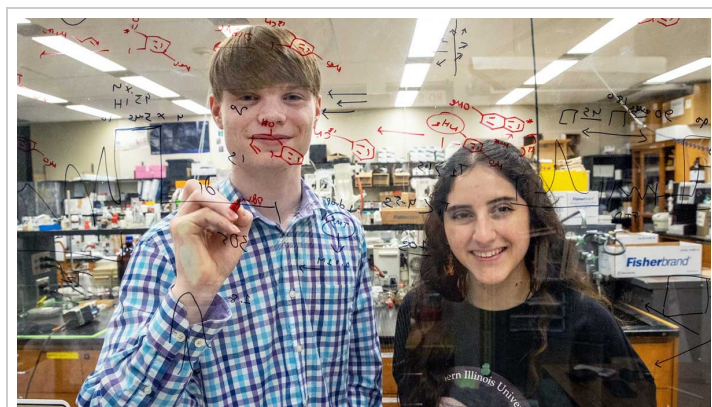




NEWS

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Southern Illinois University Carbondale students Elijah “Eli” Jones, left, and Aleida Iriarte have been accepted into the National Science Foundation’s Graduate Research Fellowship Program.

(Photo by Russell Bailey)

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2 SIU seniors win NSF Graduate Research Fellowships

by Tim Crosby

CARBONDALE, Ill. – Two Southern Illinois University Carbondale seniors have won prestigious fellowships from the National Science Foundation, which they will use to pursue their passions in chemistry and biodiversity.

Elijah “Eli” Jones, majoring in chemistry with a specialization in chemical catalysis, and Aleida Iriarte, a senior in zoology and chemistry with specializations in wildlife biology, environmental chemistry and biochemistry, have been accepted into the NSF Graduate Research Fellowship Program. The five-year fellowship provides three years of financial support, including an annual stipend of \$37,000, and is aimed at ensuring the quality, vitality and diversity of the scientific and engineering workforce of the United States. The oldest graduate fellowship of its kind, the GRFP has a long history of selecting recipients who later achieve high levels of success, including Nobel laureates and members of the National Academy of Sciences.

Elizabeth Donoghue, assistant director of the University Honors Program and adviser for major scholarships, said the fellowship is one of the most prestigious awards a graduating student pursuing scientific research can win.

“Having two winners says, unquestionably, that as a research institution, SIU can attract and cultivate students able to compete nationally at the highest level,” Donoghue said. “This puts us in the company of top universities in the nation. What often distinguishes our students is real life experience focused on solving pressing problems of the world and access to research labs at earlier stages in their academic journey.”

Both Jones and Iriarte also are members of SIU’s honors program, and it plays a key role in supporting

outstanding students, said Donoghue, who assisted Jones and Iriarte with their applications.

Jones, a senior from Jackson, Missouri, hopes to become a chemistry professor, applying data science and programming tools to unveil trends in reactivity that would be impossible to observe through traditional means. He said he was ecstatic upon hearing he'd been selected for the fellowship.

“Science is all about convincing others that your work and ideas are important,” he said. “For me, knowing that the National Science Foundation found my proposal valuable gave me confidence that I could do meaningful work in academia.”

Born in Bolivia before immigrating to the U.S. at 5 years old, Iriarte wants to become a researcher and advocate for conservation. She said she is honored to receive the fellowship a year after she was named Goldwater Scholar.

“For me, this award means the financial freedom to pursue a thesis project that I am passionate about,” Iriarte, who plans to earn her doctorate at the University of Florida with the long-term goal of becoming a biodiversity conservationist and researcher.

“SIU has provided me with multiple undergraduate research opportunities,” Iriarte said, including access to cutting-edge scientific instruments, scholarship support and a community of friends who made her college experience more fun and motivating.

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