

**Department of  
Recreation, Sport and Tourism**

**RST**

**2023 Honors  
and Awards**



**College of Applied Health Sciences**

**APPLIED  
HEALTH  
SCIENCES**



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# Message from the Department Head



## Dr. Carla Santos

The Charles K. Brightbill Student Awards event is always a highlight of my spring semester. I am proud to lead a department that has so many outstanding students, and I congratulate each and every one of you.

You have earned scholarships and awards through your hard work and your commitment to the values and mission of the Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism and the College of Applied Health Sciences. In communities across the nation and around the world, professionals in leisure industries are recognizing that they must do more than meet the needs of the majority population. They must make their services, facilities and programs accessible and appealing to minority residents and marginalized groups as well. RST scholars and alumni have been on the leading edge of this movement. As students, you are benefitting from their expertise. When you join their ranks, you will continue their efforts to make leisure productive and meaningful for all.

I am in awe of what you have already accomplished, and I look forward to hearing about the contributions you make as recreation, sport, and tourism educators, researchers and practitioners. You will always have a home in RST—stay in touch and stay involved!



## Message from the Dean

### Dr. Cheryl Hanley-Maxwell

On behalf of the College of Applied Health Sciences, I would like to congratulate you on receiving scholarships and awards from the Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism and AHS. You have made a significant, positive impact upon this college and this campus through your creativity in coursework, volunteer and internship experiences, leadership in professional associations and clubs, research and teaching. You have shown your commitment to the college's mission to promote health and well-being throughout the lifespan and across a diverse society. I applaud your efforts to make leisure opportunities fair, equitable, inclusive and culturally relevant.

As you move into professional lives and take your work beyond campus, your belief in the right of all individuals and communities to have access to the physical and mental benefits of safe and meaningful leisure experiences will be life-changing and life-improving for many. Never give up the good fight. I'm proud of all of you and wish you extraordinary futures.



# **UNDERGRADUATE AWARDS**

## Joan Braswell Scholarship

*This scholarship was established by Belleville, Ill., native Joan Braswell, who completed a B.S. in the Department of Recreation in 1967. It is awarded to students in RST who demonstrate achievement and professional promise.*



### Vicki Kopko

*“This award helped take a big weight off of my shoulders and will help me put more focus on my goals of getting into law school once I graduate from the University of Illinois. It feels unreal to receive the support of friends and alumni of the RST department. Their selfless donations are helping so many people finish their academic careers with more ease.”*

After completing her bachelor’s in RST in 2024, Vicki plans to attend law school. She said she wants to be a lawyer because she loves to help people and she wants to make a difference in someone’s life. She is interested specifically in entertainment law, which combines her interests in the recreation, sport and tourism industry with law.

In the summer of 2022, Vicki had an internship at a real estate law firm known as Trivedi & Khan Attorneys At Law. This internship taught her valuable skills such as basic clerical skills, how to summarize a deposition for a civil lawsuit and more. She also recently began

volunteering at The Refugee Center in Champaign, where she helps with administrative work and uses her Spanish language skills to help local community members.

One year ago, Vicki received the George and Mary Lowrey Scholarship, and in September 2022 she was named a James Scholar. She loves to spend time with her family, friends and cats and watch movies. She also enjoys trying new foods and restaurants, especially sushi restaurants that her friends recommend.

## Charles K. Brightbill Memorial Scholarship

The Charles K. Brightbill Memorial Scholarship is given to a Recreation, Sport and Tourism major who has demonstrated outstanding ability. The award is given in honor of Charles K. Brightbill, a former faculty member and department head who is regarded as one of the prominent statesmen of the early recreation movement.



### Chris Wurl

*“It means a lot knowing that my hard work is paying off, and it really makes me thankful that I go to such a wonderful university that has given me opportunities for scholarships like this and other experiences that have allowed me to become who I am today.”*

Chris plans to finish his B.S. in RST in December and wants to work in either player development or team operations for a Major League Baseball organization. Chris said he loves baseball and the idea of helping players be their best appeals to him.

Chris is currently a part of the Illinois football video team, where he records games and practices that the players and coaches use to improve themselves. Last summer, he worked for the Paragon Marketing Group as a Gatorade Team Leader, where he helped distribute Gatorade to youth sports camps on the U. of I. campus.

Chris has been a part of the Campus Honors Program, has been a James Scholar and has been on the Dean’s List every semester so far. Chris is a big baseball and college football fan, so whenever those sports are on TV, he spends time watching games and reading about them. He is also an avid reader, particularly about U.S. history and baseball.



