Richard Evan Wells

**Blakemore Freeman Fellowship Essay**

When I initially enrolled at Boise State University as an undergraduate, I had absolutely no idea that I would pursue a career related to East Asia after graduation. My interest in East Asian history traces back to a fascinating introductory course on the history of China, Japan, and the Philippines that I took in my sophomore year, one of the few courses on non-Western history offered at my university. The professor of the course encouraged me to pursue my newfound interest in East Asia, and in my final year of college, I was lucky enough to receive a Confucius Institute Scholarship, which gave me the opportunity to spend the final year of college studying Chinese at Northeast Normal University in the city of Changchun, China, the former capital of the Japanese puppet state of Manchukuo. During the year I spent in Changchun, I became fascinated by the history of northeast China during the years of Japan’s informal empire and decided to research the topic in graduate school. After receiving a bachelor’s degree in history in 2011 and enrolling in graduate school at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I made my way to the nearby city of Harbin to study advanced Chinese at the CET program at the Harbin Institute of Technology under a Foreign Language and Area Studies Summer Fellowship.

As a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, I have taken six semesters of graduate-level seminars on East Asian history, including a class on the history of religion in Japan, a survey of English-language scholarship on Japanese history, a course on the major historical controversies in East Asia (such as those surrounding the Yasukuni Shrine and the Nanjing Massacre), and seminars on early-modern Japan, early-modern China, and modern Japan. In the spring of 2013, I received my master’s degree in history from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. My master’s thesis explored the history of the international soybean trade
in northeast China during the early 20th century. In the paper, I explored the themes of Japanese imperialism, Sino-Japanese relations, global trade, and the politics of agriculture. My dissertation project will expand on these themes by investigating Sino-Japanese relations in the soybean trade before, during, and after the Pacific War.

I have three semesters of experience as a teaching assistant. As a teaching assistant for an introductory course on Eastern civilizations at Boise State University, I facilitated an hour-long discussion section every week, graded mid-term and final essay exams for over 80 students, and held office hours on a weekly basis. As a teaching assistant for an introductory survey on Chinese history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the fall of 2013, I taught four discussion sections every week, graded papers and exams, and held weekly office hours. This past spring, I served as the TA for a history course geared towards teaching students historical research and writing skills. My best memories from college and graduate school come from moments I have spent teaching and learning as a teaching assistant.

At the University of Wisconsin-Madison I have taken the equivalent of three years of Japanese-language courses for a total of 30 credits. In addition to formal classroom instruction, I have spent a considerable amount of time teaching myself how to read Japanese, and have referenced Japanese-language sources in my research. I used several Japanese-language newspapers in my master’s thesis, relying especially heavily on articles from the Manshū nichi nichi shinbun (滿州日日新聞), which was a Japanese-language newspaper based in the city of Dalian in the early 20th century. Even though I am not currently enrolled in a Japanese language class, I regularly deal with Japanese-language newspapers for other research projects, and am currently working through the IUC’s Integrated Japanese: Advanced Course textbook in my spare time.
This past spring, I was awarded a Fulbright Critical Language Enhancement Award and a Fulbright IIE research grant to support the China-based portion of my dissertation research. Between July and October, I spent three-and-a-half months in an intensive Chinese language program in Harbin, China. I am now in Changchun, China doing dissertation research at the Northeast Documents Center at Northeast Normal University, the Changchun Municipal Archives, the Jilin Provincial Library, the Jilin Provincial Archives, and the Liaoning Provincial Archives. During this stage of my research, I have been searching through Chinese-language periodicals and newspapers published during the late-Qing, Republican, and Manchukuo periods. These include journals such as the Fengtian gongbao (奉天公報), the Dongsansheng guanyinhao jingji yuekan (東三省官銀號經濟月刊), the Zhongdong jingji yuekan (中東經濟月刊), and the Manzhou techan yuebao (滿洲特產月報), which contain valuable insights into northeast China’s early 20th century history but have not figured prominently in English-language scholarship.

Having almost completed two months of research in China thus far, I already have a long list of questions to pursue during the Japan phase of my research. Before I am ready to start visiting libraries and archives in Japan, however, I need to develop my Japanese-language skills. I believe that studying Japanese without outside distractions for a whole academic year under the guidance of experienced Japanese-language instructors at the IUC is the best way for me to do this.

Immediately after completing my language studies at the IUC program in Yokohama, I plan to conduct one year of research at the National Diet Library, Waseda University’s library system, Hitotsubashi University, and the Mitsui Archives. Professor Okamoto Koichi, a professor of history at Waseda University, and Professor Enatsu Yoshiki, a professor of history
at Hitotsubashi University, have graciously offered to help me with my research while I am in Japan. My time in the IUC program will be indispensable preparation for this year of research in Japan. After I finish my research in Japan and China, I plan to turn my findings into a dissertation, which I plan to revise for publication as an academic monograph.

After completing graduate school, I aspire to become a university professor of East Asian history, ideally at a public university with a large population of nontraditional students. Many such public universities, like the one I attended as an undergraduate, have few professors who teach non-Western history. At my university, for example, only one professor was in charge of teaching all of Japanese, Chinese, Korean, and Southeast Asian history.

My reason for wanting to teach at such an institution is personal. After attending three high schools sporadically for two-and-a-half years, I finally dropped out of school at the age of seventeen with no plan for my future. After a while, I began studying for the GED test. After I passed the test, I applied to Boise State University, and was granted admission on a provisional basis. Many of my friends at Boise State took similarly circuitous routes to college. Those of us who managed to graduate attribute our successes to the remarkable teachers who inspired and challenged us during our college careers. I want to teach because I, too, want to inspire students who find themselves in similar, nontraditional situations.