



VERONICA SINOTTE

FULBRIGHT ACADEMIC AWARD TO DENMARK

For Veronica Sinotte, childhood curiosities and dreams have indeed come true.

She'll take another big step toward realizing those dreams, which began when she was very young searching for critters under stones on walks around her hometown in North Wales, when she heads to the University of Copenhagen in Denmark to pursue a master's degree in biology, with a specialization in ecology, as a Fulbright student scholar. Her thesis will examine the disease recognition and subsequent behavioral responses of ants.

This pursuit will be carried out at the university's Centre for Social Evolution with Dr. Line Ugelvig and Dr. Jacobus J. Boomsma, renowned scientists whose studies of insects are well known in the field.

"I read Dr. Boomsma's papers," Sinotte said. In the field, "every person knows his name. It seems like a dream that now I have this opportunity to study there."

Sinotte reached this juncture in her career through two experiences at The University of Scranton, which reignited her childhood marvel of the world, its delicate environment, and the little creatures that roam within it. In her first year of undergraduate studies, a conversation with Marc Seid, Ph.D., assistant professor of biology at Scranton, piqued her interest in ants and insects. He has an "incredible energy and passion for what he studies," Sinotte said.

That summer, she earned the opportunity to be a Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute summer intern, accompanying scientists in their field work in a rainforest of Panama.

"It opened up this world that I thought I could never enter," Sinotte said, adding that it brought to life the experience of watching Discovery Channel shows when she was younger. "I had the amazing opportunity to live there all summer." She returned to the rainforest in 2015 as research assistant for the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute and then travelled to the California Academy of Science, San Francisco, California to conduct taxonomic research.

"Growing up, I was drawn to nature — the complexity of it, the questions it posed, the beauty of it," she said.

"That was revived when I was given these opportunities through The University of Scranton."

Sinotte will graduate in May as a double major in biology and philosophy, and as a member of both the University's Honors Program and the Special Jesuit Liberal Arts Honors Program. At commencement, she will

receive the University's Kathryn and Bernard Hyland Memorial Award for Excellence in Biology.

At the University, Sinotte conducted research on the social structure, immune responses, nervous system, and behavior of ants. She presented her research at several academic conferences and was a co-organizer of and presenter at the Social Insects of the Northeast Region Conference in 2015.

In addition, Sinotte has served as vice president of the ALS Awareness Club, member of the Sustainability Club, and intern in the Sustainability Office where she organized sustainability advocacy events on- and off-campus. In Denmark, Sinotte's studies in her field will expand and deepen. She will examine ant colonies and individual ant's disease defense and response and how that ties to social evolution and emerging disease dynamics. She is also interested in deepening her knowledge of the concept of sociality: human and non-human habits, behaviors and tendencies when assembled in communities.

"Ants are considered to be one of the highest social systems of living creatures on Earth," Sinotte said. These studies will greatly assist her next pursuit, earning a Ph.D. in evolutionary ecology, which she hopes leads to a position at a university where she can teach and conduct research.

But it's not only science she wants to explore in Denmark. Sinotte hopes to build international connections with her peers and be a part of Danish culture. She intends to create a series of art pieces that reveal ecological concepts, which will be shown at a cultural event in Copenhagen.

"Art is a universal language. These two views of the world, an artistic view, and a scientific view, are very important to me," Sinotte said.