



MEDIA RELEASE

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U Student Awarded Fulbright Scholarship

Focus on Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Military Vets Inspired by Father

April 28, 2008 -- Lynnette Averill, a Ph.D. student at the University of Utah studying counseling psychology, will take her work to Melbourne, Australia for a year beginning this fall, funded as a Fulbright Scholar.

The intensely competitive award, worth nearly \$30,000 including travel, will help support her continuing research on posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Averill's interest in PTSD stems from her father, a Marine Corps veteran of the Vietnam War who was diagnosed with the disorder, and took his own life as a result when Averill was a child. She has been involved in research and clinical work at the Salt Lake Veteran's Affairs Medical Center for the past four years.

Her research in Melbourne will explore the relationship between PTSD and alcohol use in Australian military veterans. This research will provide important information for improved treatment protocols for veterans across the globe.

Averill will be studying at the Australian Centre of Posttraumatic Mental Health at the University of Melbourne beginning in August. The Centre is an internationally renowned research facility recognized for its pioneering influence on the field of PTSD through efforts to increase awareness and refine treatment strategies for veterans in Australia and around the world.

"The relationship and trajectory of change between PTSD and alcohol use among military veterans is a topic that has been largely neglected for quite some time," said Averill. "Given its high

prevalence, serious consequences and the current climate with regards to the war in Iraq, careful examination and further exploration are crucial.”

Recent estimates suggest 17 percent or more of American military returning from Iraq will develop PTSD, generalized anxiety disorder, or depression, a rate that is twice the percentage among soldiers prior to being sent overseas and four times that of civilian populations.

“Additionally, a significant percentage of homeless across the world are veterans and this number is continuing to increase as veterans are returning from Iraq. Many of their problems are related to PTSD and substance use. This work will increase our collective understanding of the relationship of substance use and PTSD and provide an opportunity to make substantial advancements in treatment protocols for intervention and prevention strategies among individuals with PTSD,” Averill concluded.

PTSD is a psychiatric condition characterized by symptoms that includes reliving the traumatic experience, emotional numbing and avoiding thinking or talking about the past. Individuals with PTSD often experience depression, anxiety, social phobia, substance abuse and dependence. The U.S. National Center for PTSD reports that as many as 80 percent of veterans with PTSD struggle with alcohol abuse or dependence.

Averill has been recognized before for her research, leadership and service to promote awareness and understanding of serious issues like PTSD. She currently serves as vice chair of the student section for the International Society of Traumatic Studies; received the University of Utah Founder’s Day Scholarship in 2008, the Steffensen Cannon Scholarship in 2006 and 2007 and the Outstanding Student Humanitarian Award from the Utah Campus Compact in 2005.

Averill is one of 13 American students selected to continue their studies in Australia under the auspices of the prestigious Fulbright program, the largest educational scholarship of its kind. This program was created by U.S. Senator J. William Fulbright and the U.S. Government in 1946 and aims at promoting mutual understanding through educational exchange. It operates between the U.S. and 150 countries.

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