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CFI awards funding for specialized microscopes to two Laurier researchers

WATERLOO – Two Laurier researchers are seeing things a little more clearly these days thanks to major funding for specialized microscopes provided, in large part, by the Leaders Opportunity Fund of the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI).

Biologist Dr. Mihai Costea has purchased a \$193,000 environmental variable pressure scanning electron microscope with the assistance of a \$77,521 grant from CFI. Psychologist Dr. Diano Marrone, who studies age-related memory decline, has acquired a \$351,000 multi-user confocal microscope to enable him to visualize cellular activity and examine neural networks. CFI contributed \$130,999 towards the cost.

“This is great news for researchers and students in the Faculty of Science,” said Dr. Deborah MacLatchy, Laurier’s dean of science. “These instruments are incredibly versatile and can be used in many disciplines, in addition to psychology and biology.”

Costea’s microscope is vital in furthering his innovative research in the area of worldwide parasitic plant biodiversity, especially his work with the genus *Cuscuta* (dodders). Dodders are a particularly interesting type of plant because some are listed as invasive or noxious weeds which can greatly diminish some crop yields, while others are endangered or threatened with extinction, and some are being investigated for their medicinal properties. Despite their importance, dodders are little known and are frequently misidentified. About 40 of the 180 species identified are known only from single specimens in herbaria around the world.

Marrone’s research into age-related memory decline is gaining in importance as Canada’s population ages. With average life expectancy in Canada now reaching 80 years, memory loss will no doubt afflict a substantial population in years to come. Determining the nature and causes of this cognitive impairment has become a major challenge in the study of aging.

Both microscopes will be made available to other Laurier researchers – professors and students.

“It is terrific that the Canada Foundation for Innovation has recognized the quality of research done by Drs. Marrone and Costea, and the significance of this equipment to their research and to student training,” MacLatchy said.

Peter Braid, MP for Kitchener-Waterloo, welcomed today’s announcement as a signal that the Government of Canada is serious about funding scientific innovation.

“Our community is fortunate to have two leading universities, both on the cutting edge of research and development,” Braid said. “We support their contribution to the further advancement and discovery of modern science and technology, and the role of the universities in making us world-renowned.”