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Five Students to Study in China Through ASIAnetwork Grant

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. – Five Illinois Wesleyan students and one faculty member have been awarded the ASIAnetwork Freeman Student-Faculty Fellows grant, and will travel to China for several weeks this summer for a research project. It is the fourth IWU time the University has received the ASIAnetwork grant. Other recipients have taken student to India, Indonesia and China.

The nearly \$22,000 grant will allow the group to study aspects of city planning in China that took place in the years immediately following the Chinese Revolution in 1949 by traveling to Beijing, Shanghai and Hangzhou.

“In the late 1940s, there was widespread hunger, a high percentage of illiteracy, homelessness, and inadequate sanitation and medical care,” said Thomas Lutze, associate professor and chair of the History Department at Illinois Wesleyan, who will lead the students in the study. The students will each take on an aspect of city planning that was implemented after the Revolution.

Liz Chandler, a senior political science and women’s studies major from Athens, Ill., will focus on pollution, both post-Revolutionary attempts to clean up industrial waste and pollution caused by industrialization during the period.

Eric Fatla, a senior political science major from Frankfort, Ill., will use his time in China to explore the building of post-Revolutionary educational facilities and provisions made to lower illiteracy.

Christy Ivie, a sophomore sociology major from Galesburg, Ill., will explore the attempts to upgrade housing and eliminate homelessness.

Melisa Maisel, a sophomore political science major from Wheaton, Ill., will look at the revamping of sanitation in the cities and the attempts to address related public health threats.

Sneh Rajbhandari, a sophomore business administration and political science major from Kathmandu, Nepal, will study the provision of health facilities and fighting drug addiction

in cities.

City planning in post-Revolutionary China is an area that has been under-studied by Western scholars, said Lutze, who noted the information could be useful to developing nations. “Many people in cities around the world still live in squalor,” said Lutze. “It could be important for people in countries that face similar issues to analyze the Chinese experience for what may be applicable and what may not.”

All five of the IWU students participating in the grant have already traveled to China with Lutze, who teaches a May Term class about Chinese history that is hosted by China’s prestigious Peking University. “I just fell in love with Chinese history and culture and cannot wait to go back,” said Ivie.

Fatla agreed, saying, “I went to China with Dr. Lutze when I was a freshman. The experience was an eye-opener for me, and it refocused my studies on the history of Asia.”

Two other Illinois Wesleyan students will be assisting in the study. Adam Guo is a first-year student from China who has been translating primary source documents from Chinese for the student researchers and acting as a liaison to Chinese institutions with which the students have been working. Sophomore Anna File will assist the team members with their research in China, especially when they arrive in Hangzhou, where she is currently studying abroad.

The importance of learning about historical and present-day China is increasing, said Lutze, who joined the Illinois Wesleyan faculty in 1996. “What impacts Asia impacts our lives. The U.S. and China have had alternative philosophies, political trajectories and ideas of how human beings should live with each other,” he said. “When we learn about each other, we expand and challenge our own notions of how we live.”

ASIANetwork, whose national office is presently housed at Illinois Wesleyan, began in April 1992, when representatives from more than 45 liberal arts colleges with an interest in Asian studies met in Colorado Springs, Colo., and Pinehurst, N.C., to explore ways to strengthen the study of Asia on their campuses. Grants from The Henry Luce Foundation, The Ford Foundation, The Japan Foundation and The Freeman Foundation have enabled ASIANetwork, now representing more than 170 colleges and universities, to expand its activities and to provide consultation and training for member institutions.

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