## Jerry D. Burnam Student Scholarship

Established in 2015 by Dr. Jerry Burnam, who held the position of associate dean of Academic Affairs in the College of Applied Health Sciences for many years before retiring in 2000, the scholarship is awarded to students who are transferring or have transferred into AHS from another institution or another college within the University of Illinois. Preference is given to students who are first generation, have a history of community service, participated in the U.S. military or ROTC or graduated from an Illinois high school in a “low-sending” county.



### Isabella Clifford

*“Receiving this scholarship reminds me of the importance of education and community. I will continuously have individuals to thank for my accomplishments, and I greatly appreciate the generous financial support I have been given to pursue my education. I am amazed by the alumni network at the University of Illinois and will be forever grateful for their commitment to current students.”*

Isabella is on track to complete her B.S. in RST in May and plans to move back to Chicago and enter the recreation and event management industry. She said she has always had a deep love for recreational programming and has been present in park districts for most of her life.

Before coming to Illinois, Isabella worked and volunteered for the Chicago Park District’s Day Camp as a teen leader and seasonal recreation leader. She also had the opportunity to work for the Norridge Park District as a pool attendant. In the summer of 2022, Isabella was a recreation and sport management intern for Maggie Daley Park in Chicago. There, she had the opportunity to supervise other staff and facilitate all events for the season.

Previously, she received the Margaret K. and Edward W. Harvey Scholarship in Parks and Recreation and the George & Mary Lowrey Scholarship. In her free time, Isabella enjoys reading and going to Illini sporting events with her friends.

## John Bruce Capel Memorial Scholarship

The John Bruce Capel Scholarship is presented to a sophomore or junior in Recreation, Sport and Tourism who has demonstrated outstanding ability and potential. The scholarship honors John Bruce Capel, who graduated in 1965 from the Department of Recreation and was a member of the All Big Ten Academic Team. Capel was killed in Vietnam on May 2, 1966 while serving as a Marine lieutenant.



### Todd J. Marshall

*“RST has done more for my belonging than any one professor or adviser will ever know. This award continues to affirm my place in the department, college, university, my home. This award gives me great recognition but even more—a reason to keep working to attain my further ambitions.”*

Todd plans to complete his bachelor/master’s degree in sport and event management in May 2025 and said that a vision for his career is still evolving. He said his future could take many forms and he said he would love the chance to work and compete overseas to experience sports in other lands.

Todd has been a James Scholar and was named to the Dean’s List in multiple years and he was also a part of the RST student advisory council. In his spare time, Todd enjoys traveling to new places to experience new scenery and features in nature. Another recent use of his free time that has proven very rewarding is coaching. He said coaching helps him

connect with youth while teaching something he is passionate about.

# Chicago Knight Life Charities Scholarship

The Chicago Knight Life Charities Scholarship, founded with a generous lead gift from Carmen Rossi (M.S., 2009) and support from the annual RST Winter Social, goes to an undergraduate student majoring in RST who has demonstrated outstanding academic ability, entrepreneurial drive and spirit, RST community involvement and potential as an RST professional.



## Nathaniel Beebe

*“This award helps to lift some of the financial burden of school from my family. Both my brother and I attend the U. of I. One of the things that I’ve been told many times is that the Illini family is large and strong. I’m thankful to be seeing that in action.”*

Nathaniel plans to graduate in May 2025 with a B.S. in RST and a minor in statistics, which lines up perfectly for his hoped-for career in pro baseball, specifically baseball operations. Nathaniel said he enjoys analyzing data and finding solutions to problems.

Nathaniel is a James Scholar and has been on the Dean’s list each semester. He also joined the student advisory council in the past semester. In his free time, Nathaniel enjoys attending as many Illini sporting events as he can. From volleyball to baseball to football to basketball, he said he’ll make every effort to be in the student section. He’s also a *Star Wars* fan, reading all the books and watching all the

movies and streaming shows.



## Andy (Sirui) Hou

*“I happened to meet a lot of our donors months ago at the RST Winter Social. Their successes are great motivation and inspiration that set examples for us in the industry. And it’s also their great quality that makes the Illini diploma more reputable and valuable. Thank you all!”*

Andy plans to complete his bachelor’s degree in sports management in May 2025 and hopes to become a soccer coach or work in the professional soccer industry.

