

February 2016

Catching up with our 2015 Scholarship Recipients, Part 1

Kristina Butler

Kunming, China, is situated in central Yunnan Province and north of the Dianchi Basin. It is skirted on three sides by mountains, with one side opening onto Dianchi Lake. One hundred twenty six kilometers southeast of Kunming is a region of typical karst formation called the Stone Forest, which covers an area of more than three hundred square kilometers. The Ming Dynasty called the Stone Forest the First Wonder of the World. CIRCAC scholarship recipient Kristina Butler can trace her interest in geology to this very place.



Kristina's parents taught school in China, and she lived there for ten years, from the age of 8 to 18. Exploring the Stone Forest's caves, geodes and mineral deposits, and the huge limestone blocks--weathered in place like skyscrapers--made a lasting impression on her.

Now a third year geology major in the Honors College at the University of Alaska, Anchorage (UAA), it was Alaska's geological diversity, including: active volcanoes, active tectonics, frequent earthquakes, and one of the highest rates of coastal erosion in the world, all at her back door, which drew Kristina here. According to Kristina, UAA's geology program has proven to be amazing for undergraduate research opportunities, mentoring and fieldwork, with professors and other professional geologists who are very invested in the students.

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Kristina learned about CIRCAC's scholarship offering through the geology department at UAA, which sends out an email of upcoming scholarships to all students on their mailing list. She credits the scholarship with allowing her to focus on research by not having to work two jobs.

"UAA offers incredible research opportunities to undergraduate students, but many of us work part time to pay for school. Working on top of school makes it difficult to devote time to this amazing experience. Scholarships like this one make it possible to take advantage of these career-shaping opportunities," Kristina said.

Kristina was impressed by CIRCAC's interview process which involved a panel of committee members calling her to discuss specific things she mentioned in her cover letter and resume.

"The committee wanted to know who I was, what I wanted to do with my career, and how the scholarship would help me. They asked challenging questions and gave me encouraging feedback. What an awesome way to determine scholarship awardees – actually get to know them!"

Members of the committee have kept in contact with Kristina over the last year to see how her studies are going and the impact the scholarship made. "Getting the CIRCAC scholarship feels like getting welcomed into the CIRCAC family," she said.

Kristina's career plans are ever evolving as her research interests develop. She does know that she wants to be a research scientist and get her PhD in geology, but that career could manifest in a lot of different ways. She would love to come back and teach at UAA if the program has grown enough to support more faculty, and likes the idea of running an international research program that gives students the opportunity to travel and get fieldwork experience early in their academic careers.

When not studying rocks, Kristina loves being outdoors climbing or hiking on them. Other passions are cooking (she went to culinary school in the South of France, and traveled extensively, before returning to school to major in geology), being a wine connoisseur, and practicing yoga.

Kristina's Mandarin is rusty, but she would love to return to China for the wonderful cuisine, people, back packing and, of course, geology. We have no doubt she will get there, or anywhere else she sets her sights.