

SVP Futures Award

In the wake of the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor, many segments of society that are predominantly white spaces have grappled with the racism that many people face on a daily basis. When we take the time to turn some of that introspection on ourselves, we note that vertebrate paleontology, like many geoscience fields, has poor representation of scientists who are Black, Indigenous, or members of other ethnic minority groups. Research shows that this underrepresentation is not due to a lack of interest, but rather a lack of opportunities and resources and that this disparity is amplified at later career stages. To ameliorate this, we propose a grant program targeted at undergraduates from minority ethnic backgrounds to fund summer research projects in vertebrate paleontology.

DESCRIPTION OF GRANT PROGRAM

This grant aims to provide funding for two applicants per cycle. Each grant will provide \$5,000 for a summer stipend (8 to twelve weeks) for the applicant and \$500 towards research expenses, e.g. for travel to a field locality. All funds must be spent on the proposed project within two years of awarding. Our aim is for students to then apply for a student travel grant to attend SVP the next year to share the results of their project, where they will participate in a new mentorship program organised by the Student and Postdoc Liaison Committee. As more funds are raised for the award in the coming years, the award amount will increase by \$1,000 to cover the costs of attending SVP.

Applicants will identify a research mentor for their project and the research mentor will need to submit a letter of support indicating that they agree to be responsible for guiding the applicant through successful completion of the project. Applicants are encouraged to work closely with their potential mentor in developing their project to ensure that realistic goals are set for all parties involved. However, the grant will be awarded to the student, not the mentor, and the research project is expected to be led by the student, including any publication(s) or presentation directly resulting from the work funded by the grant.

The amount of each grant is expected to be \$5,500 (depending on if the student needs to relocate for the research experience), so the yearly amount to be awarded will be \$11,000. This goal will require a fund of ~\$300,000 for the program to be sustainable, although we do not necessarily have to meet that goal in the first years to start the project.

APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

Any minority ethnic or person of color enrolled in an undergraduate degree program who is not due to graduate at the end of the year in which they apply for the grant is eligible (i.e., they will not graduate before the research project is conducted). This new award is for undergraduate students from racial or ethnic groups that are underrepresented in vertebrate paleontology due

to historical discrimination. Black (a person with African heritage and with lived experience as a Black person) and/or Indigenous (a person belonging to a group established in a territory before colonization whose lands remain largely colonized and with lived experience as an Indigenous person) students are especially encouraged to apply. Anyone found to have intentionally misrepresented their identity will be in violation of the SVP Code of Conduct and face consequences such as revocation of the grant and a temporary ban from SVP meetings.

POTENTIAL MENTORS NETWORK

Many higher education institutions do not have faculty members specialising in vertebrate paleontology. We do not want this to be a barrier to any interested students, so we will put out a call for SVP members who are interested in serving as mentors for these projects. We will prioritize mentors who have a strong track record of successfully mentoring undergraduate students, such as professors at primarily undergraduate institutions, over mentors who simply have strong name recognition. The committee reserves the right to exclude potential mentors from this list if they feel that the interested researcher is not a good fit for this role. The list of potential mentors will be published along with the call for applications. All researchers mentoring students who receive this award are expected to abide by SVP's Code of Conduct at all times when interacting with their mentee.