2017 Patricia Lee Thompson Dissertation Award Announced

The Graduate College is pleased to announce that two WMU doctoral students have been named recipients of the Patricia Lee Thompson Dissertation Award for the 2017–18 academic year. The Patricia Lee Thompson Dissertation Awards are funded generously from Dr. Donald Thompson, former WMU vice president for research and dean of the Graduate College. Awards are given to assist recipients in all fields of study with expenses associated with the dissertation.

The 2017–18 Patricia L. Thompson Dissertation Award recipients:

Peggy Mansfield McNeal - Mallinson Institute for Science Education

Peggy Mansfield McNeal will receive the Patricia L. Thompson Dissertation Award for her dissertation titled, *Cognitive Processing in Atmospheric Science: An Investigation of the Forecasting Process*. Her dissertation advisor, Dr. Heather Petcovic, writes that Peggy has distinguished herself as an evolutionary researcher, not only within the Mallinson Institute, but also more broadly, in the field of earth science education. Peggy’s research “involves an interdisciplinary approach that blends cognitive science with atmospheric science education and explores the role of discrete intelligence abilities, knowledge, and expertise in weather forecasting.” At the present time, there are no best practices in place to teach weather forecasting to undergraduate students because, as Dr. Petcovic states, “we simply do not know what types of cognitive abilities are involved, or which abilities are more critical than others.” Peggy’s research is of special significance, for the act of predicting weather can help forecasters to warn populations of imminent danger. The primary purpose of her research is to impart an understanding of five discrete intelligence abilities on weather forecasting skill and to characterize the interplay between them. Peggy will also develop a qualitative process model that describes how individuals solve weather forecast problems. An awardee of the Joseph P. Stoltman Endowed Scholarship, Peggy is also the recipient of a Graduate Student Travel Grant, sponsored by the Graduate College. She has presented her work at the WMU Research and Creative Activities Poster and Performance Day, and at professional conferences.

Rebecca Straple – Department of English

Rebecca Straple will receive the Patricia L. Thompson Dissertation Award for her dissertation titled, *Movement and Meaning in Old English and Old Norse-Icelandic Literature*. Her dissertation advisor, Dr. Jana Schulman, writes that Rebecca’s research is “noteworthy” and that it will contribute to the “scholarship of Anglo-Saxon and Old Norse-Icelandic literature because of her interdisciplinary approach and application of kinesics [the study of bodily movement] to these literatures.” Rebecca’s excellence was recognized in the award of a prestigious grant to attend the 2017 Humanities Without Walls PreDoctoral Workshop. In addition, she has participated in eight conferences and also organized panels at the WMU International Congress on Medieval Studies. Moreover, she is the recipient of a Graduate College Graduate Student Travel Grant to present a paper at Leeds. Convinced of Rebecca’s organizational skills and exemplary work ethic, Dr. Schulman chose Rebecca to assist her in the administration of a
As part of this experience, Rebecca wrote a book chapter on digital resources for teaching *Beowulf*. Working within an established gap in the scholarship – one that recognizes that descriptions of bodily movements are less common in early medieval literature than in later medieval literature, Rebecca works within a broader definition of *movement* than that used in previous studies of gesture and movement in early medieval literature. She is currently conducting a comparative study of *how* and *when* bodily movement is depicted in Old English and Old Norse-Icelandic literature and then analyzes the possible communicative, symbolic, literary, social or cultural meanings of those movements.