

NEWS RELEASE – July 25, 2024

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Announcing the 2024 SME Academic Grant and Ph.D. Fellowship Recipients

For a ninth year, the Society for Mining, Metallurgy & Exploration (SME) will award grants and fellowships to tenure-track professors and Ph.D. students seeking the financial support needed to earn their Ph.D. to begin a career in academia or assist with securing tenure at their university.

These programs, funded through the SME Foundation, exist to address the long-term challenges that threaten the sustainability of U.S. mining academic degree granting programs, as well as the looming future labor deficiencies associated with retirements over the next two decades. This year's recipients are Dr. Rudrajit Mitra of South Dakota School of Mines & Technology, Dr. Ehsan Vahidi of the University of Nevada, Reno and Daykin Schnell of the University of Kentucky.

"The SME Foundation remains committed to investing in the future of mining and minerals education, having funded 40 students and faculty with \$7.7 million to date," said Thomas C. Rauch, SME Foundation President. "This year's outstanding class of recipients, like those before them, are cultivating a robust talent pipeline to meet the many resource demands of tomorrow."

The program allocates to each recipient:

- Freeport-McMoRan, Inc. Academic Career Development Grant - \$100,000 per year for a maximum of three years. The grant provides assistant or associate professors financial support to fulfill requirements for achieving tenure and promotion.

- Ph.D. Fellowship - \$60,000 per year for a maximum of four years. The fellowship provides financial support necessary to acquire a doctoral degree to students with industry experience and a desire to pursue an academic career.

About the recipients:

2024 Freeport-McMoRan, Inc. Career Development Grant



Rudrajit Mitra, Ph.D.

Dr. Mitra is currently an Associate Professor and Syd & Felicia Peng Professor in Mining Engineering at the Department of Mining Engineering & Management at South Dakota Mines. His area of expertise includes rock mechanics and mining systems engineering focusing on resource efficiency through use of digitalization, virtual reality applications in mining and innovation in learning and teaching. He has over 130 research publications in book chapters, journals, peer-reviewed conferences and reports and has been involved in various projects for the mining industry across different countries. To date, he has graduated 12 Ph.D., 13 MS and 77 undergraduate honors students under his supervision.



Ehsan Vahidi, Ph.D.

Dr. Vahidi holds the John N. Butler Endowed Professorship at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR). As an interdisciplinary researcher, he aims to bridge the gap between engineering and sustainability sciences by applying fundamental environmental engineering principles to practical solutions, particularly within the mining and metallurgical engineering sectors. Dr. Vahidi has contributed to numerous peer-reviewed journal articles focusing on producing, recovering, and recycling critical and strategic materials

using methods such as chemical leaching, bioleaching, and solvent extraction. He currently collaborates with several mining companies across the U.S. to help them achieve their carbon reduction objectives.

2024 SME Ph.D. Fellowship



Daykin Schnell

Daykin Schnell is excited to pursue his Ph.D. in Mining Engineering at the University of Kentucky this fall. For the past four years, he served as the Explosives Engineering Manager at RESPEC, an engineering consulting company. He has worked in the mining and construction industries for nine years and has experience in mine planning and scheduling, blast optimization and improvement, blast vibration management, instrumentation, project management, operational support, and supervision. Daykin is looking forward to working on his degree, participating in mining engineering research, and educating the next generation of mining engineers. Ultimately, he wants to help build up mining engineering and other earth science programs across the country to fill industry needs.

For more information about the SME Foundation including programs, events and ways to give, visit smefoundation.org.

About SME

The Society for Mining, Metallurgy & Exploration (SME) brings together the mining and mineral industry's brightest and most dedicated professionals. Over 13,000 global members advance their careers with the world-class technical resources, educational programs, networking opportunities and professional development tools from SME. Our members are focused on

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sharing best practices for safety, environmental stewardship and moving mining forward. SME.

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