

Profiles

HOW I SPENT MY SUMMER VACATION:

Department of English Undergraduates Engage in PURE Research



**Owen
Thelwall**

It's the first of May, and you are a University of Calgary Undergraduate student. The stress and strain of final exams are beginning to fade into memory and the busy fall semester is a mere speck on the horizon. Once again, you must meet the challenge of finding summer employment. Will you wait tables this year, or paint houses? This is necessary and potentially lucrative short-term work, but will it really add anything to your CV after graduation?

If you count yourself among the growing number of undergraduates interested in conducting research projects outside the classroom, your answer should be a resounding **"Yes!"** This year, 176 students applied for a PURE award, a program that gives undergraduates the opportunity to study alongside top University of Calgary researchers during the summer. [PURE-Programs for Undergraduate Research Experience](#) was implemented in 2006 as a way to encourage undergraduates to apply for graduate studies and undertake careers in research and teaching. [\[i\]](#)

Five Undergraduate students in the Department of English have received PURE awards this year and they will each undertake a full-time, supervised research commitment between May and August:

The poems of T.S. Eliot have always interested **Helen Hajnoczky**. In her project, ***The Nymphs are Departed: Women class and modernity in T. S. Eliot's The Wasteland***, she examines the way in which women are characterized, what the poem says about the changing position of women in the modern world and how the roles and problems of modern women relate to their class. Helen's supervisor is [Dr. Harry Vandervlist](#), from the Department of English.

Owen Thelwall studies the role of proper natural philosophy in the 17th century in his project, ***The Weapon Salve Controversy***. It explores a magical healing potion attributed to Paracelsus, a Swiss physician who lived in the early 1500s. Called the weapon-salve, it was applied to the blade that made the cut and was said to heal the wound. Over time questions arose about how the salve worked, which have still to be answered in full. The curious overlapping of chemical, magical and religious doctrines in the Weapon-Salve controversy exposes past assumptions about reality that are vastly different from our own. Exploring these doctrines in detail, under the supervision of [Dr. Margaret Osler](#) in the Department of History, Owen hopes to gain a greater understanding of the modes of thought on the cusp of the Scientific Revolution.

Megan Michelle Martin is an English major, though her project, ***Beyond Borders: The Human Face of Development in Israel/Palestine***, focuses on her Political Science minor. It examines the human impact of developmental obstacles in the region, concentrating specifically on the impact of the Security Barrier's construction on the Palestinian areas it disrupts and on the Palestinian workers who formerly relied on travel to Israeli-controlled areas for employment. As well, she will investigate aid mismanagement and violation of agreements and accords on the part of state and non-state actors on both sides of the Arab/Israeli conflict and the effects of these on citizens in the occupied territories. Megan is supervised by [Dr. Tareq Ismael](#), in the Department of Political Science.

Laura Jarvey has undertaken her project, ***Defining Communities: Sharon Butala and the Search for Identity in the Canadian West*** as an opportunity to further explore a topic which really interested her during the school year. Her theory is that Western identity has historically been based on defining through opposition. This categorization and separation overshadows everything including our understanding of ourselves in relation to the "natural" world. She argues that a shift is needed towards an understanding that instead defines through a connectedness and community that includes environment (both "Natural" and constructed) landscape and each other (both human and non-human life forms). Exploring these issues of

location identity and community in the writing of Sharon Butala, under the guidance of supervisor [Dr. Pamela Banting](#) (Department of English), she will examine the relationship between Western Canadian identity and the environment. She will study of current tendencies in Western thinking and possibilities for different or revised understandings of sense of place and examine how Butala's experiences of moving from the city to the country reflect on both rural and urban senses of ecological identity in the Canadian prairies. These explorations will revolve around an examination of the differences between identifying through ecological community and identifying through isolation, taking into account the multiplicity of meaning in both these terms.

In her project, *Re-Writing and Re-Righting the Past: People and Connection to Place in Albertan Historiography*, **Joanna Dawson** explores how her interests in both Canadian history and literature can enter into a dialogue without sacrificing the interests of one discipline in order to satisfy the criteria of another. She plans to consult various historical and literary sources in order to redress historical events that have not been incorporated into the popular imagination of western Canadian history, such as coal mining in the Crowsnest Pass in the early 20th century and the Oldman River Dam project near Lethbridge Alberta. She will compare treatments of these events in order to demonstrate that literature is often a close ally of history in the inclusion of unconventional visions and experiences of the west. She is a strong believer in Canadian writers and causes and strives to serve them in the community and with her critical activities. Under the supervision of [Dr. Elizabeth Jameson](#) in the Department of History, Joanna will develop a critical voice that inspires others through her future writing and teaching at the University level.

The award recipients will present their research reports to the Teaching and Learning Funding Committee by 15 September, 2008. They will also submit proposals to participate in the Annual Fall Poster Symposium, sponsored by the Students' Union, where they will demonstrate their work.

More information about applying for a PURE award is available on the Teaching and Learning Funding Committee website: <http://www.ucalgary.ca/TLFC/awards/undergrad/>

By Brigitte Clarke

Photo: Ken Bendiktsen

[\[i\]](#) *On Campus*, April 2008
