

2016 Whiting Indigenous Knowledge Research Award Winners

The Interinstitutional Center for Indigenous Knowledge is pleased to announce the 2016 Whiting Endowment winners. This year, the winners are Sarah Eissler, a PhD candidate at Penn State; Annie Marcinek, an MS candidate at Penn State; and Narmadha Senanayake, a PhD candidate at Penn State. The winners will present their research findings and/or project results at a fall 2016 or spring 2017 ICIK seminar. They will also write an article highlighting the indigenous knowledge aspects of their projects for publication in the ICIK journal *IK: Other Ways of Knowing*.

Each year, Penn State graduate and undergraduate students are invited to submit proposals to conduct research funded by the Whiting Endowment. The Whiting Endowment for the Advancement of Indigenous Knowledge at Penn State was created in 2008 with a gift of \$50,000 from the Marjorie Grant Whiting Center for Humanity, Arts, and the Environment. In 2009, The Whiting Center increased the endowment to \$100,000. The endowment was transferred from the College of Agricultural Sciences to the Penn State University Libraries in 2014. The funds from the endowment may be used to enhance indigenous knowledge at Penn State by supporting activities that include developing interdisciplinary courses, funding indigenous knowledge-related research, education and outreach efforts of faculty and students, and supporting visiting scholars and lecturers. The endowment has also funded the Student Indigenous Knowledge Research Awards. These awards are open to full-time Penn State undergraduate and graduate students at any Penn State campus, including the World Campus.

You can learn more about applying for [the Whiting Indigenous Knowledge Student Research Awards by visiting our website](#), or [you can view past winners](#).

This year, the winners' research projects will be:



Sarah Eissler, PhD Candidate, Department of Agricultural Economics, Sociology, and Education, Penn State

Title: Investigating Gender Dimensions in Response to Climate Change: A Mixed Methods Approach on Smallholder Cacao Farms in South Sulawesi, Indonesia

Abstract: Women are often excluded from climate change discourse; they are disproportionately impacted by climate change, yet they are often viewed as vulnerable beneficiaries rather than capable change agents. Women play a critical role in natural resource management and have a unique understanding of the natural resources around them. In Indonesia, women and men are both actively engaged in smallholder cacao production; however, women here are marginalized from participating in decision and policy-making. This project aims to investigate the gender dimensions of the impacts of climate change in smallholder cacao production in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Utilizing a mixed-methodological approach, this project will capture the voices and knowledge of local cacao farmers and communities, particularly those of women. This data will then be brought to larger development projects implementing climate-smart agricultural (CSA) practices for the purpose of building household and farm resilience to climate change, as well as to the broader international development community.



Annie Marcinek, MS Candidate, Department of Recreation, Park, and Tourism Management, Penn State

Title: Extracting from the Rainforest: Indigeneity and Ecotourism in the Ecuadorian Amazon

Abstract: Several indigenous communities in the Napo Province of the Ecuadorian Amazon have turned to ecotourism as an alternative, sustainable development strategy in the face of harmful extractive industries, namely oil. The literature suggests that new income proves insufficient for true sustainable development of indigenous communities. The purpose of this ethnographic field study is to better understand the interaction of indigenous knowledge and new forms of tourism-related knowledge within three projects located in the Napo Province of the

Ecuadorian Amazon. Opportunities to participate in management, decision-making, and, ideally, ownership of tourism projects are explored as a means to extract meaningful environmental, social, and economic benefits from ecotourism among local indigenous communities in this biodiverse area of the planet.



**Narmadha (Nari) Senanayake, PhD Candidate,
Department of Geography, Penn State**

Title: Cultivating Health in Landscapes of Uncertainty:
Mystery Kidney Disease and the Return of Native Seed in
Dry Zone Sri Lanka

Abstract: Since the first reports of a mysterious form of Chronic Kidney Disease (CKDu) emerged in the early 1990s, Sri Lanka's dry zone has become the epicenter of an epidemic that is slowly crippling the island's rice belt. While the disease's etiology is the subject of scientific debate, narratives that link CKDu to the agrarian landscape captivate the popular imagination and influence farmers' cultivation practices, albeit in uneven, haphazard, and poorly understood ways. The proposed project examines the following: how ideas about the environment and its link to diseases are formed, reinforced, and circulated; how farmers' cultivation practices are changing in response to the problem of CKDu, particularly through the repatriation of native seeds and the return of indigenous cultivation techniques; and how relationships between indigenous knowledge, health, and agricultural modernization in the dry zone have changed over time and continually shape the dry zone's positioning vis-à-vis the Sri Lankan state. Findings of this research will provide new insights into the driving forces and consequences of agrarian transformation in dry zone Sri Lanka while also informing emerging scholarship within geography and the social sciences on indigenous knowledge and, health, and environmental interactions.