Iwanter Prize Recognizes Excellence in Undergraduate Humanities Scholarship

MADISON, Wis. (July 28, 2020) – Recent graduate Adi Dina (B.A. ’20, English and Art History) has received the 2020 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.

The prize was established in 2000 by alumnus Sidney E. Iwanter (B.A.’71, History), who recently 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.”

Dina’s senior honors thesis, “Plastic Surveillance: Negotiating Digital Girlhood in the Work of Portia Munson, Julia Scher, and Juliana Huxtable”, forges a feminist critique of the contemporary politics of looking in the age of surveillance. Dina was inspired by how the overwhelming ubiquity of plastic works to proliferate the visual landscape of our digital surveillance age. Her thesis focuses on the work of contemporary feminist and trans-feminist artists Portia Munson, Julia Scher, and Juliana Huxtable.

Dina’s project confronts the way in which plastic is, itself, plastic. “This key word for both molding and flexibility has attached itself not only to material epistemology (i.e., plastic polymers), but also to plastic waste, plastic capitalism, plastic bodies, plastic surgery, plastic arts—to name just a key few,” Dina wrote.

At UW-Madison, Dina studied both art history and English, which, “provided me with an interdisciplinary and critical eye for both visual and literary culture,” she wrote. “Reading literature and studying visual culture has allowed me to engage in crucial conversations about identity as well as critical shifts in the contemporary moment such as climate change, digitization, and surveillance.”
Dina also served as the arts editor of the student-run publication, the *Illumination Journal*, and a journalist for *The Badger Herald*. This work has inspired Dina to consider graduate studies as well as other avenues through which to continue to research the racist and sexist effects of surveillance in the digital age to combat the increased polarization we see so often online today.

Recent graduate Alyson Long (B.A. '20, History) has garnered the $500 Honorable Mention prize for her senior honors thesis, *"Diaspora Politics: How the Lithuanian-American Community Sought American Support for an Independent Lithuania 1890-1950"*. In her thesis, Long compares the specific techniques that the Lithuanian-American community utilized to gain American support for Lithuania's independence between two periods: immediately post World War I (1918-1922) as well as during and post-World War II (1939-1950).

Through her research of the political material that the Lithuanian-American community published in these periods, Long found that this community presented the concept of the Lithuanian identity to the American public differently in each period, responding to the evolving ideas of race, international law, and self-determination for small nation-states that characterized this era. Her research traces the reasons for this difference in approach, highlighting how Lithuanian-American political activists adapted to both the changing political tides of the United States and values of the Lithuanian diaspora between 1890 and 1950.

At UW-Madison, Long studied international cultures as a history major and also received certificates in European Studies and French. “As I learned more about how culture and national identities have formed historically, I noticed that our definitions of national identity have been closely linked with the political tides of each historical era,” Long wrote. “I was very interested in studying this phenomenon in regard to Lithuanian culture and identity in particular, as my Lithuanian great-grandmother’s migration to the United States in the early twentieth century helped to inspire my interest in history more broadly.”
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