

2015 Undergraduate Regents Scholar Award Nominee Statement – Kevin Omeed Tamadonfar

How would you assess your experience at UNLV academically and personally, and how has your UNLV experience, in the broadest sense, prepared you for achieving your future goals?

With my father being a professor at UNLV, I have essentially grown up on our campus. This has given me the opportunity to observe the university's efforts, challenges, and accomplishments over the past twenty years. UNLV has indeed developed into a quality research and teaching institution with great potentials for becoming a tier one university. This is why, despite graduating as a valedictorian from high school with numerous opportunities to leave the state, I decided to enroll at UNLV. I found the opportunities at UNLV to be taught by research professors and to gain meaningful academic and research experiences to be invaluable.

As a student, my experiences have been exceptionally positive. Academically, my classes in the life sciences have provided me with a deep understanding of current topics in my field. This understanding has been fostered by the opportunity to be taught by and interact with professors who conduct cutting-edge research in their fields, an opportunity which I would not have had in other universities. Personally, I have been able to conduct research on the microbial ecology of hot springs in Dr. Brian Hedlund's laboratory and, under his mentorship, I have been able to secure a number of undergraduate research grants and fellowships. Furthermore, I have been involved in a number of student organizations including AED and the Phi Kappa Phi chapter that have enabled me to partake in numerous community service projects which have been personally fulfilling. As the student vice president of Phi Kappa Phi, I have gained leadership skills and abilities through interactions with students, staff, faculty, and administrators across the campus.

My experience at UNLV has been further enriched by the Honors College. The College has provided me with a well-rounded, liberal arts education. Its seminars and functions create numerous opportunities to learn from capable faculty, caring administrators, and students across different disciplines. The College's nurturing and intellectually stimulating environment has not only offered me a unique learning environment but also has ensured my future success. During my medical school interviews I have noticed the positive impact of this college on my broader understanding of social issues and my ability to connect with my peers from other universities.

In the future, I will be continuing my education in graduate and professional school in order to enter a career in academic medicine. As evidenced in extensive interest in my application by some of the top medical schools in the country, UNLV has prepared me well to successfully pursue my future education. Access to advising in the Honors College and College of Sciences, particularly pre-medical advising by Dr. Joseph Nika, has been invaluable in allowing me to progress toward graduation while also positioning me for my future career. As a native Nevadan, I am grateful for the opportunities that UNLV has afforded me. This would not have been possible without the seemingly tireless efforts by dedicated staff, capable faculty, and thoughtful administrators.

NSHE 2015 Nevada Regents' Scholar Award Review Committee,

I am writing to express my appreciation for the academic and personal growth that I have experienced as a doctoral student at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. As the first biomechanics doctoral student in the Department of Kinesiology and Nutrition Sciences at UNLV I have been active in conducting and overseeing research in the UNLV Biomechanics Laboratory, located in the Sports Injury Research Center. As a result of my past and proposed research, under the supervision of Dr. Janet Dufek, the UNLV Graduate College has awarded me the UNLV Foundation President's Graduate Research Fellowship during a focused institutional initiative on the Path to Tier One Research University. Studying in a young doctoral program has provided several unique opportunities that have lead to tremendous growth in my time at UNLV. Experiences mentoring undergraduate student researchers during the 2012 & 2013 Institutional Development Award Network of Biomedical Research Excellence (INBRE) have offered invaluable preparation for continued research and university instruction.

As a doctoral student and researcher at UNLV, I have had the opportunity to build two independent research focuses, examining movement control strategies and the implications of movement pattern alterations. My primary line of research, including the topic of my doctoral dissertation, utilizes multivariate statistical techniques that evaluate potential causes of movement dysfunction and injury, which I believe are an important advancement in the field of biomechanics. In parallel to my primary area of research, I have had the opportunity to conduct investigations examining three-dimensional impact kinetics during running, for which I was fortunate to receive the Norman James Research Award at the 32<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of the Southwest Chapter of the American College of Sports Medicine. Additionally, my follow-up research proposal examining the role of footwear in moderating impact kinetics was awarded the New Balance ® Footwear Research Award. Balance between my outlined research tracks and the use of success from one project in building momentum in future projects has been rewarding and encouraging as a developing independent researcher. This approach demonstrates research growth and will serve as a strength in my pursuit of future research funding.

In addition to research and scholarly activity, I have been an active member of the Graduate & Professional Student Association, and Rebel Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math Academy. These experiences have been valuable in developing effective communication skills and promoting research at UNLV. Continued involvement in professional organizations, including international, national, and regional chapters of societies for biomechanics, sports medicine, neuroscience, motor control, and engineering further demonstrates my commitment to scholarly development. As I approach the completion of my doctoral studies, I am placed in a position for sustained productivity and future success. Collectively, I believe these experiences make me a suitable candidate for the 2015 Nevada Regents' Graduate Scholar Award.

