Join Us On Our Journey!

Dr. Juan Meng chose six students to participate in her first study abroad trip to China offered through the Department of Advertising and Public Relations at the University of Georgia. The program gave students the opportunity to explore and immerse themselves in one of the fastest emerging markets in the world. This unparalleled learning experience enabled the group to gain insights about the Chinese culture and learn about one of the future centers of brand communication.

During the three-week period, students visited universities, corporations and agencies in Hong Kong, Shanghai and Beijing. Other trip highlights included Lan Kwai Fong street, Wu Zhen water town, the quaint city of Hangzhou, Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City and the Great Wall.

Hong Kong
West Meets East

Being that it was a British colony up until 1997, Hong Kong is indisputably the most westernized city in China. Many Hong Kongers even consider their city as its own entity, an oasis of free media and commerce on the fringe of Mainland China. Considered a city-state and a Special Administrative Region of the People’s Republic of China, it runs on the principle of “one country, two systems.” After the First Opium War in the 1840s Hong Kong became a British colony, but changed hands between Japan and England a few times before returning to China where it has a high degree of autonomy in all matters except foreign relations and military defense. As the third most important leading international financial center, it should come as no surprise then that Hong Kong was chosen as the point of departure for the trip. However, while Hong Kong openly exemplifies western ideals, the fact remains that the city lay half a world away from familiarity for the students who participated in the program. The fast-paced, highly competitive nature of the eastern market has created a city with a relentless work ethic that can be seen in everyone from the local students to the businessmen. Aside from these eastern influences in business practice, the UGA students experienced cultural nuances through obscure cuisine and the family style dining use of the lazy Susan. These aspects would be common throughout the rest of the trip.
Work Hard, Play Hard

The group of six students visited Hong Kong Baptist University as their first stop of office tours in Hong Kong. They were able to meet Dr. Flora Hung-Baesecke and four students from HKBU to converse about public relations and advertising. The most interesting part of the tour to the students was learning about the Young Agency, which is a yearly competition that challenges students to produce a successful campaign for a local non-profit or company. The Young Agency can be easily compared to the Public Relations Student Society of America chapter at UGA that offers the Bateman competition and Creative Consultants.

The group also visited the public relations firms Edelman, Ketchum, and the Strategic Public Relations Group. There is a major difference between how each firm conducts business in Hong Kong. SPRG is the only local public relations firm the students visited and also the first. SPRG preached a unique look of how to conduct business in Hong Kong by creating a synergy of profit and benefits for the local community. Chairman Richard Tsang believed that the best method toward success in Hong Kong is knowing your market personally and that making a difference leads to continued success. Being local has helped Tsang gain an edge on the Hong Kong public relations market with SPRG being the leader in IPOs started in China. SPRG also has one of the highest turnover rates in the country.

At the Chinese University of Hong Kong the students met with Dr. Fung, the eccentric head of the communications school at CUHK. Dr. Fung discussed how students take classes and decide communication majors at CUHK. He also gave the students a tour of the fantastic facilities of the university, which included everything from a full soundproof radio station to a state-of-the-art TV studio.

Edelman and Ketchum are the two multinational public relations firms the group met. Andrew Kirk, managing director of Hong Kong Edelman, described the Hong Kong market as being all about face and very viable for public relations. Andrew gave a perceptive view to the students about how public relations and advertising are merging together. Andrew thought this trend resulted from an increased use of digital and the emergence of social media.

The Edelman team showcased one of their more original campaigns called IKEA Sleeptober, which aimed to turn a mundane product into an exciting social media topic. With limited resources Edelman was able to create a successful campaign with the use of selfies, 50 beds and a hotel ballroom. The campaign showed the extreme expertise of Edelman, which might stem from the creative environment fostered in the open and fun office structure not seen in most public relations firms. The students were very impressed by Andrew Kirk, who described himself as the Aussie from down under.

Ketchum was the last stop in Hong Kong where students met Dr. Simeon Mellalieu, partner of Ketchum and general manager of the Hong Kong office. He gave an instructive presentation of how the Hong Kong market works and what important factors to consider when doing a campaign there.

