

## Top grad students earn gold medals

June 09, 2011

ValyearKen Valyear is quick to say he isn't a scientific whiz kid or boy wonder. But his curiosity, determination and strong work ethic have paid off, earning him the Governor General's Gold Medal.

Valyear, who completed his PhD in Neuroscience in the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry, and Chris Bundock, who completed his PhD in the Department of English, were selected as the two Governor General's Gold Medal recipients as graduate students with the highest academic standing. The pair will be presented the medals during The University of Western Ontario's convocation week, June 13-17.

"This kind of recognition means a great deal to me. I am truly honoured. It makes me appreciate just how fortunate I am, for many things in my life," Valyear says. "Many aspects of the process do not come easily for me. Each day is a real grind, and steps forward are often numbly slow.

"But, I seem to have a genuine driving interest deep down, my inner nerdy self I guess, and this is what keeps me at it," he continues. "I suppose the constant challenges of research are also what makes this career choice great – as scientists we are always challenged and always learning, and there will never be a stop to that."

Each faculty submits a nomination to the School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies and these are evaluated based on: graduating with a grade of 85 per cent or higher; academic performance in degree courses; seminar performance; evaluation of the thesis and thesis defense; originality and significance of research; and appraisal of other requirements for the degree.

While the program is nationwide, Western distributes two medals each year on behalf of the Governor General. The medals are not associated with any monetary award.

Lord Dufferin, Canada's third Governor General after Confederation, created the academic medals in 1873 to recognize outstanding scholastic achievements.

Valyear is currently completing postdoctoral research at the University of Oregon with Scott Frey, a cognitive neuroscientist Valyear has followed closely throughout his academic career.

He credits the support of the departments of Psychology and Neuroscience and the world-leading scientific investigators in these areas for his success. During his studies he worked alongside Jody Culham, associate professor of psychology, who later became his advisor, and Mel Goodale, director of the Centre for Brain and Mind.

"To be surrounded by such brilliant minds, it brings out the best in someone," he says. "I think it's a real special place to be for neuroscience."

As well, he sees the opportunities to travel and attend and participate in international conferences as valuable experiences for young researchers.

BundockLikewise, Bundock is humbled to know multiple people at different levels of the faculty advocated for him to be awarded the medal.

“It’s really nice,” he says of the recognition. “When I first came to Western, the Centre for Theory and Criticism was the reason I came to do a master’s degree there. It is unlike really anything else in Canada.”

To expand his knowledge of literature, Bundock decided to complete a master’s degree in English and later pursued a PhD in the subject.

“Having that extra couple of years to live with some books and to gain a certain kind of comfort with some writers is hugely important for getting through the dissertation in a timely fashion,” he says.

Bundock was one of the key organizers for the international conference on Romanticism & Evolution held at Western in May. He is currently a postdoctoral student at Duke University.

“I truly was a bit surprised with a university this large to find a group of like-minded people who are not just professionally supportive, but actually personally supportive,” Bundock says. “The personal connections and the sense people you work with actually care about you is not just something that happens at community colleges, but I definitely felt that at Western.”