In July 2018 I was fortunate enough to be a part of the University Immersion Programme at the Sichuan University in Chengdu, China. The prospect of going to China for the first time was very exciting and I am very grateful to have been given this opportunity. I had never taken part in a programme such as this one before and I did not know anybody else going on the trip, so I was unsure of what to expect from it.

The flight to China was long, and nerve-wrecking, but when we finally arrived we were immediately taken to the hotel by the volunteers who would soon become our good friends. The first few days were plagued by jet lag, but the welcoming ceremony presented by Sichuan University was very entertaining, and including a variety of performances such as traditional Chinese dancing and Chinese opera. We were given a tour of the university campus by the volunteers, which was even beautiful in the rain. The next few days were spent wandering around museums and the local shopping street, Hongxing road, trying local food and admiring the views. Here we tried the Sichuan hotpot, which is famous in China for being extremely spicy.

Our classes started at Sichuan University, which was great fun. We got to experience a variety of activities such as Mandarin, Chinese Calligraphy, and dumpling making. These classes were great fun, and brought us closer together as a group. As well as these mandatory classes, we could take a selection of academic courses at the university. I was able to attend a Neuroscience class which was difficult but very informative, and good fun.

In the evenings we were allowed to explore the city as we pleased, and we visited local sites such as the Anshun bridge that crosses the Jin river. Along
the river was a variety of restaurants and sights to visit, and we ended up visiting this area of the city many times during our trip.

During the University Immersion Programme, Sichuan University organised a variety of activities for us to do such as visiting the Chengdu Research Base of Giant Panda Breeding. This was a highlight of the trip, especially as the baby pandas had just been born when we visited. Despite being one of the hottest days of our trip, we had a great time and didn’t want to leave. We were able to visit older, traditional towns, as well as the Global Centre which is the biggest building in the world, and houses an incredible water park. We also visited a variety of temples, which was an enlightening and beautiful experience.

Since returning from this trip, I have already starting planning my return. I have received a placement offer to teach English in China once I have completed my degree, and am currently taking part in the Language Scholarship at QMUL to continue my study of Mandarin. I believe that this programme has made me more confident, more appreciative of other cultures, and also introduced me to new friends. I am incredibly grateful to have taken part in this opportunity, and to the Expeditions Fund for helping me subsidize the trip. Without it, I would not have been able to enjoy as much of Chengdu as I did. I was able to try local foods, explore the city through its subway system, and take part in traditional experiences. The time I spent in Chengdu was invaluable to me, not just in terms of future career prospects, but also in making me a better, more adventurous person. The friends I made, both from QMUL and Sichuan University, made the experience so enjoyable, and I know I will always remember the decision to go to take part in this programme as one of the best decisions of my life.