2022 Iwanter Prize Winners Announced
The Award Recognizes Excellence in Undergraduate Humanities Scholarship

MADISON, Wis. (July 28, 2022) – Recent graduate Matthew Strupp (B.A. ’22, History) has received the 2022 Iwanter Prize for Undergraduate Research, an annual award administered by the University of Wisconsin-Madison’s Center for the Humanities. The $2,000 prize is given to a graduating senior who, through a senior thesis and general academic distinction, demonstrates outstanding humanities-based scholarship of a broad and interdisciplinary nature.

It was another competitive year for the Iwanter Prize with many compelling entries. The $500 Second Prize was awarded to Samantha Sharpe (B.A. ’22, History and Political Science) and the Honorable Mention was awarded to Angela Fraioli (B.A. ’22, Political Science and Vocal Performance).

The prize was established in 2000 by alumnus Sidney E. Iwanter (B.A. ’71, History), who said, “In this academic year featuring a landscape of such chaos and uncertainty, it is uplifting to witness such a continuing form of scholarship from these seniors.”

First Prize, Iwanter Prize for Undergraduate Research: Matthew Strupp

Matthew Strupp won the Iwanter Prize for his thesis, Where Lies the New Moment? Wang Hui and the Retreat From Class, which deals with the Chinese New Left, a group of thinkers who are critical of China’s market turn since the late 1970s. In the thesis, Strupp examines the work of Wang Hui, a leading thinker of the New Left. Strupp writes, “As a work of intellectual history, my thesis project is highly interdisciplinary. In addition to providing an overview of post-reform Chinese intellectual history, I also engage directly with the thought of Wang Hui on the level of political theory, exploring the merits and weaknesses of his intellectual project.”

The time frame of Strupp’s thesis is also interesting. Strupp writes that it, “Departs from the ordinary terrain of history in that it is highly contemporary.” For example, a section of his thesis is focused on developments in Chinese society and politics that have occurred since 2012; Strupp engages with Wang Hui’s approach to the Belt and Road Initiative, China’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and other matters of contemporary relevance. Strupp writes, “This “history of the present” tackles topics ordinarily dealt with by sociology and political science, but from a historical perspective.”

Viren Murthy, Associate Professor of History, guided Strupp’s work on his thesis. Murthy writes, “Mr. Strupp’s thesis deals with a difficult question: namely how are we to understand Wang’s thought today when the Chinese government itself is, at some level, returning to Mao’s thought and practice?” Murthy adds, “His senior thesis allowed Mr. Strupp to combine his interest in China with his concern about the future of socialist movements more generally. Given his diverse concerns, his work is genuinely interdisciplinary.”
Second Prize, Iwanter Prize for Undergraduate Research: Samantha Sharpe

Samantha Sharpe garnered the $500 Iwanter Second Prize for her thesis, A Jewish Cold War: The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee and American Jewish Organizations, 1941-1989. Sharpe’s thesis focused on the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee, which was created in the Soviet Union in 1941 to influence international public opinion and organize support for the Soviet fight against Nazi Germany. Two members of the committee were sent to the U.S. in 1943 to raise money for the Red Army from American Jews and to help heal divisions within the American Jewish community.

Sharpe writes, “While World War II was being fought halfway across the world, a Jewish Cold War was beginning to unfold on American soil. My thesis posits that the 1943 tour of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee deepened divisions in the American Jewish community, rather than bringing it together like it was meant to. At the center of this conflict was the question of which identity should take precedence during all of this—their American identity or their Jewish one.”

Sharpe’s interdisciplinary experiences have been greatly informed by her Political Science and Jewish Studies education. She writes, “Through the interdisciplinary experience of Jewish studies and history, I was gained a deeper perspective of what it meant to be an American Jew grappling with their identity during the Holocaust and through the Cold War.”

For her thesis, Sharpe worked under the guidance of Brandon Bloch, Assistant Professor of History. Bloch writes that Sharpe, “has produced a remarkable contribution to scholarship on American-Jewish history, the Cold War, and global Jewish politics in the twentieth century.” Bloch adds, “Rather than viewing American Jews as a monolith, Samantha shows how the community’s leaders espoused fundamentally opposed ideas of what it meant to be Jewish. Her thesis not only historicizes competing conceptions of Jewish identity that remain relevant today, but provides a framework for understanding how conflicts over identity can deepen political divides.”

Honorable Mention, Iwanter Prize for Undergraduate Research: Angela Fraioli

In her thesis, The Fatal Implications of Structural Design and Political Culture in New Democracies: The Polish Case, Fraioli examines the way in which structural and normative systems interact as they relate to the strength of a democratic state. She concludes that there is a direct relationship between the congruence of a state’s structural and normative systems, and that only when both of these systems are conducive to democracy is the state strengthened.

Fraioli writes, “I critically analyze the Polish state, beginning from the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth to the Third Polish Republic today, and I conclude
that Poland is a captured state. However, my definition of capture differs from that of the current scholarly conversation … I argue for the fatal implications of a new type of capture that cannot be categorized merely as ‘corruption.’”

Graduating with a BA in Political Science and Vocal Performance allowed Fraioli to spend “quite some time learning from all that the humanities have to offer.” She writes, “Much of my first few years of college were spent walking from Music Theory to Political Theory, and in those years, I gained a fierce love and reverence for interdisciplinary studies. I’ve always been a person who wants to find answers, to build solutions.”

For her thesis, Fraioli worked under the direction of Howard Schweber, Professor, Political Science and Affiliate Faculty, Law School, Legal Studies, and Integrated Liberal Studies. Schweber writes, “Angela has written a truly outstanding piece of work that combines multiple disciplinary approaches to present a persuasive analysis of an important question … Angela’s thesis is impressive for its promise; this is the work of a remarkably mature scholar given her age, and suggests great things to come.”

**About the Iwanter Prize**

The Iwanter Prize itself is about legacy and the passing of intellectual curiosity from one generation to another. The prize was established in 2000 by alumnus Sidney E. Iwanter (B.A. ’71, History), a native of the Greenbush neighborhood in Madison. While an undergraduate, Iwanter’s own curiosity and will to document the knowledge of the previous generation led him to secretly record the lectures of Professor of History and political activist Harvey Goldberg. In 2004, Iwanter generously donated these “bootlegs” to UW-Madison (the lectures are available from the Harvey Goldberg Center: goldberg.history.wisc.edu).

Iwanter, who now lives in Los Angeles, continues to support the undergraduate humanities and the love of learning at UW-Madison, stemming from his belief that, “A well-rounded humanities education is the keystone to an informed electorate and a healthy society.”

More information about the Iwanter Prize and past winners can be found at: [https://humanities.wisc.edu/research/iwanter-prize](https://humanities.wisc.edu/research/iwanter-prize)