Andy played for his middle and high school varsity soccer team for five years and is currently the student manager of the Fighting Illini women soccer team. He also performs data analytics tasks for the team. He also recently started learning Spanish, believing the language will help him gain employment in the sports industry.

Andy has been named as a James Scholar and was a member of the RST student council and a student ambassador. As you would imagine, Andy spends his spare time playing and watching soccer, but he also enjoys watching movies, listening to music and going to restaurants.

## Jesse “Tony” Clements Scholarship

*This scholarship was established by friends and family of Tony Clements, longtime director of Campus Recreation, undergraduate student in football and basketball and national and community leader. Campus Recreation partners with the College of Applied Health Sciences to award the Clements Scholarship annually to an undergraduate student in the Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism who holds a leadership position with Campus Recreation and has exemplified exceptional commitment, passion and service to others through that leadership role.*



### Gavin Christopherson

*“The reason this award means so much to me is because it is a reflection of my work. I aspire to be someone not only to myself but to others. Accepting this award means I have made an impact on my community and that will inspire me to push even harder to achieve my goals.”*

Gavin is on track to graduate in May 2025 and his dream is to be the facility operations manager for the future home of the Chicago Bears, at their new Arlington Heights property. The bonus, he said, was to work for the “best team in professional sports,” as well as staying close to home.

Gavin has spent the past two years working at the University of Illinois Ice Arena where he started as a zamboni driver and is now an event manager. Gavin said working at the rink has been a great experience and has provided insight into how to plan and execute events. He started an organization on campus called the Youth Sports Relief Team, and he helps fundraise to help local families and children pay for involvement in sports.

A Dean’s List honoree, Gavin enjoys cooking, hanging out with friends and his roommates and playing basketball and video games.

# Margaret K. and Edward W. Harvey Scholarship in Parks and Recreation

*The Margaret K. and Edward W. Harvey Scholarship in Parks and Recreation is given to an undergraduate student who has been a resident of Illinois for at least one year prior to selection, with preference given to students in Recreation Management who plan to pursue careers in parks and recreation in Illinois. It was established by RST alumnus Ed Harvey (B.S., 1972, M.S., 1976) in honor of his parents Margaret K. and Edward W. Harvey, who opened their home to students during the housing shortage following World War II and who remained very involved in the lives of students for more than a decade.*



## Nicole Dudek

*“Winning the Margaret K. and Edward W. Harvey Scholarship in Parks and Recreation means to me that my hard work and passion for RST is paying off. Edward Harvey was an incredible alumni of Illinois and the College of Applied Health Sciences and I am incredibly grateful to be honored with his scholarship.”*

Nicole is on track to graduate with a B.S. in RST by May 2025 and plans to pursue a career in outdoor recreation, such as with the National Park Service. She said she is working towards outdoor recreation due to her passion for balancing sustainable human enjoyment of the outdoors with the preservation of the planet.

Nicole serves as the vice president for Illini Wildlife and Conservation Club and plays an active role as a leader of small groups and retreats at the Newman Center. She has also joined the RST student advisory board and also recently joined the newly formed RST student ambassador program. She also works with the Office of Recreation and Park Resources, aiding RST Professor Laura Payne and her team with research.

Nicole previously has been a James Scholar, been listed on the Dean’s List, won the Inaugural IPRA Student iLearn team competition and presented at 2023 IPRA Conference. In her free time, Nicole enjoys being outside when the weather permits, whether that means hiking or walking around campus. She loves to travel and build on her photography skills.

## George and Mary Lowrey Scholarship

*This scholarship is awarded to a sophomore or junior who exemplifies outstanding scholarship, service and merit. George Lowrey Jr. served as an educational resources specialist and professor in what was then the Department of Leisure Studies. He was instrumental in starting the American University's International Program for Study Abroad in Scotland and is remembered by his students as someone who could take them through the process of learning while preserving the joy of discovery.*



### Derrick Chen

*“Receiving this award is a great honor and a testament to the hard work that I have put into myself. It’s a reminder to never give up on my aspirations while always striving to be the best version of myself. I am grateful for the award and will continue to work indefatigably to pursue my passions.”*

Derrick is planning to complete his degree in May 2026, and while he might not make the NBA as a player, he hopes to be a sports agent so he could be a part of the NBA while living his dream of working with NBA players. He is also interested in the business aspect of sports and the opportunity to negotiate contracts and manage finances for players.

Derrick began his career journey by seeking entry-level roles at local sports stadiums, such as the State Farm Center and Memorial Stadium. Starting with jobs such as security and ticketing helped him understand the industry’s operations and customer service requirements, which

allowed him to gain valuable experience that he can build on for future career growth.