Dr. Mellalieu described how Hong Kongers love buying luxury and trending brands. He also told the students about a successful Lenovo campaign executed with limited funds. Ketchum simply provided a biker from Hong Kong free Lenovo gear to help track his long journey from Germany to Hong Kong in which many fans followed him on social media. The campaign proved to be very successful in giving a higher face value to Lenovo in Hong Kong.

"Listening to the fascinating professionals and learning about the differences between Western and Eastern practices has certainly changed my perspective on public relations and advertising. It's something I look forward to bringing back to Athens with me, along with the fun memories made on Lan Kwai Fong street with my new friends."

- Davis Lakeman
**Culture Shock or Not?**

Initially nothing really shocked the UGA ADPR students about Hong Kong’s culture except for the fact that nothing really shocked them. The group arrived in Hong Kong expecting to be in something reminiscent of an alien planet, but what they saw turned out to look like a supercharged version of something that was actually very familiar. They saw shopping malls, a high concentration of westerners, and they could even get on Facebook, and after a few encounters with strangers, it seemed that nearly everyone spoke some English. Well it turns out that while Hong Kong is technically part of China, for all intents and purposes, Hong Kong is not China, or at least that’s what anyone who lives in Hong Kong will say. It makes a lot of sense, too. When the UK handed Hong Kong over to China in 1997, the Chinese Government promised not to interfere with Hong Kong in any way for fifty years. The government has kept this promise, which has even allowed Hong Kong to stay completely censorship free. The students saw Hong Kong’s lack of censorship in the free spirit of its people and the critical nature of its media, although many professionals mentioned the practice of occasional self-censorship. Hong Kongers are extremely condemning and cynical of the government, and they are not afraid to show it. This attitude was surprising to the group who was expecting to have to walk the straight and narrow on their trip, but after the Hong Kong locals kept asking them “Have you been to China before?” they got the message. Hong Kong is merely a western city that sits on the edge of China. One that works very hard and barely ever sleeps, and through driving itself forward by its own competitive nature, it thrives in its independence.

**Fear Factor Food**

While the students found most aspects of Hong Kong to be rather accommodating to westerners, they quickly realized that much of the common cuisine of the city would not be so easy to get used to. In fact, it only took them a few minutes of walking to find a number of food products that they could not identify. One suspect edible, which aroused the most discussion within the group, loosely resembled a dried prune and smelled nothing like the like. This unidentified edible object or UEO could be purchased on seemingly every street corner, and dares and inquisitions surrounding this product occurred all too regularly until they learned that the pungent prune-looking treats were actually dehydrated oysters. Being that the oysters required preparation to become edible, the students were unable to give this exotic food a shot. Luckily, Hong Kong had many other exotic offerings in store for them.

On their second night, the students were treated to their first traditional Chinese dinner. This one broke them in. The group sat down at a round table with a lazy Susan at the center, and the waitress proceeded to bring out some traditional Chinese dishes, which were all quite different from what the students were used to. The two dishes that were most fascinating to the students were the fungus and the jellyfish.

The jellyfish was interesting because of its odd texture, but the consensus on the flavor was “not bad.”

The black tree fungus on the other hand was odd in both flavor and texture to the American students. Considering their distaste for the dish, what interested them most about the fungus was its popularity. Fungus and jellyfish were served to the students several times throughout their stay in Hong Kong, along with several other traditional dishes. Throughout the week it became abundantly clear that the Chinese flavor palate is very broad, yet acute. By embracing all the dishes that were served to them in Hong Kong, the students were able to immerse themselves in the Chinese culture without restraints.
Personal Testimony

Hong Kong has one of the most rare and diverse cultures in the world. We were able to experience a culture with a seemingly equal mixture of western and eastern cultures, which was a highlight of the trip. This ever-changing crossover of cultures is very apparent in Hong Kong. Looking out on a street corner we could see old, neon signs written in Chinese while right next to it hung a modern advertisement in English. The Avenue of Stars, Hong Kong’s version of the Hollywood Walk of Fame, provided more evidence of the meshing cultures. When looking down at the familiar stars honoring celebrities one might think they are in Hollywood, aside from the Chinese characters. Looking up though, the vast Hong Kong skyline, Cantonese people and small market shops reminded us we are actually on the opposite side of the world. Constantly seeing this mixture of cultures made us feel comfortable exploring the world we had discovered and gave us a new view of how two extremely different cultures can live in harmony.

