History Conference to Feature Ship Student’s Research

Shippensburg University senior Katie Putz has been invited to present her research at a conference of the national history honor society Phi Alpha Theta.

Putz, a history major from Jefferson, Md., will present her findings, “The Muja-Who? Identifying the Afghan Mujahedin,” March 27 in Bloomsburg, Pa. The conference is an annual gathering of the Pennsylvania East Region of Phi Alpha Theta, and nearly 100 students and professors are expected to attend.

“The Mujahedin are a somewhat missing link in Afghan history,” says Putz. “Historians have neglected to investigate the importance of the Mujahedin and their failures, and that’s the research I’ve tried to do.”

As Putz explains, the Mujahedin were a conglomeration of religious and political groups that rose to power in the early 1990s after pushing the Soviet Union out of Afghanistan. They failed to fill the ensuing power vacuum because of corruption and infighting, giving rise to the Taliban movement as we know it today.

An Islam in Central Asia class originally sparked Putz’s curiosity about the Mujahedin, and she decided to turn her research interest into a thesis to fulfill her Honors Program capstone project requirement. Language and security barriers forced her to use mostly secondary sources for her study: interviews, journal articles, books, and news reports.

“What jumped out to me is how little we pay attention to the past sometimes,” says Putz. “It just surprises me how quickly we forget big events in other parts of the world.”

Putz received an undergraduate research grant from Shippensburg to fund her conference travel and registration. The conference offers an opportunity for students to present research in a professional venue and make connections with new colleagues from across the state.

Putz will graduate May 8 and plans to attend graduate school for international relations.

The Honors Program at Shippensburg University provides an outstanding undergraduate experience that emphasizes scholarship, leadership, and service. The program is made up of 150 students who benefit from small classes, outstanding instruction, exciting research, study abroad, and internship opportunities, and special social and cultural activities. For more information, visit www.ship.edu/honors.