



PhD student **Stephanie Woolridge** among eight Queen's students to receive a **Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship in 2021**

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Congratulations to Psychology PhD student **Stephanie Woolridge** on earning a Vanier Scholarship! Stephanie is among eight Queen's students to receive the scholarship in 2021. The Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship is one of Canada's most prestigious awards for doctoral students and postdoctoral fellows. Jointly funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), these scholarships recognize individuals who have demonstrated exceptional scholarly achievement and leadership skills in a variety of fields. Scholars receive \$50,000 per year for three years of study and research.

Stephanie received the scholarship for her work entitled, Improving diagnostic accuracy in early psychosis: Differentiating the neuropsychological profiles of cannabis-induced and primary psychotic disorders in a 12-month follow-up study.

Stephanie completed her undergraduate degree in psychology at Queen's University, and joined Dr. Christopher Bowie's Cognition in Psychological Disorders Lab after the third year of her Bachelor's degree. Under Dr. Bowie's supervision, Stephanie went on to complete her undergraduate and Master's theses in the CPD Lab, where she was inspired and encouraged to pursue novel research projects.

"Some of my work included developing a novel eye-tracking paradigm to modify attentional biases in depression, as well as using cognitive and language tasks to differentiate between diagnoses in the early stages of psychotic disorders", Stephanie recalls. "The many opportunities

to challenge myself and develop new research methodologies in the CPD Lab is a big part of why I'm so passionate about research today.”

Stephanie says she feels incredibly fortunate to have had so many influential and supportive mentors throughout her time at Queen's. “I am especially grateful to Chris and my colleagues in the Cognition and Psychological Disorders Lab, for their guidance and encouragement”, Stephanie adds. “I am also very appreciative of all the participants who took part in my research, for the team at the Heads Up! Early Psychosis Intervention program, and for all of the undergraduate research assistants who make our research possible through their hard work, diligence, and passion for science.”

Stephanie's current research aims to assess the neuropsychological differences among individuals with early-episode psychosis who are diagnosed with either a cannabis-induced psychotic disorder or a primary psychotic disorder (such as schizophrenia). “These diagnoses are often indistinguishable in early-episode psychosis clinics, but may require unique treatments”, Stephanie explains. “The ability to reliably differentiate these disorders is crucial to early intervention in psychosis, and this research could help facilitate more rapid and successful intervention in this critical treatment window.”

In addition to this project, Stephanie hopes to continue conducting research that allows her to better understand and improve outcomes in early psychosis. Her upcoming project will explore how social/romantic relationships and sexuality are related to clinical symptoms and cognitive and social-cognitive impairments in early psychosis. Despite many people with psychosis identifying how important these types of interpersonal relationships are in their lives, it is something that is rarely targeted in treatment clinics or measured as treatment outcomes. The goal of Stephanie's research is to help identify potential interpersonal treatment targets, and to support people with psychosis in achieving their interpersonal recovery goals.

“I am honoured and excited to have received the Vanier Scholarship. As a first-generation university student, it still feels very surreal,” Stephanie says. “I feel incredibly fortunate to have this support to continue doing the research that I love, and I've been lucky to have had the opportunities to collaborate on research projects and work with various community programs, which have been instrumental to my development as a researcher and future clinician.”

Graduate students often face many financial barriers, and funding such as Vanier Scholarships can help alleviate some of those stressors. With the support of this scholarship, Stephanie says she will have more freedom to focus on her research, including expanding her research on a larger scale and disseminating results more broadly. As she continues to develop her program of research, Stephanie feels that the Vanier Scholarship will provide a strong foundation for building her academic career after graduation.

“Ever since I was an undergraduate student in psychology, I've loved research. It is a dream of mine to pursue a career in academia where I'm able to continue conducting research and sharing that passion with new generations of students,” Stephanie concludes. “The ability to develop and run my own studies, which then might be able to make a real difference in our broader

knowledge of mental health research and treatment, is something that has always been very motivating for me.”