Derrick was listed on the Dean’s List last fall and in his spare time—not surprisingly—he enjoys playing competitive basketball at the ARC. In addition to physical activities, he likes to strengthen his mind by playing strategy games that are fun and challenging.



## Isabella Clifford

*“Receiving this scholarship reminds me of the importance of education and community. I will continuously have individuals to thank for my accomplishments, and I greatly appreciate the generous financial support I have been given to pursue my education. I am amazed by the alumni network at the University of Illinois and will be forever grateful for their commitment to current students.”*

Isabella is planning to complete her master’s degree in RST in May and wants to move back to Chicago to work in the recreation and event management industry. In the summer 2023, Isabella is planning to return to Maggie Daley Park in Chicago to work as a supervisor and work the upcoming season.

Before coming to Illinois, Isabella worked for the Chicago Park District as a seasonal recreation leader and for the Norridge Park District as a pool attendant, and last summer worked as a recreation and sport management intern at Maggie Daley Park.

Isabella won this award last year and previously was awarded the George & Mary Lowrey Scholarship. Additionally, she received the Willard Broom Award from Fraternity and Sorority Affairs for her leadership involvement within the Panhellenic Council. In her free time, she enjoys reading and attending Illini sporting events with friends.



## Catie Washburn

*“As a student I am dedicated and passionate about my learning, so it means an incredible amount to be recognized for my enthusiasm and commitment in the classroom from this award. This department is one I am proud to be a part of and it is a privilege to receive continuous support from people who have filled the same chairs before me.”*

Catie is planning to complete her degree in communications and RST by May 2024 before embarking on a career in the events industry because of the emphasis on working with people in the community and the versatility in day-to-day tasks.

Catie said she has extensive experience with customer service and communication. She has been a manager at Coldstone Creamery since the end of her sophomore year of high school and she manages a crew of four to eight people while providing service to customers. Additionally, during the fall 2022 semester, Catie began working at the Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, where she handles roles such as announcements at the front desk, supervising inside the theater as an usher supervisor and serving as the house manager.

Catie has been on the Dean’s List in all five semesters she’s been on campus, and in her free time enjoys walking her dog and watching shows with her sister.

# Karen Martin Luetje and Robert E. Luetje Applied Health Sciences Scholarship

*This scholarship was established by Karen Martin Luetje, who graduated in 1958 from the College of Physical Education with a major in recreation and her husband Bob Luetje, who graduated in 1959 with a degree in metallurgical engineering, in honor of the significant role the University of Illinois played in their lives. With this scholarship, they hope to inspire and instill pride in future generations of Illinois students.*



## Madeleine Larson

*“This award demonstrates my hard work and achievements at the College of Applied Health Sciences. I feel grateful to receive the support of friends and alums of the department who funded this award.”*

Upon graduation in May 2025, Madeleine’s goal is to work in sports management because of the atmosphere and the strong community it builds with its fans.

Madeleine is currently working with the Big Ten Network, Illini Football Recruiting and the Illini Athletics communication department. As of this publication, she was writing the season preview for Illini women’s golf and baseball. In the summer of 2022, in addition to working as an intern with the Chicago Dogs Baseball Promotions and Entertainment, planning and executing between-inning entertainment, Madeleine helped in all aspects of baseball operations with heavy lifting and tarp pulls on rainy days.

Madeleine has been a James Scholar since her first semester on campus and enjoys running, golfing and hanging out with friends.



## Paragon Marketing Group Scholarship

The Paragon Marketing Group Scholarship is presented to an undergraduate student that is a sophomore or junior in the Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism. The recipient shall (a) have financial need, (b) maintain a minimum GPA of 3.0, (c) demonstrate a commitment to values of diversity and inclusion, (d) exhibit and consistently demonstrate strong leadership abilities and upstanding character, and (e) be a full-time student.



### Alexis Mora

*“Receiving this award means more to me than just getting financial aid; it is a validation and culmination of all my hard work and further solidifies my perspective that as long as you keep moving towards your goal, everything will work in your favor. This scholarship will enable me to complete my studies here as well as further my professional aspirations.”*

After completing a degree in RST in May 2024, Alexis aspires to continue working in the sports industry and land a career in sports marketing. Sports have always been an integral part of Alexis’ life, and after multiple internships in the sports industry she is confident that this is her career path.

