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Where in the World is Sophia Fleri?

September 28, 2018



Study abroad advocates claim that taking one trip will only convince students that they need to go on another. Sophia Fleri (mechanical engineering '20) needed no such convincing as she spent this past summer going on her third and fourth study abroad experiences. After her freshman year, she travelled to Argentina. Then it was off to Romania after her sophomore year. And this year she participated on the trip to Shenzhen, China and Munich, Germany, spending a total of nine weeks outside of the country.

Fleri's courses in China were her first history classes not focused on American or European history. "I took a history course that was not taught from a Eurocentric standpoint. The course had an appreciation for the worldview, and I was able to learn more about the culture I was visiting while living there," Fleri said.

Spending four weeks in Asia for the first time had its challenges. Fleri had to adapt to a culture with more differences than similarities to her own. "The language was extremely difficult to grasp, let alone read. Typically, the countries that I have visited have spoken a romantic language. I have studied both Spanish and French in elementary and high school, so picking up these languages was not difficult," Fleri said. "Chinese's use of characters rather than an alphabet made it difficult to understand. I had to rely on gestures, facial expression, and body language to get by. Despite our lack of knowledge of the language, everyone was very kind when communicating and curious about us."

Finding their way in unfamiliar surroundings, Fleri and her peers slowly became accustomed to the unique and special qualities of Chinese culture. "Navigating and understanding signs became easier. Cultural norms became more apparent to us. We learned to order enough food to share between ourselves rather than individual meals. These are all attributes of a culture that you absorb through experience," she said.

The trip also included seeing many historical sites in China, and Fleri went to several landmarks such as the Buddhist Feilai temple, the Xi'an City Wall, the Love Tree in the Emperor's Hot Springs Garden, the ruins of the Terracotta Warriors, and the Lotus Mountain Park.

After wrapping up her first summer term in China, she moved on to Munich, Germany where her courses focused on environmental studies, specifically Germany's efforts to promote and to use renewable energy.

"Going on this trip was an experience of a lifetime. I not only experienced a new culture and a new language, but I found an environment that I had been searching for. Everything was centered on the environment with parks in every big city, populated with people relaxing, exercising, or working. People were active, either biking to work or to the store; there were recycling bins in front of every house," she said.

Fleri found the city to be at the scale of the individual and walkable. "We walked anywhere and everywhere, to go to the grocery store, to a nice restaurant, to parks, to museums, to festivals, to historical landmarks, and to churches," she said. Given the city's extensive public transit, Fleri and her peers were not limited to one area and took the opportunity to explore every aspect of the city.

While living in Germany, she felt closely connected with the country. She adapted quickly to the language which eased navigation and communication. The city itself was different for Fleri because of the *mélange* of historical styles in the architecture.

"The buildings were centuries old with their original facades. It was a society rich in history and progress. I wanted to speak the language and know their trends and culture so much more deeply. I hope to live there one day and work in a place that values environmental sustainability as much as I do," Fleri said.

Studying Abroad has become an important aspect of Fleri's education, helping her gain cultural awareness, flexibility, and cross-cultural communication. And she knows these skills will be useful beyond graduation once she's in her career.

Fleri hopes students will take advantage of the opportunities abroad. "Go. Go now. Go unquestioningly and quickly. There is so much more to learn about the world that you never knew existed. It helps you learn first-hand about things you would study in the classroom. It is never too late to go," Fleri said.



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A United Effort at Tybee Beach

September 28, 2018



In what has become a semester tradition, thirty-seven honors students from the Armstrong and Statesboro campuses once again joined forces to “fight dirty” in a clean-up of Tybee Island’s North Beach. This was the third time honors students have joined forces to clean up the beach, and the second time as a consolidated program. The group that came out September 8 was the largest Honors Program group yet, and many first-year students were among their number. The clean-ups are a tradition that is growing.

Students from each campus have coordinated these clean-up events through Tybee Clean Beach Volunteers, a local non-profit organization. The group hosts beach clean-ups for the general population as often as every week during beach season as well as organizes events for volunteers from specific organizations.

