

Park Student Spotlight



Zack Jenio

Zack Jenio '22 receives 10 Park Enrichment Grants

In the Park Scholarships program's quarterly Park Enrichment Grant announcements, one name has appeared almost routinely since April 2019: Zack Jenio '22.

Jenio studied biological sciences and Middle East studies and, through an accelerated bachelor's/master's degree program, is now working on his M.S. in comparative biomedical sciences at the College of Veterinary Medicine. He has received 10 Park Enrichment Grants for experiences including study abroad, linguistics training, wellness coach

certification, and osteoarthritis research, and he plans to apply for more during his fourth and final year at NC State.

Since 1998, Park Enrichment Grants (PEGs, previously called GRASPs) have provided support for Park Scholars to engage in professional and personal enrichment experiences in the United States and abroad. Grants of up to \$2,000 are awarded by a committee and funded by the Park Foundation and donor gifts to the Park Scholarships Enrichment Fund.

Tell us about your first PEG.

I knew funding was available to help support high-impact extracurricular activities, so after the PEG poster presentations in the fall and spring of my freshman year, I thought about how I could apply for one for something I wanted to do. My first submission was to financially support part of my study abroad to Amman, Jordan. I had seen others receive PEGs for study abroad trips so I had a clear idea of how to submit that type of experience. As time went on, I learned how to apply for different categories like research and professional development opportunities.

How has the availability of PEG funding and the completion of PEG projects shaped your NC State experience?

The availability of PEG funding has allowed me to access opportunities that I wouldn't be able to get inside the classroom. For example, after a series of PEGs, I was able to purchase supplies to plan and learn how to use advanced biomedical research equipment for experiments. Because of those grants, I now have the experience and skills necessary to complete my thesis at the College of Veterinary Medicine. Opportunities like those created by PEGs have allowed me to apply what I am learning inside the classroom to my studies outside — and produce findings and conclusions to contribute to the academic conversation.

Which has been your favorite PEG experience?

My favorite PEG has to be the financial support for my study abroad to Amman, Jordan in 2019. While I was there, I not only studied at one of the best Arabic institutes in the world but also had opportunities to engage in international non-profit work. My team and I went to the city of Irbid, about 20 kilometers from the Jordan-Syria border, to work with at-risk youth for English language immersion. It was great to finally have an opportunity to apply my studies in a mutually beneficial, service-learning approach.

What is the most unexpected opportunity that you've had through a PEG-funded experience?

I am the data analyst for Yallah Al-Quds with my Arabic research mentor, Dr. Elizabeth Saylor, which is a program for Arabic and English language learners to participate in a culture and language exchange. In my role, I work to find ways to improve the program both from a participant perspective as well as for our student facilitators. I submitted a PEG to pay for speakers to host a professional development workshop for the entire facilitation team with a focus on the ACTFL learning proficiency standards and how student facilitators can employ these principles in bilingual classroom design. I learned a lot while planning the two-day workshop series both as a leader and planner of a professional development workshop as well as a language learner within a classroom setting.



Zack Jenio used PEG funding to study abroad in Jordan in 2019.



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Have any of your peers’ PEG projects or trips inspired you?

My favorite PEG presentations that I’ve seen during our All-Park meetings have been all of the incredible study abroad experiences. It’s great to hear how the Park program has helped fund specific opportunities that not only contribute to Park Scholars’ academic studies but also provide them with chances for once-in-a-lifetime opportunities.

As many aspects of life moved online during the pandemic, you found and pursued PEG funding for online experiences. What drove your interest in supplemental digital experiences?

When everything was forced to virtual and remote experiences, I knew I had to adjust my plans so that I could continue getting experiences that furthered myself as a scholar and leader. One of the PEG projects I pursued was Arabic instruction that included one-on-one private tutoring offered online by the institution in Jordan I studied at in 2019. It made sense to keep up with my language work and since it was outside of NC State, there was a financial burden to it. After learning how PEGs

can be used for online activities, I broadened how I applied for PEGs, looking at virtual opportunities equal to my previous in-person activities. Other virtual PEGs I’ve done include wellness coaching courses so I can qualify to sit for the national board-certified health and wellness coaching exam.

As a repeat PEG recipient, what feedback can you share about improving the PEG process?

The majority of my PEGs were approved with modifications, so I had to make a couple of edits based on comments from the grant committee. One of my PEGs was denied during a fall cycle and I received a list of edits and concerns for why I was denied. I had worked with one of the committee members, Dr. Sarah Ash, on Civic Engagement Initiatives and we have had a couple of conversations about our philosophies on service. After my initial proposal was denied, I sought out her help to rewrite and revise the proposal. Learning from her and being able to workshop the shortcomings of the PEG taught me how to create a stronger grant application. One piece of advice I’d offer is to find a way for the Park Enrichment Grant Committee members to be more of a resource if needed because it was so helpful for me.

What advice do you have for someone considering applying for a PEG?

If you're unsure or on the fence about applying, go for it! Remember that the Park office wants to give away these grants to scholars with plans for how to use them. The applications don't need to be huge and over the top, the funds exist to support anything and everything. I think a lot of people might see the application as a lot of work, but really the questions are to make sure we have thought about how this contributes to our growth as a scholar, leader, and contributor in a rapidly changing world. Flesh out an idea, make a grant, read through some examples, talk with mentors and faculty scholars and just hit submit! Of course, know that I am always a resource for anyone in case they need it!