Alexis currently works for Fighting Illini Production, where she assists in the broadcasts for the BIG Ten Network’s Student U Program. She has been a part of more than 55 broadcasts at U. of I. as well as at Illinois State University, where she helped with broadcasts for ESPN 3, ESPN+, and Marquee Network for all of their Division I teams.

Alexis serves as special events chair for ALPFA, an organization on campus whose mission is to create and empower the future Latino leaders of America through professional, social and philanthropic events. In her free time, she enjoys playing/watching sports, is involved in intramural teams on campus and enjoys exercising and hanging out with friends and family.



## Aniyha Jones

*“This award truly means a lot to me and it’s a full-circle moment. During my freshman year at Illinois, Paragon was the first company to believe in me and provide me with an internship. I had my first opportunity through Paragon to work with major companies such as Gatorade, Chipotle and Nike. There are so many students who attend Illinois, so to be chosen out of a very selective process, I’m honored!”*

Aniyha is planning to graduate in May and wants to be a sports journalist. She said she wants to produce and write sports documentaries that tell powerful stories never been told before. She started a podcast in 2020 called “You’re Wrong, Sir.” It was through that podcast that she learned she was passionate about storytelling and interviewing.

Currently, Aniyha is the host of “Illini Sports Night,” a student-led sports broadcast where she interviews prominent athletes on campus. She has also interned at Nike as a digital product design operations intern and

she’s the production assistant for “The Pivot Podcast.”

Among her honors are the Dean’s List and the Franklin D. Pilchard Scholarship. In her free time, Aniyha enjoys paddleboarding, hiking and shopping.



## Todd Marshall

*“RST has done more for my belonging than any one professor or adviser will ever know. This award continues to affirm my place in the department, college, university, my home. This award gives me great recognition but even more—a reason to keep working to attain my further ambitions.”*

Todd plans to complete his bachelor/master’s degree in sport and event management in May 2025 and said that a vision for his career is still evolving. He said his future could take many forms and he said he would love the chance to work and compete overseas to experience sports in other lands.

Todd has been a James Scholar and was named to the Dean’s List in multiple years and he was also a part of the RST student advisory council. In his spare time, Todd enjoys traveling to new places to experience new scenery and features in nature. Another recent use of his free time that has proven very rewarding is coaching. He said coaching helps him

connect with youth while teaching something he is passionate about.

## Allen V. Sapora Research Award

*Dr. Sapora was one of the great leaders in the recreation and leisure movement. He devoted his professional life to preparing students as practitioners, researchers and educators in the field. This award recognizes outstanding student research at the undergraduate level.*



### Haley Bauman

*“Getting this award brings me pride in my accomplishments as a research assistant and in the RST major. Receiving support of friends and alumni of this department strengthens my confidence as a professional in the RST industry.”*

Haley will graduate in August with a bachelor’s degree and wants to pursue a career in sales in the eco-tourism and hospitality industry. During her undergraduate program, Haley has held three assistant research positions, with RST professors Laura Payne, Sharon Zou and Joelle Soulard.

Haley’s most research experience with Soulard allowed her to focus more on the tourism sector. She assisted in research on Dark Tourism through copywriting, captioning images and editing manuscripts.

Haley has been a James Scholar and recipient of the Illinois Athletic and Academic Strive Scholarship. She has been a member of the Illini Ice Girls for two years, and over the past three years Haley has participated and helped coordinate events with Jewish organizations on campus such as Chabad, Hillel and JET.

## Triple S Scholarship Fund

*Sarah B. Nemeth (M.S., RST 2003) established the Triple S Scholarship to honor her three favorite professors (Dr. Kimberly Shiness, Dr. William Stewart and Dr. Monika Stodolska, whose last names all start with “S”) in the Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism. This scholarship is awarded to a junior or senior pursuing a concentration in Recreation and is selected on the basis of financial need and merit, which may be evidenced by outstanding ability, potential, and commitment to the field of recreation.*



### Danielle Sauerland

*“It feels wonderful to receive the support of friends and alumni of the department. I have always loved that RST is a tight-knit family and greatly appreciate all the ways the department has assisted me throughout the years at the university. I plan to continue my involvement in this department post-graduation in order to give back to the community that helped me so much during my time spent at school.”*

Danielle will graduate in May with a B.S. in RST and wants to work as a manager in either the tourism or adventure recreation field, preferably in a tropical area. She has a passion for leading others and for cultivating inspirational and relaxing vacation experiences for guests.