Just before leaving Hong Kong Dr. Meng took us to Victoria Peak and this left a lasting impression in our already fascinated minds. The view from the Peak made our mouths hang open as we walked up to the lookout point high above the massive skyscrapers and expansive skyline. We reached the summit by riding up in a train more than 100 years old, looking like a old train cart from Great Britain. Having arrived at the top, we were blown away by the size of the city.

“China is the new frontier for communications/social experiments and will only continue to grow through the years. Our experiences here have opened up my eyes to the many opportunities China has to offer and highly recommend everyone to go to at some point in their life.”
- Jay Carroll
Shanghai

You’ve Arrived in China

Hong Kong had been a nice transition from the students’ comforting homes in America to the massive and bustling city of Shanghai where everything was written in Chinese. During their time in Hong Kong the group got the feeling that their next destination would be much more authentically Chinese than what they were currently experiencing. The students spent seven days in the city learning from top professionals in the public relations and advertising industry, while also getting acquainted with local students from the Shanghai Normal University. The group had felt comfortable roaming Hong Kong on their own, but were excited to leave their comfort zone as they explored Shanghai while battling cultural differences and language barriers. By day the city looked grey and serious, but at night every skyscraper in the city came to life with color-changing lights and dancing lasers to lift their spirits.

Getting Down to Business

The group was lucky enough to visit many impressive and entertaining agencies during the week in Shanghai. Visits to PHD Media Worldwide, Coca Cola China, Ruder Finn, Ogilvy and SPRG all offered unique perspectives on China’s media landscape.

At PHD Media, the group was invited into one of the best work environments on the trip. Complete with a relaxation area, a full time masseuse and a room full of pillows, the office alone made the students want to move to Shanghai. The presentation delivered by Kel Hook, the head of strategy for PHD Media, gave great insight into the changing face and communication landscape of China. He also went into detail about the media environment in China and discussed the different social media platforms that are essential to Chinese culture.

Coca-Cola China was an incredible opportunity for the students to see how the biggest brand in the world operates in one of the biggest markets in the world. The group enjoyed tasting products unique to China, such as the refreshing Sprite IcyMint. Richard Cotton, the content and creative excellence director, debuted a product for the group that had launched in China one day before and already had a record breaking reception. This Coca-Cola can featured lyrics from popular songs and a QR code which consumers could scan and share the song with friends.

The meeting at Ruder Finn was unlike any other on the trip. Liu Cheng, vice president of the Shanghai office, dedicated over two hours of his time to giving the group an unforgettable presentation. He talked not only about Ruder Finn’s public relations, but also passionately gave many of his personal opinions on politics and society in China.

At the Ogilvy Digital Lab, Associate Director Marc Violo showed the group a variety of digital campaigns aimed at mobile users. One incredibly successful campaign was for Yihaodian.com, the leading online grocery store in China. The app Ogilvy created for Yihaodian.com allowed users to find virtual stores that popped up in central locations throughout China and enabled them to buy food directly through the app at a discounted price.

Although Violo admitted some of the projects seemed gimmicky, the students were amazed at what the company was accomplishing and the implications this kind of technology might have on future digital campaigns.

SPRG was the final destination in Shanghai. Since the group had already visited the main SPRG office in Hong Kong, this presentation was less focused on actual content about the company. One of the coolest parts of the trip included the group being featured in a new promo video for FitBit, a product that SPRG is helping to launch in China. The students listened to a presentation about the product and will be seen in promotional photos and videos in China for the brand’s launch in two weeks.
“My favorite part of the program was exploring the different cities we visited! Hong Kong, Shanghai and Beijing were all so different and unlike anywhere I had been before, so I loved being able to walk around and take the subways to see what each city had to offer.”

- Mara Steine

Lost In Translation

Western media do not always portray China in the best light, so the students were pleasantly surprised when they arrived in Hong Kong. However, they were warned that mainland China would be an entirely new experience. Having always taken toilet seats for granted, the group quickly realized what a nice commodity we experience in America when they had to use ‘squatty potties’ and bring their own toilet paper. The girls were especially excited when entering a “really nice bathroom” that actually had all the basic restroom characteristics. The locals surely got a show every time the American group crossed the road screaming and holding hands trying to dodge the relentless cars making left turns. The group also became frustrated at times when experiencing the immense language barrier, but also found some of the written translations hilarious. At lunch one of the girls ordered a “mango kumquat spearmint child” flavored juice and a sign in the bathroom read, “Please carefully slippery.”

