SU Student Conducts Research in Asia with National Science Foundation

A Shippensburg University Honors Program student has spent seven weeks in Asia after being selected for a competitive undergraduate research trip sponsored by the National Science Foundation.

JohnPaul Bennett, a finance major from New Cumberland, traveled to northwestern China from June 16 to Aug. 8 to study the Loess plateau, a 154,000-square-mile highland that’s home to about 50 million people and is known for its fragile ecosystem.

Bennett joined 11 students from Duke, Harvard, and other universities as part of an interdisciplinary research team organized and funded by the National Science Foundation and Central Washington University. The team’s academic focus was on the plateau’s rural inhabitants, economic expansion, and water policy.

The research group examined the effects of the Great Western Development Strategy, a 10-year program implemented by the Chinese government to boost economic output in the country’s poor western provinces in order to reduce socioeconomic inequalities.

“The exposure of being in western China was extremely beneficial to my understanding of China as a whole,” says Bennett, a senior at Shippensburg and president of the campus’ Chinese Language Club. “I was humbled by what I witnessed and gained a greater sense of appreciation for the country.”

Through interviews with peasants and government officials, visits to factories and businesses, and reviews of available statistics, Bennett and his colleagues measured the Great Western Development Strategy’s effectiveness in fostering economic growth and closing income gaps on the plateau.

After their field research was concluded, the students spent a week in Washington state debriefing from the experience and generating a report from their data and observations that they hope to publish in an academic journal.