further ignited his passion through his undergraduate research experiences and looks forward to working in Dr. Li’s lab this summer, where he will continue to gain valuable career experience.
Award Winners

Merveille Muyizere is Northern Illinois University’s 2023 Lincoln Laureate.

Emma Whitlock named NIU’s 2024 Lincoln Laureate.

CURE 2024 Award Winner:
Interdisciplinary Studies—Elizabeth Nowak

Stronger storytelling with museums and theatre

Mentor: Jessica Cima