

Schnitzer receives NSF Early CAREER Award

By Laura L. Hunt



Marcos Guerra

Associate Professor Stefan Schnitzer is the first faculty member in Biological Sciences to be awarded the CAREER grant, the National Science Foundation's most prestigious grant for younger researchers.

Stefan Schnitzer, associate professor of biological sciences, has received an Early Career Development (CAREER) Award from the National Science Foundation (NSF). The \$890,000 award will support Schnitzer's investigation into the mechanisms that control plant abundance and distribution in tropical forests.

The amount of the award is unusually large for such NSF funding in ecology research. It also is the first CAREER Award for a faculty member in biological sciences at UWM.

CAREER Awards are the NSF's most prestigious grants for younger researchers. They support the professional development of teacher-scholars who are most likely to become the academic leaders of this century.

Schnitzer will use the funding to test what he calls "the 'dry season advantage hypothesis,'" which holds that many plants in tropical forests thrive during seasonal droughts because they keep growing, while trees and competing plant species suspend their growth and lose their leaves.

"We contrast this with the 'tolerance hypothesis,'" says Schnitzer, "which states that organisms are abundant in seasonal forests because of their ability to tolerate a stressful environment. But we contend they gain no additional growth advantage in this scenario."

Honorary degree nominations due Oct. 26

The UWM Honorary Degrees Committee invites nominations of candidates for honorary degrees to be awarded by the university in 2010.

While there is often a supreme achievement for which a candidate is best known, an honorary degree is not given in recognition of a single deed. Special attention is paid to evidence regarding the sum and distinction of the individual's professional achievements and personal integrity, as well as the range, substance and value of the nominee's outreach activities.

This research primarily will be done in forest plots along a steep rainfall gradient across the Isthmus of Panama. The tropical forests Schnitzer studies have distinct wet and dry seasons, which is typical of most of the lowland tropical forests throughout the world.

Schnitzer believes the dry season advantage is best exhibited by lianas – woody vines that concentrate their energy on extending high and wide, and by plunging their roots deep into the earth.

These vines are more prevalent in forests that have less rainfall, and there is growing evidence that they are becoming more populous in seasonal forests. By tapping deep sources of water, lianas can capitalize on available dry-season resources, particularly light.

This study, however, is not limited to lianas, says Schnitzer, and may also explain the dominance of particular tree species in seasonal forests.

Schnitzer joined the UWM faculty in 2003. He earned a Ph.D. in Ecology and Evolution at the University of Pittsburgh in 2001, after which he was appointed a research associate at Wageningen University in the Netherlands.

Hear Schnitzer explain his work with lianas on this video produced by the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute in Panama, where he also is a research associate: youtube.com/watch?v=bIji0VuISWY.

The committee strongly recommends that special attention be given to nominating women and minority candidates.

Individuals or departments can recommend candidates. Recommendations must be endorsed by a formal academic department or a nondepartmentalized school or college and signed by the appropriate dean.

The nomination form and additional information, including important confidentiality information, are available at uwm.edu/Dept/SecU/hondeg/nom_form.html.

INSTITUTE ON RACE AND ETHNICITY SUPPORT GRANTS

The University of Wisconsin System Institute on Race and Ethnicity (IRE) are awarded seven Support Grants for FY 2009-10 to UW-Milwaukee faculty.

Category A Research Grants support scholarly research on race, ethnicity, diversity, inclusivity and/or equity by University of Wisconsin System faculty and academic staff, and were awarded to four:

Arjit Sen, Department of Architecture, for "Creative Dissonance: The Politics of Immigrant World Making."

Jennifer Mueller, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, for "Effectively Preparing Teachers for Equity and Diversity in Urban Schools."

Erin Winkler, Department of Africology, for "Racism as a Threshold Topic: Assessing Student Learning Outcomes in a University 'Diversity Requirement' Course."

Rachel Ida Buff, Department of History/Comparative Ethnic Studies, for "Deportation Policy and the Transnational Politics of Community."

Faculty Diversity Research Awards are designed to provide released time and research support for tenure-track members on UW System campuses. An award serves to free the individual from all teaching responsibilities and additional service responsibilities for either a fall or spring semester. Awardees at UWM are:

Lucy Mkandawire, College of Nursing, for "Violence in the Lives of HIV-Infected Women: A Critical Ethnography."

Sandra Jones, Department of Africology, for "Research in African American Literacies."

Markeda Newell, Department of Educational Psychology, for "Analyzing the Implementation of Problem-Solving Consultation in a Computer-Stimulated, Diverse School Setting."

For more information on IRE grants, contact Thomas Tonnesen, associate director, UW System Institute on Race and Ethnicity, 414 229-4700 or tonnesen@uwm.edu.