

Institute of Arctic Biology
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UAF graduate receives nation's top dissertation honor

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FAIRBANKS, Alaska-University of Alaska Fairbanks graduate Katey Walter will receive the nation's most prestigious honor for doctoral dissertations by the Council of Graduate Schools today, December 7, 2006, at the organization's 46th annual meeting in Washington, DC.

The CGS makes two awards each year to recognize recent doctoral recipients who have already made exceptional contributions to their fields. There are 473 member institutions representing nearly all of the major research universities in the United States and Canada in the CGS and each institution can nominate only one dissertation in each of two categories.

Walter will receive the 2006 award in mathematics, physical sciences, and engineering for her Ph.D. dissertation, Methane Emissions and Biogeochemistry of North Siberian Thermokarst Lakes. She will also receive a certificate and an honorarium of \$1,000.

Walter's dissertation research, funded by the National Science Foundation, identified a new method of measuring and quantifying methane emissions, a significant greenhouse gas, from Siberian lakes that are undergoing thermokarst - the deformation of land surfaces which occurs when the underlying permafrost melts. Her data demonstrated that North Siberian thaw lakes are a significantly larger source of methane than previously recognized and are largely fueled by thermokarst. Walter's results suggest an important positive feedback to global warming and are expected to improve the accuracy of climate models.

"The award first and foremost reflects Katey's talent and hard work as a researcher," said Susan Henrichs, dean of the UAF graduate school. "UAF, and the biosciences graduate program in particular, have the national and international reputation to attract outstanding students such as Katey, and then provide programs that help them to develop into excellent scientists," said Henrichs, who nominated Walter for the award.

"To have her thesis selected out of the hundreds nominated from research universities across the U.S. and Canada is a real honor," said Sydonia Bret-Harte, Walter's post-doctoral advisor and research professor with the Institute of Arctic Biology at UAF. "The award highlights the fact that she's doing important work and I'm pleased she'll be working with us to set up the Arctic Observing Network."

One chapter of Walter's dissertation has already been published in the prestigious journal Nature. Walter will continue her work as an International Polar Year postdoctoral fellow in biogeochemistry at the Institute of Arctic Biology at the University of Alaska Fairbanks

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