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WAYNE - William Paterson University (WPU) students of all majors headed to the Orkney Islands of Scotland to work on the Gateway to Atlantic project, as part of an anthropology summer field course.



*Miranda Van Dunk of Wayne recently studied in Scotland as part of a William Paterson University summer anthropology field course.*

PHOTO COURTESY OF MIRANDA VAN DUNK

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"First and foremost, we are studying climate change and sustainability; both longevity of culture and landscape resources," said Ruth Maher, Ph.D, an archaeologist and WPU adjunct professor and leader of the group. "This site was located beneath an eroding storm beach. It will not survive another big storm."

The project, working with North Atlantic Biocultural Organization and Global Human Ecodynamics Alliance (GHEA), used multiple methods to project how long the beach would survive the elements, by looking at the past interactions between humans and environment, according to Maher.

One of the six students involved is Miranda Van Dunk of Wayne, class of 2013. With a communication disorder major and anthropology minor, she decided to spend June 20 through July 13 in Scotland to receive three credits and a hands-on experience.

"It was my first time being in the field so it was definitely a new experience for me," said Van Dunk. "A lot of people that were on the trip were either archeology or anthropology majors, but there was also art and classical study majors. I was like a fish out of water, but I feel like I was able to learn a lot and adapt to do what

we had to do. We worked together as a team."

The group stayed in a hostel, which had six beds in tiny rooms. Five days a week, the students would wake up at 5 a.m. A few hours later, they would walk to the site together and excavate the site from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

According to Maher, it was work to get to the site location, but it was well worth the trouble. The cool summer had students wearing hats, many layers and rain gear. The island was one of the smaller and remote islands of Orkney with a population of about 200.

"You definitely get a lot of muscles from squatting and traveling and lifting rocks," said Van Dunk.

The team's excavation of the site involved removing rocks, soil and grass to take note of the layers within the ground, as well as cleaning up stone walls and finding artifacts.

Maher said, "We expected to find a 2,000-year-old iron age broch tower, but when we uncovered a third concentric wall, it became clear we were now excavating something much older – likely from the Neolithic period – 5,000 years old."

"They became a strong team and really made me proud," she added. "They worked hard, wanted to learn, did it all with a smile and left a sparkling impression on the locals."

Almost all of the students, including Van Dunk, will be creating joint posters on issues of sustainability, conservation of archaeological sites, and environmental and climatic impacts on human settlement at a meeting of the GHEA this fall in New York City.

Maher said of her team's strengths and weaknesses, "They struggled with a general lack of archaeological background. Most only had one intro course in the past and had no practical field methods course to prepare them for what was to come. However, what they lacked in background, they made up for with heart and determination."

Now that the course is over, Van Dunk is working for the youth program at WPU, doing office work, and mentoring and tutoring students. She will likely spend next summer doing her communication disorder practical.

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