

NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier
University



Five Laurier students awarded NSERC graduate scholarships *Over \$150,000 will fund research that includes sensory illusions and grizzly bear habitats*

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WATERLOO – Two doctoral candidates at Wilfrid Laurier University are among five students who will share \$156,900 in grants from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) Post Graduate Scholarships.

Peggy Planetta from psychology and Barb Schwab in geography and environmental studies are receiving doctoral scholarships. Planetta, who specializes in brain and cognition, uses functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to investigate touch and multisensory perception. She is interested in the neural bases of various sensory illusions. The scholarship, valued at \$63,000 over three years, will allow her to devote more time to her research.

“Like many undergraduates I was concerned about not coming up with enough interesting research questions to pursue in graduate school. However, I learned quickly that interesting research questions are bountiful while time is scarce,” says Planetta. “As an NSERC scholarship recipient I will be able to devote more of my time to research.”

Schwab is exploring the response of grizzly bears to human development along the east slopes of the Rockies in Alberta. She is running computer models to simulate spatial movement patterns in order to understand bear behaviour response to landscape connectivity. Her research is being used by industry and government to make conservation decisions for grizzly bear populations. Schwab’s scholarship is valued at \$42,000 over two years.

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“The success rates of Laurier students in acquiring NSERC graduate scholarships testifies to the strength and vitality of research here at Laurier, and to the important contribution that this research is making to Canada,” says Adele Reinhartz, dean of graduate studies and research. “This research funding is a significant achievement for these students and it will assist in supporting their pursuit of academic careers.”

Jason Brown and Sarah Wagg, both from biology, and Sonja Brubacher in psychology will receive master’s scholarships from NSERC. The recipients will each receive a one-year scholarship, valued at \$17,300, in their first year of graduate study.

“This NSERC scholarship means I will be able to devote more time and energy to my research and studies while working towards a master’s degree,” says Brubacher, who will be focusing on understanding children’s memories and learning.

Brubacher’s study will examine children’s ability to monitor the sources of learned information and whether training can help preschool-aged children attribute learned details to their proper sources. This research has implications for police and forensic interviewers in many situations where children must be called upon as witnesses.

In 2004-2005, NSERC will invest \$850 million in university-based research and training in all the natural sciences and engineering. Every year, more than 20,000 university students receive postdoctoral fellows to advance their studies. Over 10,000 professors receive NSERC support for their work. NSERC provides about one sixth of all funds for university research and development in the natural sciences and engineering.