

# 2014 Marianne Schmink Outstanding Dissertation Award

We are pleased to announce that **Dr. Vanessa Mintzer** has been selected as the 2014 recipient of the Marianne Schmink Award for the Outstanding Dissertation from UF's Tropical Conservation and Development Program. Dr. Mintzer completed her dissertation in the School of Natural Resources and the Environment under the supervision of Dr. Tom Frazer (advisor) and Dr. Kai Lorenzen (co-advisor). Her dissertation was entitled ***"An Evaluation of the Conservation of Amazon River Dolphins (*Inia geoffrensis*) in a Brazilian Protected Area"***.

The committee was impressed by the interdisciplinary and comprehensive approach developed by Dr. Mintzer, towards the conservation of the Amazonian river dolphin. Vanessa's dissertation research highlights the interconnectedness of the ecological and social dimensions of dolphin management and conservation. Her dissertation is an outstanding example of the type of relevant and rigorous interdisciplinary research that is at the core of both SNRE and TCD missions.

Dr. Mintzer's research methods integrated dolphin population assessments and mapping with research on fishermen's attitudes and behaviors towards harvesting the species, resulting in a comprehensive social-ecological analysis. Based on her analysis of long-term mark-re sighting surveys of river dolphins at the border of the Mamirauá Sustainable Development Reserve and conservation program in the Brazilian Amazon, she showed quantitatively that illegal harvesting is a significant threat to dolphin populations. She carried out social surveys with local fishermen to assess their attitudes and behaviors with respect to river dolphins, showing that engagement with the reserve and its dolphin research program was associated with more positive attitudes and behaviors towards dolphins. Lastly, she studied dolphins' space use and movement behavior, and developed a simple yet robust model for assessing the likely effects of modifying reserve boundaries on dolphins' conservation status. Her results provide important insights into the ecological and human dimensions of illegal harvesting of wildlife and practical guidance for biodiversity conservation in and around protected areas in the Amazon region.

Vanessa's research has been recognized both internally (e.g., Center for Latin American Studies Student Poster Grand Prize, 2013; School of Natural Resources and Environment Most Outstanding Dissertation, 2013) and externally (e.g., Best Student Presentation at the Southeast Atlantic Marine Mammal Symposium, 2012). Internationally, she has gained recognition as a leading expert in Amazon dolphin ecology and conservation.

The Selection Committee was composed of TCD faculty members Dr. Simone Athayde and Dr. John G. Blake (UF Wildlife Ecology and Conservation) and TCD alumna Dr. Diana Alvira (Researcher at the Field Museum of Chicago). The TCD program congratulates Dr. Mintzer on her selection as the 2014 recipient of the Marianne Schmink Outstanding Dissertation!

