

## **FOR OUR STUDENTS**

# **Student Research in Asia Overview of 2007 Student-Faculty Fellows Program**

Van Symons  
Augustana College

During the summer of 2007, mentors from fourteen different small college/universities in North America, each with from two to five students, conducted undergraduate research in East and Southeast Asia as part of the 9<sup>th</sup> annual Student-Faculty Fellows Program. Each project was generously funded by the Freeman Foundation and administered by ASIANetwork.

The institutions participating in this program represented a broad cross section of liberal arts colleges: Bard College, Colby College, Colorado College, Eckerd College, Gettysburg College, Green Mountain College, Hiram College, Illinois Wesleyan University, Naropa University, State University of New York-Purchase, Swarthmore College, University of Puget Sound, Valparaiso University, and Virginia Wesleyan University.

One team conducted its research in Malaysia, one in the Philippines, one in both Malaysia and the Philippines, one in Thailand, one in Vietnam, while two teams travelled to Japan. The remaining seven research projects were undertaken in China, including one in Southwestern Tibet.

### **The Role of Faculty Mentors**

Following the guidelines established for this program, some research projects were undertaken as group endeavors with the objective of completing a joint research paper or video analysis of a pivotal topic. Other research teams worked together to foster individual research undertaken by each undergraduate participant. In these groups, a broad theme for

joint consideration was usually addressed, but each member of the group was engaged in his/her own research leave and the production of a final individual paper related to this broader theme.

The research of undergraduate students was facilitated by the expertise of their faculty mentors, especially evident in their personal links with colleagues throughout Asia and the access they were able to provide students to archives, Asian scholars, universities willing to support their research, and government and community leaders. For example, the research of Katlin Okamoto and Lucy Thompson on “Knee Laxity and Leg Strength in Female Soccer Athletes in Japan” was fostered by the close ties of their mentor, Dr. Joan Ericson, of Colorado College with Waseda University. This relationship enabled them to test 120 female Japanese athletes in order to compare their knee laxity and leg strength with that of U.S. soccer players. Similarly, water quality research in the Hangzhou area of East Central China was undertaken by three students led by their mentor, Dr. Jonathan Schoer, as part of a collaborative research project between Zhejiang University and Valparaiso University.

Access to archival materials can often be a tricky business in East Asia and one that would be difficult for undergraduate students to negotiate without a faculty mentor. Dr. Adam Cathcart was particularly adept at gaining access for his three Hiram College students to a range of archival materials in North and Northeast China housed in the Beijing Municipal Archives, Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives, the National Library, and various provincial libraries. As a consequence, his students have produced outstanding research papers, some being considered for publication. Similarly, Dr. Thomas Lutze used a range of connections at Beijing University, Fudan University, and Beijing Union University to gain access to archival materials and key urban planners to facilitate the individual research projects of his five Illinois Wesleyan University students, all of which focused upon urban planning in the early years (1949-56) of the People’s Republic of China in Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou. Dr. Deborah Sommer, a religious scholar at

Gettysburg College, collaborated with a Chinese colleague in Chongjing and a Yi minority scholar to lead her group of five students for four weeks to important religious sites throughout Southwest China as they studied “Social and Religious Identity in Southwest China.”

Two outstanding examples of the effective use by mentors of their ties to government and community leaders to encourage undergraduate research are evident among this year’s projects. Dr. Evangelina Blust led her four students from Green Mountain College to the town of Barangay Talisay, Lipa City in the province of Batangas in the Philippines to study “The Impact of Overseas Filipino Employment on Families Left Behind.” There they used a collective case study approach, balancing interviews of members of five families with additional interviews of thirty town residents to accomplish their objectives. The research experience included brief home stays for each student with members of the local community.

The key to success for a group of five Virginia Wesleyan students, who were seeking to carefully consider the impact of the Vietnam War on individuals in post-war Vietnam, was the close ties established between their mentor, Dr. Steven Emmanuel, and the Head of the Department of Medical Genetics and Director of the Office of Genetic Counseling and Disabled Children at Hue Medical College, Dr. Nguyen Viet Nhan. As a result, Dr. Nguyen provided the necessary links to enable these five undergraduate students to undertake research on diverse topics such as the role of Buddhist organizations in providing education to disabled children and the introduction of micro-banking in Vietnam.

### **Group Projects**

As mentioned earlier, researchers involved in this program can work on either joint or on individual research projects. Among the summer 2007 projects, half (seven) were group-focused and seven were not. A discussion on the group-focused research endeavors is illuminating.

