

## 2017 Department of Biology Awards

### MATT DEL GROSSO ENDOWED GRADUATE RESEARCH AWARD

*Kate Hunter, Doctoral Candidate*



My first exposure to research was as an undergraduate looking at the influence of nutrition on paper wasp social behavior. This early experience led me to an interest in studying sociality in halictid (“sweat”) bees, specifically looking at the evolution in the genetic underpinnings of their behavior.

My current research on halictid social evolution has brought me to Barro Colorado Island, Panama with the Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute. While here I have been able to work in the jungle with many other amazing scientists from across the world, fostering research connections and potential collaborations.

In the future I want to continue to study how complex processes like modification of the transcription and translation of the genome affect the response to social cues in social bees. Further I also want to understand how miRNAs (small RNA pieces that prevent RNA from being translated in proteins) alter the way that a bee responds to social cues. My long range goals as a researcher are to continue on in academia and study how complex phenotypes evolve from plastic ones.

When I’m not doing research I like to coach and play ultimate frisbee. Last fall I was able to create and coach the first women’s university affiliated team at Utah State. When I return to Utah I hope to foster an even stronger community of women’s players in the area to continue development of the sport in Logan, UT.