This time last year I made the decision to travel to China for the semester, and it was one of the best decisions I made in college.

**CLASS**

Our program at Donghua University allowed us to take a wide variety of classes. We learned about the Chinese fashion industry in terms of merchandising, product development, and marketing. These classes allowed us to collaborate with the FIT and Chinese students, which allowed each of us to utilize our expertise gained from our various learning institutes.

In addition to having separate cultural and language classes, I learned about the Chinese culture everyday on and off campus by talking and hanging out with new friends and exploring our new city. At first figuring out the food was intimidating, but by forcing me to try new things I discovered some amazing dishes. By the end I was ordering skewers from the street vendors.
FASHION

The fashion scene in Shanghai was unlike anything I had seen, especially coming from Raleigh. There was shopping everywhere you looked, every block, underground in the metro, in massive shopping malls. Anything you could ever want was easily accessible, and bargaining for it was a blast. The way people put outfits together was very unique too, from pattern play, to shape. Also every woman had an amazing statement jacket. Not to mention the talented student designers!

CITY LIFE

With a metro stop just a few blocks from our dorm building, you could get anywhere you wanted in the international city of Shanghai. We would constantly plan after class and weekend adventures that led us to art galleries, and parks all over the city. Never having lived in such a big city, I really appreciated how there was always something going on or happening. One of my favorite activities was watching the elderly couples dance in the local parks at night.
TRAVELING

I had the opportunity to do a lot of traveling while in China. The four day trip to Beijing that was planned through our program was amazing, we were able to see so many important places in Chinese history like the Temple of Heaven and the Forbidden City. As cliché as it is to choose, the Great Wall of China was one of my top experiences abroad. The mountain scenery was breathtaking and the wall was this massive, tall, steep thing, which took my breath away (literally, because parts of it were so hard to climb). Another amazing part of the Beijing trip was the bright colors and paintings represented on all of the buildings.

Another student from the program and myself decided we wanted to explore further inland of China, and so we hoped on a 15hr sleeper train and headed to Xian! This adventure actually ended up being a very relaxing trip for us; we planned for things in advance, and lucked out with super helpful and friendly hostel staff. The Terracotta Warriors were so fascinating, but honestly, my favorite part of our little trip was wandering about the Muslim Quarter with some backpackers from New Zealand that we had met at our hostel. They even met back up with us in Shanghai.
I am a person who loves nature, so when I heard about a trip to the mountains through Donghua’s international student office, I jumped at the chance. It was an all-inclusive, preplanned 4 day trip to the Huangshan mountains and surrounding cities that hundreds of other international students went on. Oddly enough it wasn’t until this trip that I really stepped outside my bubble of American student friends, and I am really glad I did. All of the other students were so friendly, and we became fast friends once returning to campus.

The 3.5 months I spent in Shanghai, fostered an adventurous spirit in me and a continued desire to learn. Even my last full day in China was not spent relaxing and packing; I hopped on a train to Changzhou to meet with my former boss and to have dinner with their factory’s owner. Sometimes you have to seize the moment to gain the most from your journey. I will be continuing to learn Mandarin through lessons at the Confucius Institute this fall, and who knows, maybe I will even be returning to China soon.