Goldwater Scholar Researches Distracted Driving

Ever take your eyes off the road when your cell phone buzzes? Kayla Sansevere ’20 wants to know why—and her research at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) might help psychologists better understand distracted driving, ranked the leading cause of death for adolescents by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Through fMRIs and driving simulations, Sansevere examined the physical and cognitive responses associated with distracted driving in teens. Her preliminary results revealed that young drivers were more likely to glance away from the road in response to cell phone notifications, compared to those whose eye behaviors were examined without such distractions.

At CHOP’s annual Center for Injury Research and Prevention Student Research Day, Sansevere focused her presentation on the oculomotor factors that contribute to risky behaviors in young drivers. She was awarded a travel grant for presenting one of the top five-minute talks, allowing her to share research updates at an upcoming academic conference.

It was a big year for the Psychology major: Sansevere is also the first Arcadia student to receive the prestigious Barry Goldwater Scholarship and Excellence in Education Foundation award for exceptional students pursuing mathematics, engineering, or natural science careers.

"It was so affirming to see that the foundation thinks I have what it takes to succeed in my career and research," said Sansevere, who will put the $7,500 scholarship toward tuition, textbooks, and academic fees. "I think sometimes students feel like they can’t compete for these prestigious awards because we’re a small school, but I’m proof that you can."

At Arcadia, Sansevere works in the Attention, Memory, and Cognition Lab with Assistant Professor of Psychology Dr. Katherine Moore and alumna Katie Jobson ’18, exploring the effects of perceived light changes on visual search. In addition to continuing at CHOP as a research assistant, Sansevere plans to study how cognitive development influences eye behavior in response to cell phone notifications for her senior thesis.