In the last semester of her college career, Danielle has had the privilege to intern at a luxury resort in Panama as a guest experience intern. She said she learned more about the tourism industry and the processes involved in providing high-caliber service. She has been able to work in a variety of departments that all contribute to the overall luxury experience guests seek out when they visit.

Danielle has earned Dean’s List honors each semester and has a 4.0 GPA. She has also served as the student representative on the Undergraduate Committee, has been an active member in the student advisory council and an RST mentor. In the spring of 2021, Danielle earned the George and Mary Lowrey RST Scholarship. In her free time, she enjoys lifting weights, running for exercise, playing badminton, skating and being part of the Illini boxing team.

## Ronald G. and Patricia L. Stopka Scholarship

Ronald Stopka received his bachelor's degree (1962) and master's of science (1964) in Physical Education from the College of Applied Health Sciences. He and Patricia established this scholarship to support students in the College of Applied Health Sciences. Applicants must be undergraduate students currently enrolled in AHS who have financial need.



### Grace Lamoureux

*“Receiving this award is a huge honor as it represents the strength of the Illinois community. It inspires me to one day hopefully do the same as I appreciate the support they have given me in my education.”*

Grace plans to graduate in May with a B.S. in RST and wants to pursue a career in both sports and real estate. She plans on working as a commercial real estate agent, finding facilities that can be transformed into sports arenas.

She has worked as a facility assistant at the Activities and Recreation Center, gaining experience in recreation. She has also worked as a student recruiting assistant for the Fighting Illini football team, allowing her to understand more about the operations of sport teams.

In addition to receiving this award, Grace has also received the John Bruce Capel Scholarship, awarded to a sophomore or junior in RST who “has demonstrated outstanding ability and potential.” In her free time, Grace enjoys spending time with friends, reading, yoga, working out, going on long walks and shopping.

## Edmund J. James Scholars

*The Edmund J. Scholars Program, named for the fourth president of the University of Illinois, is the honors program within the College of Applied Health Sciences. The program recognizes undergraduates who have achieved academic excellence and provides them with unique learning opportunities. The following students in the Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism are 2022-23 James Scholars.*

### Seniors

Alex Breaux

Isabella Clifford

Jorie Schirmacher

### Other Undergraduates

Haley Bauman

Karly Dolin

Todd Marshall

Nathaniel Beebe

Nicole Dudek

Elizabeth Opilka

Alex Breaux

Sirui Hou

Lauren Ratajczak

Morgan Brown

Victoria Kopko

Jorie Schirmacher

Isabella Clifford

Dylan Kosh

Weston Venamore

James Cuevas

Madeleine Larson

Natalie Woch



# **GRADUATE AWARDS**

# Charles K. Brightbill Memorial Scholarship

The Charles K. Brightbill Memorial Scholarship is given to a Recreation, Sport and Tourism major who has demonstrated outstanding ability. The award is given in honor of Charles K. Brightbill, a former faculty member and department head who is regarded as one of the prominent statesmen of the early recreation movement.



## Hyunseo "Violet" Yoon

*"I am now in my last year in RST. Thus, this scholarship especially means a lot to me as I feel that it recognizes all my efforts during my Ph.D. and gives me the confidence to continue my commitment to society after graduation. I am glad to learn that alumni have been supporting their future alumni. I am very proud of being a member of RST."*

Violet plans to complete her Ph.D. in August and wants to work at an institution where she can do research and teach students. Her goal is to contribute to community development and human well-being through her research and teaching.

Violet has engaged in three community-engaged research projects during her doctoral work. In these projects, she worked with community partners for tourism development in rural areas in Illinois. Also, she worked with a national park to help with public land management.

Outside of research, she participated in several community services and programs. In addition, she volunteered for the Undergraduate Research Symposium for three years as a judging panel, the Graduate Academy Microteaching as a facilitator and the Undergraduate Research Apprenticeship Program as a mentor.

In her free time, Violet likes playing tennis, snowboarding, playing golf and farming.





## Christine Ziebarth Howe Graduate Student Award

*The Christine Ziebarth Howe Graduate Student Award was created by the family and friends of RST alumna Christine Ziebarth Howe (1951-1997) to honor her legacy and to recognize and support outstanding doctoral students. A devoted academician, Dr. Howe was among the first women to be elected to the Academy of Leisure Sciences. At the time of her death, she was a professor in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at SUNY-Brockport.*



### Jonathan Rocha de Oliveira

*“To my eyes, this award means that the development and support for young scholars are taken seriously and the graduate students’ hard work to navigate through the academic and life challenges, is recognized by the community.”*

Jonathan is on track to finish his Ph.D. by May 2025 under the guidance of RST Assistant Professor Miki Sato. Jonathan plans a future career in higher education as a faculty member in the sport management field. Specifically, he wants to guide students as a teacher and advisor.

