Honors student Alex Harvey never misses an opportunity to learn about something new.

Harvey is graduating from the College of Agricultural Sciences with a bachelor’s degree in Animal Science and minors in microbiology and Spanish. As part of the Honors Program, Harvey presented her thesis this spring on the antimicrobial properties of hippopotamus sweat. She was aiming to prove that hippo sweat may inhibit the growth of bacteria that can cause disease in humans. She actually gathered a hippo’s sweat herself with the help of zookeepers from the Denver Zoo.

“Alex is very inquisitive and wants to gain knowledge,” said Karen Sellins, a senior research associate in CSU’s Nutritional Biochemistry Laboratory and one of Harvey’s mentors. “She began the tradition of sending me ‘fun facts’ along with her data and one of those about hippo sweat turned into her honors thesis.”

Since she was a freshman, Harvey has worked on a variety of undergraduate research. She’s worked in the Animal Nutrition Lab with Animal Sciences Professor Torry Engele, conducted HIV research with Ramesh Akkin, professor of virology, and camelid research with Tawfik Aboellal, associate professor of anatomic pathology in CSU’s Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory.

“Alex Harvey is by far one of the most impressive students that I have known,” said Engle. “She has a contagious enthusiasm for learning and never misses an opportunity to get involved.”

As a first-generation scholar Harvey often worked two or three jobs along with 20 to 30 hours a week in the three different labs on campus. Growing up on a hobby farm in rural Wisconsin, Harvey gravitated toward working with animals. On her first visit to Colorado State University she immediately felt at home and that she was part of CSU’s “Ag Family.”

Outside of class and work, Harvey is a truly engaged CSU student participating in the President’s Leadership Program, Collegiate 4-H, Ag Ambassadors, Microbiology Club, the Animal Welfare Judging Team and even intramural sports. The summer after her freshman year, she volunteered in Bali to help provide veterinary care.

As a child, his parents didn’t give him gifts of video games and technology, instead they gave the gift of the outdoors — hiking, backpacking, rafting and camping.

As his love for the outdoors grew, it drew him to CSU’s Warner College of Natural Resources. This May, Gannon will graduate with a bachelor’s degree in Ecosystem Science and Sustainability, with a GPA of 3.95. To add to his high achieving academic work in Ecosystem Science and Sustainability, Gannon also studied forest fire science in the Department of Forestry and Rangeland and Stewardship. In 2014, he was awarded the Forestry and Rangeland Stewardship Student of the Year.

When he arrived at Colorado State, Gannon said one of the obstacles he had to overcome was figuring out exactly what he wanted to study. It was his undergraduate work in the Funk Lab that would provide that direction. The Funk Lab focuses on evolution, ecology, genomics and conservation of biodiversity. Gannon said that his work in the lab was not something he planned, but once he started he knew he had found his niche.

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He has now been an undergraduate research technician in the Funk Lab for four years, helping doctoral student Brian Gill with his research on latitudinal variation in elevation range sizes in stream insects. The EvoTrac project, which stands for Evolutionary and Ecological Variability in Organismal Trait Response with Altitude and Climate, focuses on predicting the consequences of rapid climate change on biodiversity loss and ecosystem function.

With help from members of the Funk and Hoke labs, Gannon wrote a proposal to study the evolutionary mechanisms behind species range limitations and its climate change implications, which has led to a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship.

“Dusty is a talented young scientist with a bright future in ecology,” said Chris Funk, associate professor of biology and director of the Funk Lab. “He is incredibly hard-working, detail-oriented and flexible. I would say that Dusty’s hard work in the lab has been critical in the success of our large, highly integrative project on the vulnerability of stream insects to climate change.”

Gannon says that among his experiences at CSU, receiving the NSF Fellowship is among his greatest achievements.

