

Personal Statement and Fellowship Experience Proposal
The Stewart R. Givens Memorial Fellowship

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"The war against Vietnam is only the ghastliest manifestation of what I'd call imperial provincialism, which afflicts America's whole culture -- aware only of its own history, insensible to everything which isn't part of the local atmosphere."

STEPHEN VIZINCZEY, London Times, Sep. 21, 1968

"No event in American history is more misunderstood than the Vietnam War. It was misrepresented then, and it is misremembered now."

RICHARD M. NIXON, New York Times, Mar. 28, 1985

Now the second-longest war in American history, the Vietnam conflict serves as a haunting reminder of so many things that seem better forgotten. With a total of more than one million individuals killed, under pretenses still debated today, the Vietnam War certainly fueled the anti-establishment counterculture of the 1960s, but also caused many more conventional citizens to question our government's military intervention in Vietnam. In our rapidly advancing world it's easy to forget the importance of this era, but for me it has become a source of both lessons learned and a burden of heavy questions: why were we in Vietnam, and why did so many Americans oppose it? Were our soldiers heroes or criminals? And from such a volatile and divisive time to today, what conclusions have been drawn? As I studied the history of this war as a student here at the University, I found myself asking these difficult questions and not able to fully answer any of them.

However, the biggest hurdle I have had while studying this subject is the lack of presence or information from Vietnamese perspectives. Too often, these minority viewpoints are lost in time or simply go unrecognized – in the end, how can we be expected to learn from history when supplied with only half of the story? Hundreds of books have been written about the failed U.S. intervention from the Western perspective, but finding an objective – or even subjective – view of Vietnamese positions is much more difficult and this lack of information has significantly limited my understanding of the conflict. Subsequent generations of Americans have drawn well-known conclusions on Vietnam, but what of the conclusions that present-day Vietnamese have drawn about America? I recognize that this obvious imbalance over the power to recount or revise history is not new, but it is also not acceptable to me, as it incorrectly implies that the dominant view is the only standpoint worth crediting.

One might wonder why I am so interested in the history of this war and its repercussions. My important tie to this conflict starts with my grandfather, who was trained as a medic and ended up a helicopter gunner in Vietnam, who never talked to me about anything about his war, but who also guided me to a military career. With my grandfather's support, I enlisted in the United States Air Force at nineteen years of age and served honorably for four years, at which time I was accepted into a scholarship program that has allowed me to attend BGSU on the path to

becoming an Air Force officer. As a future military leader, I know that understanding past conflicts is of paramount importance for my comprehension of today's challenges; as a student, the bias of available perspectives leads me to believe that broadening my understanding of the war's repercussions depends on my ability to access the Vietnamese points of view. There is no better place to do this than in Vietnam itself.

Learning about this war in the places that shaped my grandfather's life, and ultimately my own, would be a way to connect with him again while also gaining invaluable insight into this largely unpopular war: the in-country military operations and how they are remembered today, accounts from Vietnamese participants and civilians, and the effect the war has had on subsequent generations – essentially, my Vietnamese counterparts. To me, removing the ethnocentric barriers by personally pursuing the minority perspective is incredibly empowering and would be priceless in my development as a student and leader.

Ultimately, I have two specific objectives for this experience: first, I want to re-learn the history of this war from Vietnamese perspectives, and to study the disparity between their history and popular Western accounts. Secondly, I want to reach out to young adults in Vietnam and learn their opinions regarding the Vietnam War – does it figure into their daily lives, and if so, how? Do their understandings of these events differ from my own? Achieving these objectives will be possible with the support of the Givens Fellowship.

The attached proposal provides details regarding my trip to Vietnam. Over the course of a four-week visit during the summer of 2014, I would stay first in Hanoi and then Ho Chi Minh City to work with professors (whom I have already contacted) and students at Vietnam National University, which operates in both cities and specializes in Vietnamese studies. I am also in contact with the tourism boards in both cities to arrange for cultural immersion, with an emphasis on home-stay experiences with college-age students who are fluent in English, granting both access to my generation and their understanding of this history. Prior to departure, I will also ask for additional investigation of the topic with my ROTC Commander, who has been my military instructor thus far, to review selected readings that will further my understanding of the dominant American-constructed discourses of the conflict. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I will share my experiences and what I have learned with others in two ways. While abroad, I will create a blog with written and video updates on my activities and research, and upon returning to the U.S. I will hold an on-campus seminar to formally present my findings to the BGSU community.

In closing, I would like to thank the committee for its consideration. Regardless of whether I am selected, I am proud to know that my university offers an opportunity like this to students and values that our BGSU-cultivated experiences – especially experiences of this magnitude – will ultimately shape our future.

Itemized Proposal: Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam
Tentative dates: 14 July – 8 Aug 2014

Airfare: Detroit to Hanoi Hanoi to Ho Chi Minh City Ho Chi Minh City to Detroit	\$1000 \$200 \$1150
In-country transportation: To include funds for day trips and in-city travel via automobile, bus, and/or train	\$500
Lodging (4 weeks): As quoted by Airbnb.com; lodging would consist of a one-room flat with private entrance and access to sanitation facilities	Hanoi (2 weeks): \$420, homestay experience Ho Chi Minh City (2 weeks): \$600, private flat
Food and water (4 weeks): Estimate includes all meals (85 meals total at a projected \$6 per meal) and bottled drinking water (recommended)	\$510 (food) \$200 (water)
Fees: Includes price quoted from tourism office regarding cultural immersion tours, ranging from 4 hours – 2 days	\$500
Pre-departure health care: Includes typhoid, Japanese encephalitis vaccinations and anti-malarial prescription (co-pay for 1-month supply)	\$200
Traveler's Insurance: Quoted from ISIC website; Premium rate includes emergency evacuation up to \$500,000, accidental up to \$100,000	\$209
Miscellaneous: Includes small fund for emergencies, international calling minutes, purchase of books and note-taking supplies, etc.	\$400
TOTAL PROJECTED COST:	\$5889