

# STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

## Megan Laffoon

Megan Laffoon loves soil. Over the past four years, she has spent countless hours inside and outside the classroom learning how it works, where and why it doesn't, and what she can do to improve its capacity for nourishing life. "There's an expression that soil is the mother of life. It's true, and it's so easily neglected," she said.

A Louisville, Ky., native, Laffoon came to WKU with an interest in environmental science and a curiosity about Chinese language. Following these interests into research opportunities and study abroad, Laffoon has compiled a robust record of intellectual and cultural engagement with the help of her primary mentors, **Dr. Chris Groves** (Geography and Geology) and **Dr. Albert Meier** (Biology), as well as the staff of the **Chinese Flagship Program** and Bowling Green permaculture farmer **Timothy Kercheville**. The staff of the **Office of Scholar Development** have helped her translate her experience and sense of purpose into success in national scholarship competitions.

In 2013, a two-week training workshop at the **UNESCO International Research Center on Karst** in Guilin, China, transformed Laffoon's interest in karst desertification into a passion for improving people's quality of life through environmental restoration. The next year, she won a **Barry Goldwater Scholarship**, the nation's most prestigious award for undergraduates in STEM fields and a recognition of her commitment to a career in scientific research. At WKU, she has served as the Ecology Club President as well as a Grow Fellow in WKU's Office of Sustainability. Last spring, she **presented her Honors College thesis research** at an international symposium in Guangzhou, China, which brought together research hydrologists from all over the world.

In her final year as a WKU student, Laffoon is forging a clear path ahead. Last summer, she interned with global biotechnology company **Alltech in China**, visiting crop science research sites and exploring Chinese soil conditions and sustainable agricultural practices. This fall, she begins two semesters of language study and professional experience in Nanjing, China, funded by a **National Security Education Program Boren Scholarship**. With future leaders like Laffoon, the world will be better equipped to manage the challenges of environmental degradation and global food security.

