STANDOUT STUDENT WINS PRESTIGIOUS GOLDWATER SCHOLARSHIP

STUDENT-ATHLETE KARA FERNER PLANS RESEARCH CAREER.

by Jim Hanchett | April 1, 2020

Above: Kara Ferner

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Kara Ferner has ambitious goals: teach at a major university, conduct experimental research in nuclear or particle physics, and harness technology to make solar power more cost-efficient. In recognition of her ability and determination, she has been named a Goldwater Scholar.

> The Goldwater Scholarship is widely considered to be the most prestigious award bestowed on undergraduates studying the sciences and engineering.

Ferner, from Wilmington, N.C., is a double-major in applied physics and computational and applied mathematics, with minors in computer science and leadership studies. She is a member of the Honors Program and the President's Leadership Program. Ferner also conducts research in nuclear physics at Jefferson Lab, maintains a perfect 4.0 GPA and plays on the women's tennis team.

"I am so thankful that the culture of Christopher Newport and all of the wonderful people here have allowed me to strive for more than I ever thought I could," Ferner said. "I am so honored for the recognition, and I am thrilled for the opportunities that are to come."

The Barry M. Goldwater Scholarship and Excellence in Education Program was established by Congress in 1986 to honor Senator Barry Goldwater. The program was designed to encourage outstanding students to pursue careers in mathematics, the natural sciences and engineering. For the complete list of 2020 recipients, visit goldwater.scholarsapply.org.

“We are thrilled about Kara’s selection as Goldwater Scholar. She certainly deserves it,” noted Dr. Anton Riedl, chair of the Department of Physics, Computer Science and Engineering. “Kara is an outstanding student who clearly displays the characteristics the Goldwater Foundation is seeking in its scholars, including intellectual intensity, a strong commitment to research in the natural sciences, and potential for significant future contributions to her chosen field. Based on everything I’ve seen so far, there is no doubt in my mind that she will have a successful career as a scientist, scholar and, hopefully, for the benefit of future generations, a teacher!”

Ferner says that after graduation, she plans to earn a PhD and pursue a research career aimed at improving technologies, including photovoltaics, that will solve some of the world’s most pressing problems.

Dr. Peter Monaghan is directing Ferner’s work at Jefferson Lab. This summer, she will continue her research there through a Department of Energy Science Undergraduate Laboratory Internship.

"Since starting research at Jefferson Lab with my group, Kara has grown in skills and knowledge, demonstrating an excellent ability to think and work independently,” Monaghan said. “The research experience at a national laboratory and the skills she is learning will serve her well for a career as a professional scientist. I have been very impressed by her dedication to her research efforts at Jefferson Lab and awards such as this for our undergraduate students underscores the importance of our connections with research facilities such as Jefferson Lab. Kara is a fantastic student and thoroughly deserving of this award."

“When I found out I was selected, it was such an incredible feeling to know that my hard work has paid off,” Ferner said. “More importantly, it is a testament to all of my mentors who continuously believe in me. Dr. Monaghan, Dr. Heddle, Dr. Dobrescu and Dr. Riedl helped me so much throughout the application process and pushed me to excel in my undergraduate career, and my tennis coach, Dave Weiner, has unwaveringly supported all of my academic goals.”

Ferner is the second Christopher Newport student to be named a Goldwater Scholar. Applied physics major Brook Byrd (‘17) earned the distinction in 2016.