In two of the seven group projects, the individual work of each student was focused on providing background and understanding for the production of a video. Naropa University's production is titled, "Three Paths-One Mountain: An Exploration of Pilgrimage to Mount Kailash within Three Distinct Religious Traditions." It examines the ritual of circumambulation of this holy mountain by adherents of the Bon, Hindu, and Tibetan Buddhist faiths. To prepare this video, the mentor, Nataraja Kallio, and his five students traveled overland from Nepal to Southwest Tibet to Mt. Kailash, which soars to over 22,000 feet and is one of the world's most venerated, but, because of the ruggedness of the terrain and harshness of the climate, less-frequented holy sites. Once there, by participating in the thirty two mile circumambulation process themselves, they were able to explore more fully what motivates pilgrims to circumambulate Mt. Kailash, and to examine the relationship between the outer journey and the inner experience of these pilgrims. Most individuals take three to four days to complete this process, but some prostrate themselves around the entire boulder-strewn route and spend weeks—even months—completing the journey. The Naropa study group faced numerous obstacles including severe intestinal disorders, altitude sickness, jeep breakdowns, and multiple interrogations by Chinese military personnel.

A second video production, based on over 30 hours of footage and entitled "Making Peace with Viet Nam," has also been completed by Dr. Steven Emmanuel and five students from Virginia Wesleyan University. It considers the impact of the Vietnam War on the inhabitants of Vietnam, boldly asserting that no country in modern history has been subjected to a more intensive and ruthless military assault. The video focuses on the humanitarian efforts being undertaken by the Office of Genetic Counseling and Disabled Children (OGCDC) at Hue Medical College to repair the damage. Help in producing the video was provided by research activities undertaken by each student participant, focused on the following topics: the role of Buddhist organizations in providing open education to disabled

children in Hue; the efforts of the OG CDC to help rural poor in Vietnam; the micro-loan initiative of the OG CDC in Hue; ongoing problems with dioxin in Vietnam; and the role of government in protecting the environment.

The other five group projects centered on the following topics:

1) “Ethnicity in the Lives of Modern Malaysian Youth” (Eckerd College). This study explored the pulls of tradition versus those of modernity on Malaysian youth. To complete the study, 196 Malaysian youth were interviewed in four different locations in Malaysia.

2) “The Impact of Overseas Filipino Employment on Families Left Behind” (Green Mountain College). This research examined five case families in the town of Barangay Talisay, Lipa City and supplemented this analysis with additional interviews of other community residents.

3) “Contrasts and Similarities in Water Quality Issues Facing East Central China and Northwest Indiana: Issues, Perceptions, and Approaches for Resolution” (Valparaiso University). This study group performed water quality research and conducted surveys on the perceptions regarding water quality and management in China, and then compared the results with studies undertaken during the summers of 2005, 2006, and 2007 in Northwest Indiana.

4) “Knee Laxity and Leg Strength in Female Soccer Athletes in Japan and the United States” (Colorado College). This study by two students showed that Japanese soccer players have greater knee laxity and hyperextension than U.S. players, and that U.S. players have more leg work output. It also showed that Japanese players reported having double the number of stress related injuries.

5) “An Analysis of *Omamori* [good luck charms, generally placed in small cloth bags with blessed protective words written inside] in Contemporary Japanese Society” (University of Puget Sound). The mentor and three students spent four weeks travelling throughout Japan to interview Japanese Buddhist and Shinto persons, priests renowned for their knowledge of

*omamori*, the manager of an *omamori* factory, and over 150 ordinary people to conduct research on the origin of *omamori*, the commercialization of *omamori*, and the modern history of *omamori*.

### **Projects Encouraging Individual Research**

It is somewhat more difficult to summarize what a large number of students accomplished in the seven groups where mentors undertook the challenging task of facilitating individual research. However, it is possible to discuss the overall research themes of these groups and highlight the research of some undergraduate students:

1) “Tourism, Cultural Festivals, and the Politics of Representation in Island Southeast Asia” (Bard College). This group of students, all anthropology majors, spent six weeks in Malaysian Borneo (Sarawak and Sabah) and the Philippines, attending seven cultural festivals in order to study ethnomusicology and the anthropology of music. Their focus centered on the “specific ways local cultural forms, particularly music and dance, are appropriated, transformed, and objectified through the globalizing process of tourism.” The commitment of mentor and students to visit seven different festivals during a six week period is impressive, as are the papers produced by each student on a related topic.

2) “Tradition, Transition, and Modernity: Reconfiguration of Public Spaces in a Globalizing China” (Colby College). This research group worked in four Chinese cities (Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Wuhan) to “explore how China’s urban landscape and cultural scenes have been transformed in the past two decades.” Each student focused his/her research on a different aspect of the changing urban landscape.

