

My name is Timothy Johnson and I am going to be a senior this year at NIU. I am a Political Science major with minors in History, Southeast Asian Studies, and Chinese Studies. I was lucky enough to be granted the Student Engagement Fund for my study abroad trip to China this summer. I would like to reflect on my trip in order to demonstrate to the Office of Student Engagement how this trip and grant benefited me.

Going to China was a completely new experience for me. Before this trip, I had never left the country and had never even been on a plane. My experience on the flight was pretty good and had no problems, thankfully. Some challenges I had to overcome my first week in China was the weather, the sleeping situation in the dorms, and the food. The weather was very hot and humid in our first city, Chongqing. It was hard to adjust to temperature so quickly and with very little rest after the plane ride. The sleeping situation was also very different than what I was used to here at home. The beds had very little cushioning and were not comfortable at all. The beds are very common in China, as the culture leads people to believe that sleeping on hard surfaces is good for the body. The food in Chongqing was also very different. It was very spicy and had a lot of flavor and was based around a lot of seafood and meats. I am not a seafood person myself so it was hard for me to eat this kind of food daily. The best food I had in Chongqing was Hotpot. Basically, you get a pot in the middle of the table and it is full of a spicy broth and you dip the meats and vegetables in it to cook it. It was a different experience, but delicious! After a few days I had gotten used to it all. It still was not the most comfortable but I was willing to sacrifice it for the experience. In Taigu, where we stayed in the dorms again it was pretty much the same, but the food was diverse. One of the best parts of staying in the dorms was having Chinese roommates. I was able to practice my Chinese and they were able to practice their English. We were able to form close friendships with each and we keep in contact through WeChat. It was very cool to be able to talk to the students about their life on campus and at home. We also talked about the differences between the US and China, such as privacy, security, and gun control. During the trip we also participated in classes at the college. They

ranged from learning about the Chinese abacus to learning about the Mongolian language to the Three Kingdoms. All the classes were extremely interesting and taught me more about Chinese culture and history. Overall, my experience at the colleges were incredible and life changing.

Besides the colleges in Chongqing and Taigu, we also visited the cities of Xian and Beijing. We went to these cities as tourists. In Xian, we went to many museums and historical spots. Since Xian is the oldest capital of China it had thousands of years of history in it. It was incredible. The Terracotta Warriors were here and that was surreal for me to see. They were so big and there were so many of them. Xian reminded me a lot of Washington DC, a lot of museums and history and not many skyscrapers, which I like. Beijing was a lot bigger, but still full of history. The site of Mao Zedong's body was there and that was definitely crazy to see. There is a lot more modern history in Beijing, modern as in 1500 to now. The Forbidden City was here as well, which was massive. The main thing we did in Beijing was visit the Great Wall, which was one of the most stunning things I have seen. I never imagined I would see such an amazing piece of history. Throughout our stay in these cities, our tour guide gave us great lessons over the history the sites we saw. I absolutely loved these cities.

Overall, my experience in China had taught more about the culture, language, people and history. It accomplished everything I wanted it to do, and then some. I feel this trip has also helped me with my future career path. I believe when I start to apply for jobs and the employer sees that I went to China it will make my application stand out from others. This experience was something that I could have only dreamed of because of my financial situation and without the SEF I would not have been able to go. Thank you so much.