Gannon plans to begin his graduate work in evolutionary ecology and genomics in the fall of 2016.
Sedillo fulfills her dream with degree

BY KORTNY ROLSTON

When Kassandra Sedillo graduated this month from the College of Natural Sciences with a degree in chemistry, the Denver native will have fulfilled a goal set at age 12 during a science camp at Colorado State University.

It was that week Sedillo decided she wanted to go to college – something no one else in her family had done – and that she would graduate from CSU.

“I really loved the campus and the experience I had here,” said Sedillo, who is minoring in microbiology. “Everyone was very friendly and welcomed us on campus. I remember walking around and telling myself I would go here.”

Her decision never wavered and over the next six years, getting into college kept her going as she and her siblings were shuffled between schools and families in foster care, “couch surfing” with her mother’s friends and, at times, were homeless.

Her home life was in constant upheaval as her mother struggled with her meth addiction and to provide for Sedillo and her siblings.

“I always liked school, especially math and science, and my teachers really encouraged me,” Sedillo said. “Everyone around me was doing drugs and having kids at 15 and 16. I didn’t want that.”

When Kassandra Sedillo graduates this month from the College of Natural Sciences, the Denver native will have fulfilled a goal she set at age 12 during a science camp at Colorado State University.

“Kassandra is an amazing young woman. I had her in a class some three years ago and she’s been a member of my research group since then,” Revis said. “She’s a pleasure to have in the lab and has taken to research well.”

Sedillo studied in Costa Rica last summer with CSU’s Fostering Success program, which assists students who have come out of the foster system.

“(Fostering Success) made sure I had what I needed,” Sedillo said. “My very first care package had a shower caddy. I didn’t have any of those things. They become your family and help you succeed.”

And succeed Sedillo has. She has maintained a strong academic record while helping to care for her younger siblings (two have lived with her) and to show them a life beyond drugs.

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Football created a future for Steve O

BY TONY PHIFER

It’s difficult to imagine a more unlikely college graduate than Steve Michel. He’s one of eight kids raised in a single-parent home — and that parent could not read or write English. Michel could barely read himself going into high school, and his freshman grade point average was 1.9. And he’s not just the first in his family to attend college — he’s likely the first person in his Orlando, Fla., neighborhood to do so.

“If someone had told me eight years ago that I would be graduating from college I would have thought they were crazy,” said Michel. “That thought never even crossed my mind growing up.”

For much of his youth, it appeared Michel was going to be just another statistic from a poor neighborhood. He was selling drugs, smoking pot and getting away with whatever he could.

“I probably should be in prison — or dead,” he said. “I just thank God I was able to get out of that before it was too late.”

A talent for football and some caring mentors at Jones High School helped Michel — call him SteveO, by the way — create an opportunity to change his life by attending Colorado State University on a football scholarship. As a result, he would graduate from the College of Health and Human Sciences with a degree in social work — and he would have earned that diploma in four years.

Malcolm Scott, assistant professor in CSU’s School of Social Work and faculty adviser to student-athletes in the program, said college has been anything but easy for Michel. The early papers he wrote for classes needed a great deal of work, and he lacked study skills.

“The great thing about Steve is he was willing to be mentored, and he’s just as tenacious with his academics as he is on the football field,” Scott said. “To see the growth he’s made, I’m absolutely thrilled. I’m very, very proud of him.”

Michel’s CSU football career has been solid. A linebacker and defensive tackle, he has recorded 53 tackles to date, and he’s likely a starter this fall. He would love to play professionally but realizes education is a better bet. Fittingly, he has already been accepted into the master’s program in social work at CSU.

“I want to be a role model — someone kids can look up to,” he said. “I want to be able to tell my story so I can help other kids do what I’ve done.”

ONLINEPLUS

OnlinePlus keeps firefighter moving up the career ladder

BY ZACHARY MCFARLANE

In 2010, his 11th year as a firefighter in Eagle County, Colo., Tyson Houston was suddenly overcome by a series of seizures. Diagnosed with adult onset epilepsy, he could no longer work on the fire truck.