Currently, Jonathan is designing an innovative mixed-methods research project to better understand from the community lens in what ways college sports events can (or cannot) promote tangible and intangible outcomes to the residents of the Champaign-Urbana community. He presented 12 conference papers in the U.S., Europe and South America and has published 10 papers in international outlet journals in the fields of sport, leisure and tourism in collaboration with 10 scholars.

Jonathan was awarded the Best Conference Paper Award at the 16th ANPTUR Seminar (The Brazilian Association of Tourism Research) in 2019, and the Best Master’s Thesis Award on soccer and fandom rights from the Brazilian federal government. In his free time, Jonathan watches sports (soccer, basketball, football, volleyball, racing and combat sports) on TV but tries to attend games as much as he can.





## Jonathan Ruwuya

*“Being recognized for the hard work I have exhibited in the last one and a half years through the Christine Ziebarth Howe Graduate Award is a great honor. Receiving this scholarship award has profoundly impacted me by alleviating the financial concerns and challenges I have faced in pursuing a career in academia. I feel relieved and thankful, and the peace of mind enables me to fully focus and direct my efforts to enrich my education and pursue opportunities that will best prepare me for acquiring a job when I start my career.”*

Jonathan is on track to complete a Ph.D. in 2026 in RST under the guidance of Assistant Professor Julian Woolf. Jonathan said his goal is to be a faculty member with teaching and research responsibilities. He wants to influence the development of students to be the best version of themselves, academically and as individuals. As a researcher, Jonathan wants to contribute to knowledge creation by amplifying the voice of the Global South in academia, particularly from an African perspective.

As a graduate assistant in the Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism, Jonathan said he has gained experience associated with teaching and research. As a teaching assistant, he has conducted office hours, taught classes, graded exams and assignments and responded to students’ emails. He is currently a community aide with the University of Illinois Family and Graduate Housing.

In his limited spare time, Jonathan is passionate about music, particularly learning musical instruments. He taught himself to play the bass about eight years ago and enjoys playing. He took up running during the spring break of 2023 and also enjoys weight training.

## Mary and Duke Regnier Scholarship

The Mary and Duke Regnier Scholarship is presented to a student who demonstrates outstanding work, a need for financial assistance and a commitment to the leisure studies industry. Duke Regnier served as the first and only director of the Illinois Cooperative Extension Service, Rural Recreation Section. He is especially remembered for his warm and engaging personality and his innovative work in helping communities across Illinois plan for recreation programs.



### Sean Baptist

*“I am incredibly honored to have received the Mary and Duke Regnier Scholarship. This award is not only generous, it embodies the support and commitment that Illinois and its extended family give to all those who represent this great university. I am proud to represent Illinois and I am proud to have been chosen for this award.”*

Sean is working toward completion of his M.S. in RST by April of 2024 and aspires to manage a nonprofit, work for a city/state/federal agency creating public programs or special events or anything that can bring joy to the public.

For the past eight years, Sean has taught art and has created workforce development and college prep courses for public programs. He said he is most excited to conduct research on issues surrounding diversity and inclusion in recreation and sport industries.

Sean was part of the NYC Parks: Team of the Year Award in 2020 and 2021 for his role in citywide pandemic emergency response initiatives. Outside of public service, Sean is a freelance Illustrator and children’s book illustrator, and he loves to play guitar, go hiking, camping, snowboarding and riding a bike.



### Oswaldo Garcia Romero

*“Receiving this award means a lot to me from what I have been going through with my life recently. Financially speaking, this award gives me less stress moving forward with academics and is crucial to my daily studying life. I give thanks to all of the donors who help students like me, to get through college.”*

Oswaldo is working toward a master’s degree in RST and expects to graduate in December.

Upon graduation, Oswaldo wants to provide assistance to his family back in Chicago. In terms of professional work, Oswaldo wants to transition into tourism/outdoor recreation in which he works for organizations such as national parks or get into the management aspect of ecotourism.

Oswaldo started off as a football premium seating student worker and made his way working with the Illini football team department. He is currently working as a TA for RST 100 and also an intern at Irwin Academics.

In his spare time, Oswaldo enjoys going to park and going on walks, working out and being physically active.

