

Lake awarded prestigious Thatcher prize

By Staff

(May 13, 2013) Dr. Samuel Joseph Lake, who recently earned his Ph.D. degree from the Virginia Institute of Marine Science, was awarded the 2013 Thatcher Prize for Excellence in Graduate and Professional Study during William & Mary's commencement ceremony on Sunday.

The Thatcher Prize, the highest award for a graduate or professional student at William & Mary, was created in 2000 in honor of W&M's 21st Chancellor, Margaret, The Lady Thatcher, who died this past April 8.

Lake was recognized for his exemplary blend of scholarship, character, leadership, and service, which made him a rising star in the field of marine ecology long before he defended his dissertation in William & Mary's School of Marine Science at VIMS in April. He has made outstanding contributions to every facet of VIMS' three-pronged mission— research, education, and advisory service.

A marine ecologist, Lake is dedicated to the balance between traditional fieldwork and cutting-edge computer modeling. His adviser, VIMS Professor Mark Brush, describes Lake's doctoral research as "comprehensive, interdisciplinary, and novel," focusing on the scientific understanding and societal implications of low-oxygen "dead zones" in coastal waters. One chapter of his dissertation has been published and another is under review by leading journals. His work has been showcased at numerous national and regional conferences.

Lake's passion as a scientist also involves teaching. He twice served—to rave reviews—as a teaching assistant for a field-intensive course taken by all new VIMS students. He was twice awarded a prestigious GK-12 Fellowship from the National Science Foundation to teach high school in Yorktown, and emerged as a leader and role model for other fellows. His students achieved a 99-percent pass rate on Virginia's Standards of Learning exam in Earth Science. With other fellows, Sam implemented a "Draw a Scientist" program, tracking students' perceptions of scientists. The program has been featured at national conferences and by the media.

In addition to research and teaching, Lake has been a leader in the VIMS community, serving as treasurer of the VIMS Graduate Student Association and president of the VIMS Sail and Paddle Club. He has been a frequent participant in VIMS' annual Marine Science Day, helped organize the Institute's first-ever Pi Day celebration in 2012, and spoke about graduate-student concerns with Virginia Education Secretary Laura Fornash during her visit to VIMS.



VIMS graduate student Dr. Sam Lake (R) receives the Thatcher Prize from W&M President Taylor Reveley during the commencement ceremony on May 12.

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Outside of VIMS, Lake has served as a mentor for teachers at a NASA Langley workshop to enhance STEM education, and on committees of the international Coastal and Estuarine Research Federation and the Atlantic Estuarine Research Society.

No stranger to awards, Lake was honored in 2012 with the John M. and Marilyn Zeigler Student Achievement Award. In regards to Lake's receipt of the Thatcher Prize, VIMS Dean and Director John Wells says, "I can think of no better recipient for this prestigious award. Sam embodies VIMS' interdisciplinary focus and has shown remarkable leadership and exceptional contributions to our mission. He continues a tradition of outstanding performance by graduate students at VIMS." Three other VIMS graduate students have been honored with the Thatcher Prize, including inaugural winner Juliana Harding in 2000, Elizabeth Hinchey in 2003, and Kristin France in 2007.

"Sam brings the very best of William & Mary to the wider community," said W&M President Taylor Reveley during the commencement ceremony. "His impressive record extends beyond the walls of any classroom, making him a great ambassador for VIMS and the College."



VIMS graduate student Sam Lake teaches at York High as part of the NSF-funded GK-12 program at VIMS. Photo by Rosemary Hicks.