

Gavin Cross
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Spring 2015 Aura Report

My spring 2015 AURA award provided me with funding to attend the Duke-UNC China Leadership Summit from February 20th to 22nd. The conference gave me a chance to hear from a selection of notable China experts, as well as a chance to meet a wide variety of other students involved in Asian studies at universities across the country.

Duke and UNC cohosted the conference, with each day taking place on either campus. I arrived on Friday afternoon in time to hear a talk from Aaron Friedberg sponsored by Duke's Program in Asian Security Studies, in which he spoke on American and Chinese grand strategy in a "contest for supremacy" in Asia. On Friday we were also assigned to case competition teams and began working on our cases. My team was assigned to a case on Chinese involvement in Africa.

On Saturday, the main highlights were a set of interactive seminars and a lecture from Jonathan Landreth, the Managing Editor of ChinaFile.com. I had the chance to attend seminars with both Lawrence Liu from the Congressional-Executive Commission on China and Samuel Li Shing Hong from the Asia Monitor Resource Centre. I enjoyed the opportunity to have a long conversation with each of them after the seminar as well, speaking with Lawrence about the great firewall as a trade issue, and with Samuel Li about migrant labor rights and the role of foreign advocates in mainland China. Following these seminars, Jonathan Landreth spoke on "China's Soft Power Strategy Through Film," and I was surprised to learn that very few of the other delegates held much interest in Chinese film. I applied much of what I've learned in Chinese film classes taught by Dr. Qian and Dr. Kokas, and sufficiently differentiated myself enough to Landreth that he actually offered me work at ChinaFile. On Sunday, we had the chance to hear a number of other lectures and present our cases, although I particularly enjoyed hearing from Taisu Zhang on the role of international law in Chinese foreign policy.

I enjoyed the chance to hear from such an accomplished list of speakers, and the conference gave me time at meals and between events to speak personally with basically every speaker that I wanted to. The AURA also gave me a chance to hear from students at other universities, which I found particularly valuable since Rice is relatively small. I've already used some of the connections I made in the internship search this summer. I also hope that my experience at the Duke-UNC CLS will better prepare me to attend other conferences in the future, such as the Stanford FACES conference which I hope to attend next year.