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Alumna Wins Prestigious Postgraduate Scholarships

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Alicia Levin, a 2002 graduate of Illinois Wesleyan University, received the prestigious Phi Beta Kappa (PBK) Mary Isabel Sibley Fellowship for French Studies last spring. The \$20,000 award will allow her to conduct research in France over the 2006-07 academic year as she writes a dissertation to earn her doctorate from the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Each year, the Mary Isabel Sibley Fellowship provides one unmarried female doctoral student between the ages of 25 and 35 with the opportunity to complete original postgraduate research in Europe. This year the award was designated for a student of French language or literature.

“I wrote my application unsure of whether my topic was appropriate,” said Levin, whose field of research is musicology. “As I argued in my application, I use literary sources in my work, although my discipline is not French literature or language. The fellowship has been awarded to interdisciplinary projects in the past, so I thought I’d give it a try.”

Levin learned that she had won the Sibley Fellowship in the spring of 2006. “I was thrilled at the prospect of spending a year in France and relieved that I would be able to write the dissertation that I had proposed,” she said. “Without the primary sources in French archives, I would have had to adjust the topic to fit the limited materials available in the U.S.”

Levin’s proposed dissertation, “Seducing Paris: Piano Virtuosos and Artistic Identity, 1820-1848,” examines how prominent 19th-century pianists constructed their identities and launched their careers in France.

A native of Oshkosh, Wis., Levin earned her bachelor of music in piano performance with a minor in French and Francophone studies from IWU in 2002 and completed her master’s at the University of North Carolina in 2004. To support the necessary research in France for her dissertation, the final requirement for the completion of her doctorate, Levin applied for seven grants in addition to the Sibley fellowship last fall.

She has received a total of four awards, including the Chateaubriand Fellowship provided by the Education Office of the Embassy of France in the United States. This grant, which is awarded to 14 doctoral students at American universities each year, will provide Levin with a monthly stipend, health insurance and a round trip ticket to France.

Levin will remain in Paris until June of 2007, when she will travel to Brussels to continue her research. She plans to return to the University of North Carolina before the beginning of the 2007-08 academic year.

The Mary Isabel Sibley Fellowship has been awarded to students of Greek and French in alternate years since its inception in 1934. The award was founded by Isabelle Stone, a graduate of both Wellesley College and Cornell University and a member of PBK, who completed postgraduate research on Greek history and language in Europe during the first decade of the 20th century.

Founded in 1776, PBK is the oldest academic honor society in the United States. With more than 270 chapters and half a million members, PBK seeks to champion education in the liberal arts and sciences, recognize academic excellence and foster freedom of thought and expression.