



PRESS RELEASE

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Winners of 2025 CGS/ProQuest Distinguished Dissertation Awards Announced

Awards recognize outstanding research by graduates in Pathology and Anthropology

Washington, DC – Today the Council of Graduate Schools and ProQuest™, part of Clarivate™, presented the Distinguished Dissertation Awards to Yu Fan (Peter) Zeng and Dusti Cheyenne Bridges during an award ceremony held at CGS's 65th Annual Meeting in Washington, D.C. Since 1982, the awards have recognized doctoral recipients who have made significant and original contributions to their fields.

Zeng, who is completing his MD/PhD at Western University, received the 2025 award in Biology/Life Sciences for his dissertation, *One Patient to Hundreds: Molecular Portraits of Common and Rare Diseases in the Head and Neck*. His thesis focuses on three diseases in detail at the molecular level: human papillomavirus associated-opharyngeal cancer, idiopathic subglottic stenosis, and anaplastic thyroid cancer. He developed a biomarker that may allow clinicians to identify human papillomavirus-driven oropharyngeal cancer patients at low, medium, or high risk of relapse. He also identified cells driving idiopathic subglottic stenosis, catalogued changes in the DNA of tumor cells that lead to the development of lethal anaplastic thyroid cancer, and identified a drug that anaplastic thyroid cancer cells are vulnerable to. Together, his work has uncovered important mechanisms governing the development of diseases in the head and neck and provided important groundwork for future investigations in the lab and clinic.

Bridges, who graduated in May from Cornell University, received the 2025 award in the humanities for her dissertation *United With Them in Good Feeling and Friendship": (Re)lating Archaeological Belongings, Colonialist Histories, and Incorporated Peoples Among the Onöndowa'ga:' Hodinöhsö:ni'*. Bridges' dissertation combines Anthropology, Archaeology, and Indigenous Studies to challenge long-standing settler narratives that portray the incorporation of outsider individuals and groups into the Onöndowa'ga:' (Seneca) Nation of the Hodinöhsö:ni' (Six Nations or Iroquois) Confederacy during the 1630-1715 CE period. Using overlooked archaeological collections, specifically, hair combs carved from antler, the author reexamines 17th- and 18th-century Onöndowa'ga:' Hodinöhsö:ni' sites to separate Indigenous histories from colonial assumptions of decline. By analyzing patterns of activity across several generations of settlements, Bridges argues that incorporated peoples were integrated through a cooperative process of kin-making and placemaking, not enslavement. Along with critical assessment of historical scholarship and engagement with the descendants of these communities, Bridges' methodologies offer a means of (re)lating belongings to past and present communities.

Chevelle Newsome, CGS President, praised the accomplishments of Zeng and Bridges and said they represent the best of graduate education and research.

"The research by Peter and Dusti demonstrates an extraordinary level of insight and commitment to forward-thinking scholarship," Newsome said. "We are proud to honor their contributions, which not only advance their fields but also model the ethical, community-centered research our institutions strive to champion."

Kamran Siddiqui, Vice-Provost, School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies, Western University, said Zeng exemplifies the very best of graduate research, scholarship, and creative activity.

"Peter Zeng's innovative dissertation has advanced our fundamental understanding of complex head and neck diseases, and his research is leading to real-world solutions to improve patient care," Siddiqui said. "Peter's intellectual rigor, leadership, and collaborative spirit set an exceptional benchmark for doctoral research excellence."

Thomas A. Lewis, Dean of the Graduate School and Vice Provost for Graduate Education, Cornell University, said that Bridges stood out as a nominee because of the depth of her archival and archaeological research and her strong ethical commitment to ensuring the knowledge generated by her work directly serves contemporary Onöndowa'ga:' (Seneca) communities.

"Dr. Bridges' dissertation reshapes long-held assumptions by centering Hodinöhsö:ni' perspectives to demonstrate that outsiders were not enslaved, as conventional narratives claim, but were incorporated into a web of community relationships with their Onöndowa'ga:' hosts over time. By showing that relational frameworks, not coercion, structured these encounters, her work reveals forms of cooperation and mutual adaptation long overlooked by limited traditional histories," Lewis said.

"ProQuest™ is proud to stand with CGS to support the outstanding recipients of this year's Distinguished Dissertation Awards competition. This competition gives us the opportunity to celebrate the insights that Dr. Bridges and Dr. Zeng have contributed to their fields and to the scholarly corpus. We congratulate them on this enormous achievement and look forward to seeing what they each do next," said Austin McLean, Senior Director of Partnerships, ProQuest.

ProQuest™, part of Clarivate™ – whose ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (PQDT) features more than 6 million dissertations and theses from across the globe– sponsors the awards, while an independent committee from the Council of Graduate Schools selects the winners. Two awards are given each year, rotating among four general areas of scholarship. The winners receive a certificate of recognition, a \$2,000 honorarium, and a travel stipend to attend the awards ceremony at CGS's Annual Meeting.

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About CGS

The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) is an organization of approximately 460 institutions of higher education in the United States and Canada engaged in graduate education, research, and the preparation of candidates for advanced degrees. The organization's mission is to improve and advance graduate education, which it accomplishes through advocacy in the federal policy arena, research, and the development and dissemination of best practices.