## J. Robert and Linda L. Rossman Graduate Research Fund

The J. Robert and Linda L. Rossman Graduate Research Fund (for Graduate Student Research) supports graduate students within the Department of Recreation Sport and Tourism, specifically for their dissertation and thesis research. Preference is given to students researching the antecedents of recreation, sport and tourism experiences, the phenomenology of participating in them, and the short-term and long-term outcomes of them for individuals and society.



### Mina Woo

*“I feel grateful and honored to receive the support of friends and alumni of the department. I sincerely appreciate them believing in me and giving me this valuable award. As I will keep this gratitude in mind, I will move forward and pursue my career goal to make a return for the support.”*

Mina plans to complete her Ph.D. in RST in May 2024 and her goal is to be a professor and researcher in academia. She credits her advisor, RST Associate Professor Toni Lietchy, for learning how to apply the knowledge in conducting research and collaborating with other cohorts and faculty members. These valuable experiences, she said, motivate her to keep conducting research and contribute to practitioners with her findings and research.

One aspect of Mina’s research is about Korean middle-aged women’s sauna participation and sense of community. She presented a 30-minute paper at The Academy of Leisure Science Conference in February 2023 and plans to submit a manuscript from the study to Leisure Sciences this summer. She also has a manuscript about roller derby players and sense of community under review in *Journal of Leisure Research*.

Mina previously earned an RST Graduate Student Conference Travel Award, and in her free time, enjoys playing tennis with her husband and friends. She also enjoys walks in parks and watching dramas and movies.

# Allen V. Sapora Research Award for Ph.D. Student Research

*Dr. Sapora was one of the great leaders in the recreation and leisure movement. He devoted his professional life to preparing students as practitioners, researchers and educators in the field. This award recognizes outstanding student research at the doctoral level.*



## Hongzhi Hu

*“Receiving this award means a lot to me. It validates my hard work and inspires me to continue pursuing my goals and aspirations and make meaningful contributions. I am humbled and grateful for this recognition, and I hope to use this opportunity to inspire and empower my peers to achieve their dreams.”*

Hongzhi plans to graduate with a master’s degree in RST in May and is working on her master’s thesis in social media use and physical activity participation. Social media has been a part of the typical American college student’s life for more than a decade. Hongzhi’s thesis is meant to answer how college students’ use of social media impacts their participation in physical activity.

Hongzhi’s research interests revolve around exploring the relationship between social media use and physical activity participation. Specifically, she is interested in examining how social media platforms can be utilized

to promote physical activity and healthy behaviors among individuals. She also aims to investigate social media’s potential benefits and drawbacks in shaping physical activity behaviors, focusing on understanding the underlying mechanisms and factors that influence this relationship.

In her free time, Hongzhi loves to cook and experiment with new recipes and enjoys exploring the woods around Champaign-Urbana, searching for deer and other wildlife and appreciating the area’s natural beauty.



## Emma Lundin

Emma is on track to complete her doctoral studies by December 2025 under the tutelage of RST Assistant Professor Joelle Soulard. Emma has presented her work at the Travel and Tourism Research Association (TTRA) annual international conference, and the Emerging Voices for Animals in Tourism conference.

Emma is currently a URAP mentor, getting the opportunity to introduce an undergraduate student to research and mentor them in a semester-long study. Emma’s main research interests include relationships between humans and other animals in tourism contexts. Understanding tourism as a multispecies phenomenon, she uses more-than-human approaches to explore interspecies sustainability and learn with other animals, tourists and destination residents.

# Additional Recognition

## RST Student Advisory Council

Amalia Malecek

Andy Hou

Todd Marshall

Nate Beebe

Chris Wurl

Natalie Woch

Carson Bounds

Eubin Ham

Jorie Schirmacher

Natasha Plummer

Dylan Kosh

Emma Glennon

Isabella Clifford

Grace Lamoureaux

Colleen Oribello

## RST Graduate Student Conference Travel Awards

Juan Carlos Acevedo

Byron Juma

Kshitij Tewari

Leslie Camarillo

Latashia Key

Lance Warwick

Seung-Jin Ch

Emma Lundin

Darrien Watson

Xin Du

Shohgo Motoyama

Xingxing Wu

Rekha Janarthanan

Jazmin Pazmino

Xue Yan

Incheol Jang

Zack Russell

Hyunseo "Violet" Yoon

Wonjin Jeong

Jonathan Ruwuya

Jonathan Rocha De Oliveira

Jake Simms





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