

# Student's Research Adventure - 2010

## Steven Smith - Summer in China

Tucson, Arizona recently broke the 1 million mark for population. But a visit to wildcat country during the summer months could lead to some serious head scratching about the legitimacy of such claims. It seems every year the end of the traditional academic season in May brings with it somewhat of a mass exodus out of the sweltering heat of southern Arizona that seems to markedly decrease the population of this eclectic and fun city. This summer, I was part of this exiting crowd that escaped the desert.

Through the **National Science Foundations (NSF) East Asia and Pacific Summer Institutes (EAPSI) program**, I spent my summer abroad, in China, not only doing research but also experiencing a different culture that is rich in tradition and history.

My goals for this summer were relatively simple: (a) get a lot of work done, (b) have a lot of fun and experience a new way of living and a new culture; and also (c) represent the United States of America in a positive fashion overseas (the last one was a specific goal of the NSF). I also wanted to learn some Chinese and learn, once and for all, how to use chopsticks.

The EAPSI summer program in China has been an incredible and very worthwhile experience. This has been, without question, the best summer in my life. The program lasted just over 2 months and there were approximately 40 American, PhD science students that were my colleagues in China this summer. Each of us essentially joined a foreign research group for the summer and tried to fit in as best we could with our foreign collaborators, supervisors and colleagues. We all arrived in Beijing at the beginning of the summer where we stayed for one week and participated in various orientation and educational activities. The Chinese government, particularly the Ministry Of Science and Technology (China MOST), was very generous and showed us all of the sights one would expect to see while in Beijing, including the Great Wall and the Forbidden City/Tiananmen Square. We were also treated to a quite elegant Peking Duck dinner that was fantastic.

Following this first week, each of us basically went our separate ways: some remained in Beijing for the entire summer, but many, like myself, traveled to various locations across China where we would reside and work. I worked and lived in Xiamen, Fujan over the course of a completely

unforgettable summer.

The quality and quantity of work I was able to get done while at **Xiamen University with Professor Zhao-Xiong Xie** was comparable to what could have been accomplished in the States. The facilities and access to resources while in China was surprising and very helpful. Our work with multifunctional nanoparticles for biomedical applications has seen much progress over the summer and my own familiarity and training with new synthesis and analytical techniques has also improved.

I feel like I came close to accomplishing all the goals previously mentioned (except learning the Chinese language - which proved even more difficult than quantum physical chemistry), but it would be incomplete to speak only of work when describing this summer - the rest of life in China has also been incredible. The food was, quite simply, amazing (side note: I officially now know how to use chopsticks!!). And the prices for everything in China, combined with the exchange rate, allowed my meager US graduate student salary to actually provide me quite a comfortable standard of living this summer.

Overall, although I am definitely a big fan of Tucson, it was quite an experience to be on the other side of the world for a few months this summer while avoiding the scorching desert heat. It's great to be back in the USA, but I definitely plan to make a return trip to the Far East in the very near future.

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