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Burgin '25 Seeks Solutions for Climate Change and Global Inequality

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — Combating climate change requires commitment and collaboration between international leaders, and Melinda Burgin '25 hopes to contribute to those efforts through her research as a [2023 Robert S. and Nell B. Eckley Summer Scholar](#).

Burgin developed a passion for protecting the planet as early as elementary school, when she learned about the effects of

climate change on endangered species and harmful environmental impacts from the meat industry. This interest led her to become involved with climate activism organizations in her hometown of Chicago.

"I began to learn more about climate change's disproportionate impacts on already disadvantaged groups, from environmental racism exhibited on a local scale in Chicago to global inequalities between developed and developing nations," she said, referring to issues such as water pollution and poor air quality that are more prevalent in communities of color.

As a political science and art major, [Burgin is eager to use her experience and interests to make a difference](#). Her Eckley research project is titled "Exploring Environmental Inequities: Solutions to an Emerging Crisis."

"My project revolves around the inequalities inherent in the causes and experiences of climate change around the world, and what I view as the failure of the international community to properly address these inequalities," said Burgin.

Her research focuses on the history of international efforts and treaties regarding climate change while identifying patterns and room for improvement, especially regarding human rights concerns. She said the latest stage of the project involves analyzing "various theories relating to environmental justice and developing a critique of the main proposals for a just solution."

"Though I can't hope to solve such a complex issue in one summer, my goal is to contribute some ideas to the ongoing global conversation," she said.

Burgin has been assisted in her research by faculty sponsor Ben and Susan Rhodes Endowed Professor in Peace and Social Justice, Professor of Political Science Jim Simeone. She said his support and direction has been invaluable while navigating the objective of her research.

"[Professor Simeone] introduced me to the various schools of thought and context that I need to know in order to frame and develop my own argument, as well as providing a lot of important reading material," she said. "As I've entered the drafting process, he has had a lot of great feedback that has helped me clarify and organize my message and arguments, and develop a solid plan for my final paper."

Her summer as an Eckley Scholar has sparked a new interest in research, inspiring Burgin to expand her investigation into global inequities and efforts that could foster sustainability. This fall, she plans to take courses that focus on global responses to climate change and international law. She will also serve as the vice president of the Sierra Student Coalition.

"The Eckley Fellowship has given me an even greater appreciation of the opportunities IWU offers, and my work has further clarified my academic interests and goals for the remainder of my time here," said Burgin.

"The more work I do, the more I see what is left to be done, more than can possibly be done in one summer project. Climate change is constantly creating new ethical and political conflicts and debates, and my goal is to continue to explore these issues and contribute to solutions as much as possible."

[Established by the late IWU President Emeritus Robert Eckley and his wife Nell](#), the Eckley award provides a stipend of \$4,000 for each scholar to spend the summer conducting academic research or artistic activity under the mentorship of a faculty member. The program is designed to develop and deepen a student's creative and research competencies.



As one of four 2023 Robert S. and Nell B. Eckley Summer Scholars, Melinda Burgin '25 is researching solutions to fight climate change and environmental inequalities.