

UNH Alumna, Undergraduate Receive Fulbright Grants

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UNH SENIOR SPANISH MAJOR KELLY TAVERAS '14 OF MANCHESTER AND GRADUATE SOPHIA BURKE '13, ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE MAJOR OF BELMONT, MASS. HAVE RECEIVED FULBRIGHT GRANTS FOR THE 2014-2015 ACADEMIC YEAR.

UNH graduate Sophia Burke '13 of Belmont, Mass., and senior Spanish major Kelly Taveras '14 of Manchester have received Fulbright grants for the 2014-2015 academic year.

Burke, an environmental science major, will travel to New Zealand to conduct independent research on carbon dioxide and methane emissions in peatlands while Taveras will teach English at the Universidad del Atlántico in Barranquilla, Colombia.

The Fulbright U.S. Student Program is the largest U.S. educational and cultural exchange program offering opportunities for students to engage in international graduate study, advanced research in foreign countries, and English language teaching worldwide. Ten UNH applicants competed in the 2014-2015 Fulbright competition, with three advancing as finalists; Sonia Scherr ('13, MFA, creative writing) is an alternate for a research grant to Morocco.

Burke, who begins her Ph.D. at UNH in the Natural Resources and Earth System Science program this coming fall semester, will continue research she has conducted since her junior year at UNH with associate professor Ruth Varner of the Institute for the Study of Earth, Oceans, and Space and the department of Earth sciences.

"I have wanted to return to New Zealand ever since I spent the spring of my junior year there with the EcoQuest program," said Burke. "That I now get to go back and conduct research that really interests me and relates to my Ph.D. research is truly amazing."

Participating in the Northern Ecosystems Research for Undergraduates program directed by Varner, Burke has measured emissions of the greenhouse gas methane in subarctic peatlands of the Stordalen Mire in Abisko, Sweden, as part of a climate change study. In New Zealand, she will make comparative measurements of methane emissions from pristine and disturbed peatlands in a subtropical environment.

"I have enjoyed mentoring Sophie through her undergraduate research experience and senior thesis, and I look forward to being her Ph.D. advisor," Varner said. "Sophie's success in the Fulbright competition, as well as other funding areas, demonstrates a commitment to her career in science and her ability to accurately communicate her research."

Taveras has been a volunteer English teacher in Latin America previously but is looking forward to a longer immersion experience. "I've wanted to participate in a year-long teaching abroad program in a Spanish-speaking country since starting at UNH," she said, "so being accepted to do the Fulbright in Colombia means so much to me."

Taveras is fluent in Spanish, minors in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages and linguistics, and has volunteer-taught in the Dominican Republic and Mexico. But it was her interest in the people of Colombia, which began when her family hosted a Colombian exchange student when she was in high school that made her especially competitive for the Fulbright program.

“Kelly is intelligent, dedicated, and extremely warm and engaging,” said Lori Hopkins, associate professor of Spanish. “She will be a wonderful ‘ambassador’ of the U.S. in Colombia.”

Both Burke and Taveras applied through the UNH Office of National Fellowships, which coordinates the process for undergraduates, graduate students, and alumni.

Established in 2005, the UNH Office of National Fellowships provides information, counsel, and editorial support to high achieving students applying for national and international fellowships and scholarships like Fulbright. Interested students are encouraged to contact the director, Jeanne Sokolowski, at Jeanne.sokolowski@unh.edu or 603-862-0733.

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