Until then, his path had always been clear. Just two years earlier, Houston had started working on his bachelor’s degree in fire and emergency services through CSU’s OnlinePlus. Education had always been important to him, and he wanted to further his base of field-specific knowledge. But the sudden diagnosis brought it with uncertainty. He postponed his two courses and took time to reflect on whether or not the fire service was still a good fit.

In that reflection, Houston found clarity. While the sudden and unpredictable nature of his seizures served as a barrier to riding a fire truck, he knew he wanted to pursue the many other roles available within his field.

He returned to service, re-engaged with his coursework, and continued his journey toward his bachelor’s degree, which he is receiving this month. The fire service had always been good to him and continued that trend when supervisors reassigned him to the role of training officer with the Summit Fire Authority, High Country Training Center.

But the sudden diagnosis brought it with uncertainty. He postponed his two courses and took time to reflect on whether or not he would have to get recertified and such. But this degree will hang on my wall for the rest of my life. And I’m always trying to convince my guys that what you learn, and what you come out of getting your degree with, it’s yours forever.”

“I always thought I was going to be fighting fires the way we used to. And fire service, as a whole, needs to adapt. So, through my coursework and experience, I’m picking up how to teach the younger generations that aren’t running fires every day.”

Houston continued his journey toward his bachelor’s degree by earning his master’s in fire science. He hopes to continue moving up the career ladder, just in a different capacity. As a training officer, he now influences the next generation of firefighters who are responding to new, modern challenges that continue to redefine the profession.

"That’s where fire service needs people to step up," Houston said. "People leading fire services into the next century. We aren’t fighting fires the way we used to, and fire service, as a whole, needs to adapt. So, through my coursework and experience, I’m picking up how to teach the younger generations that aren’t running fires every day.”

His degree also afforded him the opportunity to convince my guys that what you learn, and what you come out of getting your degree with, it’s yours forever.”

ONLINEPLUS

Spring 2015 Commencement Schedule

BY ZACHARY MCFARLANE

Friday, May 15, 2015

Doctor of Veterinary Medicine 8:00 a.m. Meisy Arena
Air Force ROTC Commissioning 9:00 a.m. Lory Student Center, Grand Ballroom
Army ROTC Commissioning 9:15 a.m. Lory Student Center, Theatre
College of Engineering 11:10 a.m. Meisy Arena
Graduate School 3:00 p.m. Meisy Arena
Weld College of Natural Resources 7:00 p.m. Lory Student Center, Grand Ballroom
College of Health and Human Sciences 7:30 p.m. Meisy Arena

Saturday, May 16, 2015

College of Natural Sciences 9:00 a.m. Meisy Arena
College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences 8:00 a.m. Lory Student Center, Grand Ballroom
College of Agricultural Sciences 11:10 a.m. Meisy Arena
College of Business 3:00 p.m. Meisy Arena
College of Liberal Arts I 4:30 p.m. Lory Student Center, Grand Ballroom
College of Liberal Arts II 7:15 p.m. Meisy Arena

"Graduating means a lot," Houston said. "One of the biggest things is that they can’t take education away from you. Certificates and such have a ‘come due’ date. You’ll eventually have to get recertified and such. But this degree will hang on my wall for the rest of my life. And I’m always trying to convince my guys that what you learn, and what you come out of getting your degree with, it’s yours forever.”

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We’re here to keep our alumni connected to CSU and to one another through:

- Alumni Association Membership
- Networking and social events
- Publications about alumni and the University
- Professional development and career services

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**COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING**

**Engineering grad to use her skills to make the world a better place**

BY KORTNY HOLLSTON

When Jamie Urban tells people she is getting her degree mechanical engineering, many ask how that fits in with plans to work in the developing world.