Respectfully submitted,



Andrew D. Nordin, Ph.D. Candidate  
UNLV Foundation President's Graduate Research Fellow  
Department of Kinesiology and Nutrition Sciences  
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

## Biography for Regents' Scholar Award

Ivón Padilla-Rodríguez is a junior in the Honors Program at the University double majoring in history and philosophy of ethics, law, and politics with a minor in ethnic/Latino studies. Ivón is an advocate for the Latino community as a Legislative Affairs intern for Mi Familia Vota, the Executive Director of the UNR Latino Student Advisory Board, and an undergraduate researcher at UNR's Latino Research Center. She has lobbied for student and Latino immigrants' rights at the Nevada State Legislature and United States Congress, founded a scholarship mentoring initiative in the local school district for documented and undocumented first generation students, and completed grant-funded research on the impact of immigration reform on mixed-status Latino families in the U.S., which she presented to members of Congress in April of this year. Her research today involves working towards completing her honors thesis on the impact U.S. military intervention in Central America had on the immigration of unaccompanied child migrants to the U.S. She is also coauthoring a book about undocumented youth with the Director of the Latino Research Center, Dr. Emma Sepúlveda. Ivón co-founded a youth theatre program called Spotlight: Academy for Young Actors at a non-profit theatre and secured partnerships to teach at-risk Latino youth in the U.S., Mexico, Costa Rica, Cuba, and Chile. She studied abroad while in Costa Rica and Cuba on USAC programs. In Chile, she interned for the National Congress of Chile where she conducted research on Chilean immigration policy and attended an international conference on the rights immigrants. Inspired by her experiences at the state, national, and international level, she is currently planning the state's inaugural "Nevada Latino Leadership Conference" to be held in April of 2015 at the University of Nevada, Reno. She is our University's sixth Truman Scholar, was named a "2014 Top Ten College Woman" by *Glamour* magazine, and is a grand-prize winner (\$100,000) and spokesperson of the Dr Pepper Tuition Giveaway.

## **Augustus Merwin**

Gus has a BS in Physics (2011) and MS in Materials Science and Engineering (2012) and is expected to get his PhD sometime in 2015. He obtained his MS degree in a record 1 year. **His GPA is 3.942.** Gus is currently a prestigious **UNR- Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) Fellow** – only 5 students have been awarded these prestigious fellowships. He **already has 6 peer-reviewed publications in international journals and further 2 more under review.** He also has several proceedings articles, oral and poster presentations to his credit.



NEVADA STATE  
COLLEGE

Kristina Mehaffey grew up in the suburbs of Atlanta, GA where she earned a B.B.A. in Economics from Kennesaw State University. While living in Georgia, she married John, her husband of 12 years, and her son was born. They moved to Rapid City, South Dakota to pursue a business opportunity. Her daughter was also born there. She became involved in her son's Cub Scout Pack. While volunteering as a leader for her son's Cub Scouts, she found that she was able to make an impact on the lives of the boys in the pack.

In 2010, they moved to Las Vegas where she continues to be involved in her son's Boy Scouts and is a leader for her daughter's Girl Scout Troop. Working with her children has inspired her to go back to school to become a math teacher. Kristina is currently working on a B.S in Secondary Education with a Concentration in Mathematics at Nevada State College. She helped with the Nepantla Summer Bridge Program in its inaugural year. Kristina is a mathematics tutor for the Academic Success Center and a math redesign student worker. She plans on teaching math at the middle school level upon graduating and furthering her education by earning a Masters in Mathematical Sciences. Her hobbies include reading, puzzles, cross-stitching, camping, and watching football.

## Biography

I started attending the College of Southern Nevada in the fall of 2011, and I have been a member of Phi Theta Kappa since the fall of 2012. I am currently majoring in Elementary Education. I believe that a better future starts with a better education. I am planning to go to Nevada State College to receive my Bachelors' Degree. My long term goal is to receive my Doctorate Degree in Education because it is something that I am very passionate about.



On September 25, 2014, Trehixi served on a panel for the President's Forum on Hispanic Heritage Month in a discussion related to STEM along with (pictured left to right) Dean Patricia Castro and Vice Chancellor Marcia Turner. (Dr. Michael Richards on the right).



### Biography for Norah Lusk

November 12, 2014

Norah Lusk is a second year nursing student at Great Basin College (GBC) and upon completion of her Associate's Degree in Nursing, she will be attending GBC for the completion of her Bachelor's Degree in Nursing. She has continued to earn high marks in all her classes while attended GBC and has recently been notified of her placement on the Dean's List. Norah also belongs to the International Honor Society and hopes to continue this distinction throughout her studies at GBC. Lastly, Norah is currently holding the office of NSNA Liaison for the Student Nurses Organization (SNO) and has received an application to run for national office in the spring. She attended the NSNA Mid-Year Conference where she completed the American Red Cross training and certification for disaster preparedness and shelter operations.

