

Seeding the Future

“Time is money,” goes the saying. Yet time and money are often the enemies of the graduate student, because there is not enough of either.

During the summer, for instance, many graduate students find themselves in something of an economic purgatory. Their research and scholarship can’t slow down, and yet the economic reality is that many must spend those months taking whatever work they can to make ends meet. Time and energy for research melt away just when doctoral candidates need to be ramping up their research and preparing for what awaits them after they’ve completed their studies.

Over the past two summers, Vanderbilt’s College of Arts & Science has helped to break that cycle by offering summer grants for mid-career graduate students. The highly sought grants carry a stipend of \$4,000 each for 25 graduate students.

“A university needs to recruit the best graduate students, educate them well and place them well,” says Constantine Tsinakis, professor of mathematics and former executive dean of the College of Arts and Science. “The university’s visibility is highly dependent upon whether you place students well, whether it is in academia or industry. To be visible as a graduate student, it requires that they use their summers towards the goals of research and getting published.”

Kun Yang, Ph.D. candidate in economics, especially appreciated the time afforded by his summer grant. “Economics is very time-sensitive,” says Yang, whose research dealt with the “forward premium puzzle” (a theory based on future foreign currency exchanges). “The topic one is working on may also be studied by many other scholars. Having a whole summer to concentrate on research definitely gives us a comparative advantage.”

While Yang was able to do all of his research on the Internet, Molly Morgan

needed to travel to the source for her study of Mesoamerican archaeology. Since Morgan’s work on the Pacific coast of Guatemala was not part of a larger archaeological project, she turned to the University for support. The summer grant gave Morgan her first opportunity to perform hands-on fieldwork at a site where the layers of soil form a complex stratigraphic sequence that is much more dif-

ficult to interpret than the stone construction of the Classic Maya region. She traveled to Mexico to study at the World Archaeological Foundation Laboratory. She also worked with members of Guatemala’s Ministry of Culture who have expressed interest in Morgan’s ongoing research.

Carola Daffner is writing her dissertation on the German-Jewish poet Gertrud Kolmar. The grant gave her the opportunity to travel to Germany to review original manuscripts and a number of unpublished letters and diaries. While in Marbach, where the Kolmar archival work is located, Daffner was able to work closely with the poet’s family and contemporaries, many of whom helped to preserve Kolmar’s work after she perished at Auschwitz. To Daffner’s surprise, she was able to see a photocopied version of Kolmar’s book *Die Frau und die Tiere (The Woman and the Animals)*, which had been published in 1937 but was destroyed by the Nazis.

“It was very important for me to get to read her sister’s accounts of what they went through under the persecution of the Nazi regime,” Daffner says via email from Berlin, where she is continuing her work. “I needed to understand Kolmar’s Jewish background and why she decided to stay in Nazi Germany, before trying to understand her work.”

Time Management

When he started his summer research, David Richter had a broad, expansive idea of his thesis. What he ended up with was a more refined, focused project, which concentrated on surrealism in the work of Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca. Tangible proof of Richter’s summer exists in the 28-page article he wrote, which he plans to submit to an academic journal that deals with theory, art and philosophy.

“Having the grant really helped me, because I felt a responsibility to work really hard on the project and make the most of my summer by researching and writing in a very concentrated manner,” Richter says.

“I learned an immense amount about time management, research and writing techniques, and what it takes to ‘cover all my bases’ in a research project,” he continues. “This, of course, will be invaluable experience when, as a professor, I seek to meet professional publication expectations.”

“This is a great program,” says current A&S Associate Dean Carolyn Dever, who took over as chair of the summer grants committee this year. “The experience of reading the research that these students are engaging in is tremendous. The summer grant program is a huge investment on the part of the College of Arts and Science, and it has already made returns. We’re seeding the future.”

— Shelton Clark



Morgan



COURTESY OF FRANCISCO ESTRADA BELLI

Graduate students Molly Morgan, left, and Jeremy Bauer work on a jade cache in Guatemala.