Armstrong Campus student Grace Powers (cell & molecular biology ‘19) has participated in this event all three times and has had a great experience with Tybee Clean Beach Volunteers. “They are a fantastic group of conscientious volunteers who really make an impact on our beach community and give people access to an easy way to serve their community,” said Powers. “Just in the short time I’ve been involved in these semesterly events, I’ve seen firsthand the difference they make, and I am proud to be a part of the group!”

In addition to picking up trash, the volunteers sort and count the items they collect to determine what the city and local companies can target to help prevent future beach litter. The number one littered item they have collected on Tybee is cigarette butts: over 190,000 over the past two years. Cigarette butts are dangerous to sea life for two reasons: they leach toxins when wet, and their filters are plastic so they do not degrade. For this reason, Tybee Clean Beach Volunteers provides a separate tray in each collection bucket specifically for cigarette butts so they can be recycled separately.

For many students, the beach clean-up provides a break from the norm of busy school and work schedules. Armstrong Campus student Noah Keeth (cybersecurity ‘20) said, “As honors students, we invest a lot of time in ourselves through studying and self-development. An opportunity such as the Tybee Beach Clean-Up is refreshing as it allows us to step away from ourselves and simply give our time to enhance the quality of the community.”

Statesboro Campus student Hannah Dorough (psychology ‘18) shares a similar sentiment. “Not only do we get to help keep the Tybee community beautiful, but we get to do so in the company of our fellow honor students,” said Dorough. “Knowing the reason behind our beach clean-ups and seeing the direct impact makes it all the more valuable.”

With such a successful event, Honors Program students are looking forward to continuing this tradition in the spring and in future semesters.



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In the Gallery and Behind the Scenes: Honors Art Majors at Ovation

September 28, 2018

Taking art from the studio to the gallery is every art student's goal. For Georgia Southern's scholarship recipients in the Department of Art, the annual Ovation Showcase at the Blick Gallery in Savannah is a highlight of every fall. This year, two Honors Program students were among the participants in the event. Marian Trainor (3d studio art '18) presented projects from her honors thesis and personal work, while Megan Tanner (art history and French '21) had the opportunity to work behind-the-scenes with the curation process.

Trainor has participated in previous exhibitions, and at every event gains feedback from an audience of other artists and the interested public. She has been working on her thesis for the past year, creating sculptural and mixed media objects. Trainor credits her sculpture professor Dr. Marc Moulton with guidance and motivation in developing her work.

"If left to my own devices, I would probably never have shown any of my work at all over the years. Luckily, my professors keep me from being too much of a hermit," she said. "Showcasing my work is a very valuable reminder that the work you make deserves to exist, especially with an audience that is not concerned with preserving your feelings."

The fear of presenting can hold artists back, because one becomes emotionally connected to their work. Yet, differing appreciation and suggestions towards a person's work can help an artist grow and evolve. Trainor said, "The experience of letting someone into your work is nerve-racking, but overall it's a positive experience."

While Trainor submitted pieces to be showcased, Tanner gained experience working with Dr. Elsie Hill, designing the exhibit space. From planning to execution, Tanner developed professional relationships with the artists, her peers in the department, while trying to accurately represent their work in the space provided.

"The overall process was very fun. We had to transport all the works to the Blick Gallery in Savannah, unpackage them, and set up the exhibition. We had to decide which works and objects looked best next to others and on which wall," she said. "Each object had to be hung, which meant deciding how high and low and object must be. We also found locations in the gallery space for the two 3D pieces. The pedestals for the 3D pieces needed to be in the best position in relation to the other objects on display."

Tanner's work with Dr. Hill gave her the opportunity to see the potential of museum curation. Museum work allows the curator to engage with and to educate the public through different art forms. Tanner was able to implement ideas and knowledge from her art history courses, into a professional setting. "This particular experience has really benefited me because it was able to expose me to the possibility and experience of curation," she said.

This opportunity gave each student more insight to the art world beyond the classroom, and Tanner advises other students to take advantage of these opportunities. "For art students, any exhibition is a great way to allow yourself to be recognized by others within the community, whether it be your peers, your professors, or a committee," she said.

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