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Breen Receives Imagine Fund Award for Research on Modern Theories of Seed Ownership

Summary: Sheri Breen received an all-University Imagine Fund Award for research on ownership of native seeds.

(April 10, 2013)-Sheri Breen, assistant professor of political science, received an all-University [Imagine Fund Award](#) for research she will conduct this summer on ownership of native seeds. This work will inform her forthcoming book, tentatively titled *The Ownership of Seeds: A Political Analysis of Seed Sovereignty*.

There is currently a loss of genetic diversity and a rise in corporate ownership of seed germplasm, or living tissue from which new plants can be grown. Several groups are now working to reclaim the genetic heritage of at-risk plant species. Others are pursuing retention of seed ownership through patenting, while some Native tribes would like to preserve it themselves.

Seed sovereignty, or the control of seed genetic reproduction and distribution, is at the heart of Breen's work. She has long been fascinated by the roles of land ownership and agricultural property, which first drove her research into the concept of ownership and the influence of property theory as it relates to environmental issues. Her focus later progressed to seed law, a model of competing understandings of property and ownership in environmental political theory.

"Many of the policy debates that we have regarding environmental issues can be traced directly back to diverging understandings of whether and how we can be said to 'own nature,'" says Breen.

The Imagine Fund grant will fund Breen's trip to the southwest United States through mid-July and August of this year. Traveling through Oklahoma, New Mexico, and Arizona, she hopes to conduct interviews with seed bank operators and related parties. This work will contribute to her future book project and inform several separate journal articles.

Breen's larger project involves an examination of the ownership of plant seeds. This work will explore the role of private, collective, and open ownership of seeds. Breen also hopes to continue this work by applying for a grant to travel to the Svalbard Global Seed Vault in Norway and the Navdanya seed-saving organization in India.

This project is supported by generous funding from the University of Minnesota's Imagine Fund Awards and University of Minnesota, Morris's Faculty Research Enhancement Fund.

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