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2012 Ernest A. Lynton Award Presented at Annual CUMU Conference

Boston, MA – October 25, 2010 – On Monday, October 15, the New England Resource Center for Higher Education (NERCHE) presented the 2012 Ernest A. Lynton Award for the Scholarship of Engagement for Early Career Faculty to Dr. Jordan Karubian, Assistant Professor of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at Tulane University. The award ceremony took place at the 18th annual conference of the Coalition for Urban and Metropolitan Universities (CUMU)—which Ernest Lynton was instrumental in founding and which co-sponsors the Award. This year’s conference, “Working together Works: Partnering for Progress,” was held at the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga. The Award for early-career faculty was presented by NERCHE’s co-director, Dr. John Saltmarsh.

The Lynton Award emphasizes engaged scholarship, characterized by work tied to a faculty member's expertise that benefits the external community and is visible and shared with community stakeholders, while reflecting the mission of the institution. Dr. Karubian’s faculty work exemplifies the highest standards of engaged scholarship.

In collaboration with a team of community members, students, and professionals, Dr. Karubian has developed a multifaceted community-based program to enhance stewardship of the environment and the welfare and conservation capacity of local residents in Northwest Ecuador, long recognized as a “conservation hotspot.” Because “enforcement of environmental regulations is weak in this region,” he writes, “it is the local residents whose attitudes and actions are *de facto* determining the conservation trajectory of this area.” To that end, he focused on learning about the community and developing relationships that would form the foundation of the project, eventually bringing together the team who, he writes, “all shared a similar vision melding environmental and social wellbeing.”

The project research is carried out by undergraduate and graduate students, biologists, and community members—“hunters-turned-researchers”—who have a deep knowledge of the endangered species under study. Early in his research, Dr. Karubian recognized the value of local

expertise in increasing the chances of success for the project and contributing to the advancement of knowledge in the field. Over the course of several years, the local researchers, or “Environmental Ambassadors,” have become proficient in experimental design, data collection, computer literacy, and public speaking. The knowledge generated from the research is actively used by reserve managers, community members, and the Ministry of the Environment, and is fundamental to local and regional outreach and educational programs, as are the Ambassadors themselves.

The recently formed Ecuadorian NGO Fundación Conservación de los Andes Tropicales (FCAT) exemplifies the project’s success. This governing board consists of longtime team members working closely with the broader community to solicit and incorporate information on perceived needs, and how best to meet them. FCAT, Dr. Karubian writes, “is the vehicle by which Ecuadorians are taking literal ownership of the design, implementation, and management of this project.”

Dr. Karubian’s research has been recognized with a prestigious International Research Experience for Students (IRES) grant from the National Science Foundation, which provides funding for 21 students from under-represented groups to conduct independent research in Australia in interaction with local residents, students, and researchers.

At Tulane University, Dr. Karubian’s courses combine both research and service to local environmental advocacy agencies and non-profit conservation groups, such as the Gulf Restoration Network (GRN) and the local Audubon Zoo. Globally and locally, Dr. Karubian’s community-engaged scholarship fulfills Tulane’s mission of “fostering community-building initiatives as well as scientific, cultural and social understanding that integrate with and strengthen learning and research.”

Dr. Karubian’s conference presentation, “The Promise of Engaged Scholarship for Understanding and Conserving Our Natural World,” highlighted the importance of community-centered work in areas such as Northwest Ecuador, where the success of conservation initiatives requires the involvement of like-minded faculty from a range of disciplines who involve local residents in an inclusive and comprehensive approach to environmental sustainability.

To learn more about the 2012 Lynton Award recipient, please visit NERCHE’s website at www.nerche.org.

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