

# A SILVER LINING to PANDEMIC HURDLES

Skidmore faculty and students discovered creative ways to conduct research together over the summer.

You cannot keep a good researcher down. That might be the motto for Skidmore's 2020 Faculty Student Summer Research Program. There were plenty of pandemic-related hurdles: Students could not be on campus. Laboratories were off limits. Meetings took place not in faculty offices or on campus but remotely from home using online platforms like Zoom and Slack.

But equipped with creative thought, 55 Skidmore students and 30 faculty members met the challenge and were able to engage in a variety of sophisticated, collaborative research projects remotely.

The summer of 2020 stands as a testament to the can-do spirit of Skidmore students and the strong commitment by faculty to the academic enterprise. Many alumni, especially those who have gone on to graduate school, have reported that Skidmore's research experience provided them distinct advantages as scholars.

Associate Professor of Health and Human Physiological Sciences Stephen Ives says he was initially reluctant to proceed on a remote research project considering the effect of succinic acid treatment on metabolism.

"Kendall (Zaleski '22) convinced me to push on, and I'm glad she did because

we just submitted a manuscript for peer review," Ives says. Not being able to use labs ended up providing a "silver lining, a moment of pause and reflection" by allowing the researchers to dig deeper into existing data, Ives says.

Students like Eliana Colzani '22, who contributed to a research project with Visiting Assistant Professor of Environmental Studies and Sciences Kris Covey on tree species distributions and plant-soil relationships on Dome Island in Lake George, transformed their homes into makeshift research stations.

"My parents now know as much about dendrology as I do," jokes Colzani, who analyzed 250 tree core samples from the family's dining room table.

Perhaps no research team met the challenge and opportunity of the COVID-19 pandemic moment and the abrupt transition to distance learning more successfully than Professor of Chemistry Kim Frederick, who led a project to develop and deploy an engaging approach to traditional analytical chemistry lab courses that could also be conducted by students learning from a distance.

The project, which was supported by a Howard Hughes Medical Institute grant, was accomplished in three short



Students like Eliana Colzani '22 transformed their homes into temporary research stations this summer as they participated in Skidmore's Faculty Student Summer Research Program.

months, in partnership with faculty and student peers from the University of Notre Dame, University of Iowa and Oregon State University. Some 25 schools and around 1,000 college students are already benefitting from the project.

"We produced so much in such a short period of time," says Sarah Finnegan '22, one of six students on the project.

Of course, not all collaborative research projects came from the sciences. Other disciplines included business, computer science, economics, history, political science, social work, studio art, and world languages and literatures.

Associate Professor of Political Science Yelena Biberman-Ocakli says she learned alongside Marina Kalaw '22, a political science major with minors in theater and French.

The pair collaborated on a play to shine a light on the complex historical relationship between the United States and Afghanistan.

"It was scary and intimidating. I had no idea how to write a play," Biberman-Ocakli says.

Associate Professor of Political Science Bob Turner, who directs the summer research program, acknowledges he was initially uncertain about remote research.

"When I viewed the final presentations, I never would have guessed that the faculty and students had not been in the same room all summer," Turner says. "Learning how to work remotely on complex, team-based research projects is a valuable skill that will help them long after COVID-19 has passed."

— Peter MacDonald

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— ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE  
BOB TURNER