As an officer of SNO Norah has assisted in many events such as last year's pinning ceremony. She was also on the activities committee for the 5k run over the summer as well as the pumpkin festival and Trick or Treat Street. She has also volunteered at the NNRH annual health fair and screening. She is currently an assistant coach for a 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade girls' basketball team through the local chapter of P.A.L.S.

Upon completion of her BSN, through GBC, she will be applying to the Forensic Nursing Certificate Program through Penn State and then work towards her Masters in Nursing through Boston College. It is her ultimate goal to bring a victim services or battered women and children center to Elko. This area is in great need of victim services and she is hopeful to begin a career which will eventually lead her to this fruition of this goal.

Norah is currently thirty-eight years old has three children with her husband of fifteen years. They have been a wonderful support system for her and she is proud to exemplify that their dreams are attainable through hard work and determination. Norah works part time at NNRH as an apprentice nurse in the ICU. Balancing family, work, and school has been a welcomed challenge, however, college is financially draining and she hopes to relieve some of this burden through earned scholarships.

Norah is hopeful to see her future goals met as well as continue to be a role model for her children and family. She is excited to finish her second year of nursing school and is ready to begin her BSN here at GBC. Thank you for her consideration for this scholarship. Norah is grateful for the opportunity to advance her education.

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## **Ryan Gerchman Biography**

Ryan Gerchman was born in Reno, and spent his childhood in Nevada and in rural Pennsylvania. He enlisted in the United States Marine Corps in 2002, serving as a Landing Support Specialist, a position that requires excellent math, computer, and communications skills as well as a thorough knowledge of transportation, logistics, storage, and security. His excellent work there earned him a promotion to Corporal and transfer to the 26<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit, where he supervised 16 Marines and mentored them to improve their performance. While in Okinawa, Ryan became immersed in Japanese culture and broadened his horizons. He then deployed to Iraq to provide logistical support for his unit's operations. He received his Honorable Discharge in 2006 and returned to Pennsylvania to work and be near his family. In 2009, his younger brother Brian was involved in a motor vehicle accident that left him in a coma for thirty-eight days. Ryan took FMLA leave from work and stayed at his brother's side continuously, sleeping in the hospital waiting room and living out of his backpack. During his long vigil, Ryan decided that if his brother died, he would re-enlist in the Marine Corps, but if by some miracle his brother recovered, Ryan would devote his life to getting an education and helping those who were suffering.

Brian recovered from his coma, but remained blind and quadriplegic. After regaining his ability to speak, he encouraged Ryan to follow his dream and head back to Nevada. Ryan returned to Reno, enrolled at TMCC, and has worked toward his Associates of Science degree while engaging in extensive community service, from organizing large events to serving meals to the homeless at the Reno-Sparks Gospel Mission. He plans to graduate this year and transfer to UNR, where he will continue his education and his service to others as he pursues his goal to fulfill the responsibility he has to his brother, family, and fellow human beings to fulfill all of his vast potential and to be grateful for all the experience he has gained along the way.





## About Me:

My name is Robyn Openshaw and I was born and raised in Fallon, NV. I am twenty years old and throughout my life I have been actively involved in my community; I believe that in order to achieve personal growth, people must be connected to their communities for the well-being of themselves and others. In High School I participated in many school groups that included Honor Society, Student Council, JV and Varsity Softball, and the National FFA Organization. All of these activities were extremely important to me and helped in the shaping of my personality and development of skills, especially those involving leadership. In my senior year I also worked as an Intern for the Fallon Chamber of Commerce, an experience that has proved to be an invaluable part of my life.

My first year of college I spent in Santa Barbara, CA continuing my studies and playing softball at the Santa Barbara Community College. This was an important event in my life, for many reasons. It taught me how to be self-reliant and the importance of seeing from the perspective of others (and I have learned that perspectives are greatly varied from region to region). The most important lesson, however, was the realization that sometimes what a person thinks they need in their life isn't what they need at all. For me, I learned that I didn't need to move to a big city to better myself, and I didn't need to leave behind my experiences in Fallon. After a year in California, I moved back to Nevada to be closer to my family and the town that has always taken care of me.

I am now connected to the community on many levels. I am on the Board of Directors for the Chamber of Commerce, as well as the Fallon Downtown Merchants Association. I am furthering my studies at Western Nevada College, with plans to transfer to UNR next year, in the hopes of becoming involved in politics on both a local and state level, so that I may give back to my community and the people in it. I am passionate about my goals and do not plan on stopping till they have been achieved, no matter how long it takes me or how hard I have to work.