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Innovation Fellows excited for 'incredible' outreach opportunity



As long as he can remember, Dana Hoppe has been trying to find ways to meld his seemingly disparate passions – art and science.

As one of the first Innovation Fellows, Hoppe will design curricula for middle school students doing exactly that, combining science, engineering, math, technology and art.

"It's an incredible opportunity for me to find an outlet for my ideas and a common ground for my two passions while also giving back to the community," Hoppe, a sophomore computer science and art major, said. "There are lots of possibilities."



(https://news.unl.edu/sites/default/files/media/Innovation_Fellows_4.jpg)

The Innovation Fellows are (from left) Dana Hoppe, Alison Cloet, Caleb Kowalski and Mickey Tran.

Hoppe is one of four Husker undergraduates comprising the inaugural class of Innovation Fellows. Chancellor Ronnie Green introduced the fellows during a celebration Monday at Nebraska Innovation Studio. The fellows are Alison Cloet, a junior fashion design major; Caleb Kowalski, a sophomore mechanical engineering major; Mickey Tran, a sophomore computer science major; and Hoppe.

As fellows, the undergraduates will build their portfolios and resumes while also impacting children across the state by working on a design team with leading educational professionals from **Beyond School Bells** (<http://beyondschoolbells.org/>). As a team they'll develop Think, Make, Create Labs – mobile trailers used for expanded learning opportunities – that encourage problem-solving, creativity and exploration in a hands-on learning environment. The fellowship runs through December, and the fellows earn a \$5,000 stipend.

For Cloet, the community service aspect of the fellowship was important.

"In fashion design, a direct-to-market business, it's sometimes hard to find ways to connect to the community," Cloet, a fourth-generation 4-H'er, said. "So when I saw this fellowship open, I had to apply."

Green and Nebraska Regent Robert Whitehouse lauded the partnership with Beyond School Bells and congratulated the fellows.

"They'll work across disciplines and solve real-world challenges," Green said at the event. "As we at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln prepare the leaders of tomorrow, experiences like this are invaluable. I look forward to seeing the amazing things that come from this truly talented group of students."

Whitehouse is a former public schools administrator, coach and teacher and said the work the students will be doing is vital to the success of Nebraska students.

"The research on after-school and summer programs is clear," Whitehouse said. "It's pretty simple: when young people regularly participate in high-quality after-school and summer programs, they attend school more regularly; they have positive attitudes and behaviors and ultimately they improve their coursework."

Tran echoed the importance of hands-on learning opportunities.

“As a computer science major, I think it can be hard to grasp the things you learn in the classroom and this is a way to think about that,” Tran said. “I’ve been helping to develop different types of curriculum for other after-school programs in robotics and with the Girl Scouts, and I’ve always had this passion to help kids be engaged and bring it into their lives.”



(https://news.unl.edu/sites/default/files/media/180212_NIC_Trailer_Kids_4015.jpg)

The Innovation Fellows will be working with educational professionals from Beyond School Bells creating curricula for the Think, Make, Create Labs, as seen here.

Kowalski, too, has been helping an after-school program called Roads, Rails and Racecars and is excited to expand that experience as an Innovation Fellow.

“Being able to take what I’ve learned from Roads, Rails and Racecars and bring it to this, along with my engineering background, will be an all-around good experience and I’m really proud to be a part of it,” he said.

The fellowship was made possible by a partnership between Nebraska Innovation Studio and Beyond School Bells. For the past year, Beyond School Bells has been using Innovation Studio space to create the Think, Make, Create Labs, and Jeff Cole, associate vice president of school-community partnerships for Beyond School Bells, wanted to find a way to help college students through the program as well.

Through the fellowships, the Think, Make, Create Lab program will expand to more students and allow the undergraduate fellows a rare opportunity, David Martin, director of Innovation Studio, said.

“Our motto is collaborate, innovate, fabricate, so the Innovation Fellowship is a perfect use of Nebraska Innovation Studio,” Martin said. “Not only will this be a fantastic learning experience for these four talented University of Nebraska-Lincoln students, what they come up with will help kids statewide get excited about science, technology, engineering, art and math.”

by **Deann Gayman | University Communication** (<https://news.unl.edu/written-by/deann-gayman-university-communication/>)

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