But Urban, who graduates this month from CSU’s College of Engineering, has a ready reply. She explains that her goal is to bring reliable access to power and electricity to the millions of people in the world who don't have it and how, at its core, engineering is about helping people.

"Most people don’t think of engineering that way, but that’s what it is about," Urban said. "Engineering is about developing technologies, processes or products that help people."

The Durango, Colo., native has seen it firsthand. Growing up, she and her family often traveled to India to work at an orphanage that took children in from the streets. For several weeks during the summer, they would help at the home, bringing medical and dental supplies and other projects.

But it was the summer between her sophomore and junior year at Colorado State University that Urban's interest in mechanical engineering -- specifically electricity and power systems -- was piqued. Her father, a mechanical engineer, designed and built a solar-powered system for the orphanage so the occupants would have a steady supply of electricity.

The solar panels generated electricity for the building and any excess power was stored on site in batteries so it could be used later.

"There are a lot of outages and brownouts in India," Urban said. "The solar panels and batteries provide electricity so the students can study at night. It made a big difference for them."

That experience prompted her to pursue a major in mechanical engineering. She will get to put her training and education into practice in August when she moves to New Delhi, to intern for Engineering Ministries International, a Colorado Springs-based nonprofit organization that helps support infrastructure projects in the developing world.

While Urban won’t be working specifically on an energy project, she believes the internship will give her valuable engineering experience.

"I really want to bring sustainable energy systems to remote areas in the (developing) world," she said. "I want to make the world a better place for them."

That experience prompted her to pursue a major in mechanical engineering. She will get to put her training and education into practice in August when she moves to New Delhi, to intern for Engineering Ministries International, a Colorado Springs-based nonprofit organization that helps support infrastructure projects in the developing world.

Living in India also will enable her to pursue another passion. Urban wants to connect with international organizations working to end sex trafficking or that help women and children who’ve escaped that life.

"I feel like God is calling me to work on these issues in the developing world and has led me on a path to do that," she said.

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**COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS**

**Owen survived trial by fire to become a teacher**

BY JEFF DOODGE

When the fire started in her townhome, Jennifer Owen’s two young girls were fast asleep. Luckily, Owen wasn’t.

"I went to my kids’ room, and there were flames outside their window," she recalls. "I was able to get them out, but we watched it — we watched our roof collapse."

The house was destroyed. It was a traumatic experience.

"It’s something that we’re still working through every day," she says. "We just want everything."

Luckily, the Larimer County community stepped up after the July 2013 fire in the Bull Run Townhomes and donated virtually everything that sits in the Owens’ Loveland home today.

"Someone even gave us two beds for the girls," Owen says.

The fire forced the 29-year-old Owen to drop the CSU summer class she was taking, but she persevered and is graduating this month from the College of Liberal Arts with a degree in English and her teaching license.

The first-generation college student decided to attend CSU in hopes of becoming a teacher after being inspired by her own English teacher, a curious, motivated learner, a “sponge” for knowledge.

Owen’s junior year included tutoring in high school and serving as a teaching assistant while earning an associate’s degree in film and video production from the Community College of Aurora.

This spring, she was a student teacher at Walt Clark Middle School in Loveland, where she made a visible improvement to the learning process: Students were required to put their smart phones in a basket on her desk as they walked into class, only retrieving them on their way out at the end of the period.

"Now all of the eighth-grade teachers do it," she says. "They call it ‘Mrs. Owen’s Cell Phone Policy!’ It’s made a positive difference; they’re less distracted and more well-behaved."

Now the member of the English honor society Sigma Tau Delta and the National Council for Teachers of English is looking for a teaching job in the area. She says she loves teaching middle school because it’s such a formative time in kids’ lives — and unfortunately it’s also often the time when their priorities shift and they lose their curiosity.

"The intervention to keep that from happening needs to take place earlier," Owen says. "I want to reach kids and help them not lose their desire to learn. You need to show them the relevance of everything they’re doing in class, why it’s useful and important to know."