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CBL’s Goethel, Harris awarded 2021-22 Fulbright scholarships

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Christina Goethel didn’t have a very productive day recently, but she might be excused for her lack of work in that moment after she learned she had received a prestigious Fulbright scholarship.

“I remember opening the email at work and kind of just stopped working,” Goethel said. “I very quickly finished the task I was working on and called it a day because I couldn’t focus. It was kind of a useless rest of the day.”

Fellow University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science’s Chesapeake Biological Laboratory colleague Lora Harris has also been named a Fulbright scholar.

“It’s an incredible honor and opportunity and I’m really pleased,” said Harris, who was awarded a Seeking Solutions for Global Challenges Award. “I’m incredibly excited about it. It’s a huge opportunity both in terms of networking and culture, and also the opportunity to think about the science I do here in the Chesapeake in another context.”



Christina Goethel sorts benthic animals aboard the Canadian Coast Guard Ship Sir Wilfrid Laurier in July 2018.

“I’m really excited,” said Goethel, who received a Fulbright-Ministry of Foreign Affairs Arctic Scholar. “I’ve gotten really into teaching and the more I do it the more I get excited about it, so this grant focused on either teaching or teaching [and] research seemed the perfect opportunity to combine both, while engaging in and learning about teaching in a new country.”

Harris will use her award to work in Finland on questions of estuarine ecology, while Goethel will use her award to support post-doctoral research and teaching in Iceland.

Harris, an associate professor, and Goethel, a Ph.D. candidate, both work out of the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory on Solomons Island.

“These two awards exemplify the impacts that the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science has on our local community, the state and the globe,” said Tom Miller, the director of the Chesapeake Biological Laboratory. “We are so proud of these amazing researchers.”

During her 6-month stay, which will begin in January, Goethel will teach courses at the University of Akureyri in northern Iceland on the importance of international and Arctic resident community scientific collaborations.

The Lexington Park resident has been studying the effects of climate change on animals that live on the sea floor in the Bering and Chukchi seas with UMCES professors Jackie Grebmeier and Lee Cooper, and her research has shown that changes in the community composition of animals that live on the sea floor can be related to the warming of the Arctic and the retreat of seasonal sea ice.



Lora Harris installs a depth meter to understand how much nutrients are going in versus coming out of Parkers Creek in 2017.

“I have an affinity for the animals and their environment, particularly those that live in the mud,” Goethel said. “So understanding the temperatures they live in and the food that they have available to them and other conditions they might be living in and how that affects their lives has become my focus of my Ph.D.”

Goethel first visited the Arctic when she was 15 and “fell in love with it and got stuck on it.” She previously traveled to Iceland in 2005 as part of a research program called Students on Ice.

The few months Goethel will live apart from her husband, who is in the U.S. Navy and stationed in Virginia, will be nothing new. The couple, who have known each other almost 13 years and have been married the past 3½ years, have never lived together.

“I remember writing the application and looking back on it and thinking it was one of the best applications I’ve ever put together,” she said. “I didn’t feel like I was beating my head against the wall to write it. It was one of the first times in a long time that I was just genuinely excited to be proposing and writing something.”



University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science’s Chesapeake Biological Laboratory’s Lora Harris, left, and Christina Goethel were recently awarded Fulbright scholarships. Beginning in January, Harris will work in Finland for four months while Goethel will work in Iceland for 4-6 months.

SUBMITTED PHOTOS

Headed to Helsinki

Harris, who is a coastal oceanographer whose research focuses on how climate and management actions interact to affect water quality, quantifies responses in estuaries to change at the whole system level, with a particular focus on understanding restoration pathways.

“What I’m really interested in is understanding is how things get better,” Harris said. “How do we restore ecosystems like the Chesapeake Bay? This project is thinking about the interaction between oxygen dynamics and nutrients and what happens to the system when we take out nutrients. And it’s not always as clear cut as we would like it to be.”

Her research has included submerged aquatic vegetation and marsh plants, as well as how low levels of dissolved oxygen create challenges for restoration.

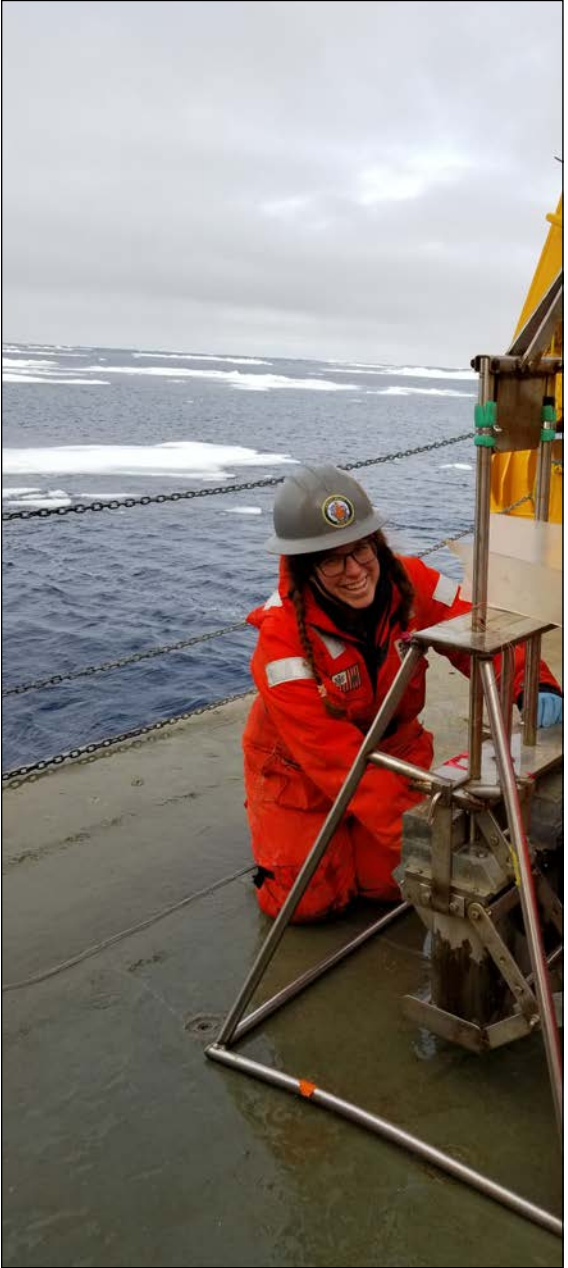
In Finland, she will conduct research on coastal restoration and apply her understanding of restoration successes and challenges in the Chesapeake Bay to a comparison with the Baltic Sea.

During her 4-month stay, which will also begin in January, Harris will be hosted at the University of Helsinki’s Tvärminne Zoological Station.

“I really wanted to cement collaboration with a group in Finland doing mesocosm research,” said Harris, who started her career doing outdoor experiments with systems that examine the natural environment under controlled conditions, or mesocosm. “They have a good facility and they are running some really exciting experiments.”

Harris said her husband and two children, who are all avid cross country skiers, are planning to visit during her stay.

“There’s an excitement in being a mid-career professor and having a little bit of a break as to what my next steps are for my research program,” she said, adding “there’s always innovation and creativity and excitement that comes with seeing a new place and new people, and I think we’ve all been craving that a bit with the pandemic.”



Christina Goethel collects a sediment core aboard the United States Coast Guard Cutter Healy in July 2018.



Christina Goethel stands in the well deck of the Canadian Coast Guard Ship Sir Wilfrid Laurier during a July 2018 expedition.

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