Dear ESF Community,

In recent years, approximately 12,000 researchers have competed for the prestigious NSF Graduate Research Fellowship and only 16 percent have been successful. In the 2020 cycle, 4 of those fellows have connections to ESF. Alumni Kelly Ann Jaenecke, Amy Dunbar-Wallis, and Rachel Czerwinski along with incoming graduate student Katy Newcomer. In addition, Sarah Dzielski, was named a fellow in 2018 and is currently doing research under Dr. Roxanne Razavi in EFB on effects of anthropogenic mercury pollution and land use change on avian health and diversity.

Currently, Katy is an invasive species scientist with the Smithsonian Environmental Research Center. In her position she looks for clues that will help to understand the patterns, processes, and consequences of invasions in aquatic ecosystems from local to global scales. Katy has been part of a team whose research encompasses a wide range of projects, exploring the ecology and management of coastal marine ecosystems. Scientists at the Smithsonian focus primarily on invasion dynamics, but also examine species interactions of both native and non-native species.

The NSF Fellowship Program provides three years of funding over the life of the graduate program and allows the student to spend the funds when and how they’re needed. While much research has been done on the bright and colorful coral reefs in Fiji, Katy will conduct surveys on other marine invertebrate animals in Fiji.

“These are the ‘ugly ducklings,’” said Katy, who will use skills she’s already honed to provide greater insights into the types of invertebrates living in coral reef ecosystems. “There is very little research to date, but a lot of research on the bright, colorful fish and coral species. I will be looking at the anemones and barnacles and crabs and the kinds of other animals that live among the coral reef and provide a lot of food and biogenic structure and habitat for other animals. And so they are an important part of the food web, but aren't studied as much as the more charismatic fish or coral.”

Being a recreational scuba diver, there is one class of marine invertebrates that are my favorites, and that is nudibranchs or sea slugs. As you can see they don’t fall under Katy’s category of ugly ducklings: https://ocean.si.edu/ocean-life/invertebrates/collage-nudibranch-colors

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value we bring to society and need for work that is conducted in our labs and fields, in particular by our great graduate students.

Sincerely,
Dave Amberg
Interim President