3) “Buddhism in Contemporary Southwest China” (Gettysburg College). This group traveled to a number of important Buddhist sites in Southwest China, including those in Chongqing and Chengdu, the ancient Buddhist cave grottoes in Dazu, the giant Buddha at Leshan, and the Buddhist temples on Mount Omei. They proceeded on to Southern Sichuan where

the Yi culture with its nonbuddhist shamanic traditions thrive. Students produced their own research papers, and two are quite remarkable, one by Eric Canzano entitled “Buddhism in Modern Southwest China,” and one by Kate Vredenburg entitled “Buddhism and Social Engagement.”

4) “Individual Research in 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Chinese History” (Hiram College). Most of the time in China for this group of students was spent doing archival research that has led to the completion of a number of projects. The mentor, Adam Cathcart, and his student, Patricia Nash, have prepared two papers, and Cathcart and his student, Daniel Falk, an additional two papers, all of which are being submitted for publication. Patricia Nash’s paper titled “Plague and Propaganda: The Significance of Bacteriological Weapons Allegations in the Korean War” has just been published in the Spring 2008 issue of the *Wittenberg University East Asian Studies Journal*, and John Sommerville’s paper titled, “The Tianjin Incident,” has been included in the anthology of Senior Seminar Papers at Hiram College, 2008.

5) “Urban Planning in the Early Years of the People’s Republic of China: The Challenges of Education, Health Care, Housing, Sanitation, and Pollution Abatement” (Illinois Wesleyan University). This group worked in libraries, municipal archives, and museums of city planning, and carried out interviews with former directors of city planning, academicians, and elderly city residents to record the varied methods employed by officials and residents in the cities of Beijing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou to initiate substantive changes in urban China after the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. All five undergraduate papers draw well from written materials, balanced by interviews and onsite investigation. They provide wonderful examples of solid undergraduate research.

6) This group of three students from SUNY-Purchase were led by their faculty mentor to Thailand where they conducted research on three separate topics: “The Challenge of Slums in Bangkok,” “The Impact of Media on Changing Images of Thai Women,” and “The Costs and Benefits of the Tourist Industry

in Thailand.” Rebecca Katzenberg’s research on the changing images of Thai women was integrated into a much longer senior project on the impact of globalization on modern Thai women. All submitted interesting photo journals of their projects.

7) “China and the West: An Investigation of Chinese Cultural Encounters in the New Context of Globalization” (Swarthmore College). Professor Xiaorong Li accepted the challenge of directing the five most diverse individual research projects undertaken during the summer of 2007. Concentrating their focus in Beijing, they included studies on the use of English loan words in Chinese youth culture, the changing views of young Chinese towards Chinese medicine, the impact of globalization on Chinese art and artists, the broadening horizons of Chinese migrant workers, and film and homosexuality in China. What is truly remarkable is the commitment displayed by the faculty mentor to facilitate such a wide range of inquiry.

### **The Positive Results of the Summer 2007 Program**

Faculty often note that a three to six or seven week experience leading undergraduate researchers through a part of East or Southeast Asia is truly transforming for them, and there is little doubt of its dramatic impact on the students who are involved. Students, upon their return to campus, are often given almost celebrity status. Reports of their experience are published in the college alumni bulletin or in local newspapers. This year, a half dozen research groups presented their findings to faculty and students as part of undergraduate research fairs or other faculty or student forums. Others participated in regional conferences of the Association for Asian Studies.

Even though this is not the primary goal of faculty participants, some have drawn from these experiences to enrich their course curriculum and to prepare articles or scholarly presentations. Students from Colorado College, Gettysburg College, Hiram College, and Valparaiso University have submitted their research individually, or jointly written with their faculty mentor, for publication in scholarly journals. Others have integrated their findings into their senior projects.



Three of this year's fourteen groups prepared photo exhibits that were posted in their libraries and other central parts of their campuses to share their experiences. As already noted, two groups have produced quite remarkable videos on pilgrimage at Mt. Kailish and "Making Peace with Viet Nam."

Mentors and students often remark that this experience has been instrumental in helping them gain admittance to solid graduate programs focused on their interest in East and Southeast Asia. Moreover, it is surprising how many students involved in the summer 2007 program have now returned to Asia. For example, from the Eckerd College student-faculty fellows group, Jonathan Banner from Eckerd College returned to Thailand as a volunteer to work in the Baan Unrak Children's Home (orphanage), while Zoe Friedman is now teaching in Malaysia as a Fulbright ETA, and Melissa Christie will be teaching in the Marshall Islands for a year.

The group from Gettysburg College, once back in the States, organized a Sangha Buddhist Interest Group which meets regularly to meditate and encourage the study of Buddhism on their campus. They travel to a local Tibetan Buddhist temple in Maryland, and have sponsored visits by Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns to Gettysburg.

It is a joy for those of us who administer this program to read these final reports and, in turn, provide members of the ASIANetwork board of directors, the Freeman Foundation, and the general membership of the consortium with further insight about this wonderful program. We hope that faculty and students at member institutions will take full advantage of this opportunity.