Despite the hilarity that ensued after many awkward language barriers and cultural differences, the group found that these were some of the best moments of their trip. When the students courageously ventured out on their own it was a time for them to completely immerse themselves in the Chinese culture and learn how different life can be on the other side of the world.

Flavor of the Week

Strange Chinese food was a highlight of the cultural experience for some students. Everywhere from street stands to convenience stores to nice restaurants, the group was constantly surprised by the interesting foods and bizarre flavors available in the Chinese market. The hotel’s small convenience store sold a variety of strange products such as packaged chicken feet, braised pork flavored Lay’s chips and giant ramen noodle bowls. At dinner the students skillfully picked things from the lazy Susan with their chopsticks and gave it a strange look while trying to decipher the food. Most of the group was willing to try everything from bitter melon to pig ears to turtle soup, but toward the end of the week some got tired of testing their taste buds.

“Trying all the crazy food and being forced out of my comfort zone were my favorite parts because it allowed me to truly experience the Chinese culture. Awkward moments and language barriers resulted in a lot of laughs and will make great stories.” - Ally Montemurro
Hangzhou

After a long week of visiting agencies in Shanghai, the students had a chance to relax during a 2-day excursion to the cities of Hangzhou and Wu Zhen. The first stop was the water town of Wu Zhen, which was built in the same style of the romantic Italian city of Venice. Having visited Venice, the students were interested to see the differences between the dreamy Italian city founded approximately 400 years earlier than this Chinese version. While walking the crowded streets as curious locals peered out their windows to observe the young Americans, the group admired the ancient city still being used today. The tour guide gave a history on a collection of old wooden beds carved by hand, Chinese festivals celebrated throughout the year and the distilling process of rice liquor as he led them through various museums. During a typical Chinese lunch, one of the students was brave enough to taste a fish eye after Dr. Meng demonstrated that it was actually delicious. The group was also made to feel like movie stars as Chinese tourists tried to sneak pictures of the Americans talking and lined up to take photos with the students. In the relatively peaceful city of Hangzhou the next day students enjoyed wandering through the temples of Lingying and smiling at the laughing Buddha. All the hustle and bustle of Hong Kong and Shanghai almost made everyone forget about the serene Buddhist religion that dominates China, so the excursion was a nice reminder of the rich culture found throughout the country.

Personal Testimony

The best part of the trip to Shanghai was being able to meet and spend time with two wonderful advertising students from Shanghai Normal University. We were nervous leaving Hong Kong from hearing stories about the language barrier that we would encounter in Mainland China. Luckily, we were introduced to Scarlett and Leslie who served as the unofficial tour guides for the first day in Shanghai and many days after. Scarlett and Leslie took us to the main tourist attractions like the TV Tower and on a sightseeing bus ride through the streets of Shanghai. They introduced us to different neighborhoods, like the upscale and artistic Xintiandi. The next day, after careful instructions from Leslie written in both English and Mandarin, a few of us were able to find our way around Shanghai to see more areas that they hadn’t seen the day before. The group then came back together and joined Leslie and Scarlett for some afternoon karaoke, which is one of Chinese teenagers’ favorite ways to spend time with friends. We were lucky enough to be joined by Scarlett and Leslie to many office tours. On the last day, Leslie handed the girls on the trip beautiful blue Chinese fans and also gave each member of the group heartfelt letters that expressed the appreciation and friendship everyone had felt over the past week together. We were all lucky to have been able to learn about both cultures and share a passion for advertising and public relations.
Beijing

Full Immersion

Beijing is the capital city of the People’s Republic of China, as well as the political and cultural center of the nation. Although it is the second largest city in China based upon urban population, the students did not sense that when they visited. This was mainly due to how spread out Beijing is compared to the sprawling skyscrapers and close proximity of all the buildings in Hong Kong and Shanghai. While the group toured around they marched through Tiananmen Square, walked through the Forbidden City, journeyed through the Temple of Heaven, climbed the Great Wall, and enjoyed the scenery of all the stadiums at Olympic Park. It is interesting to see the combination and fusion between historical culture and the modern world. For example, balance is an important aspect of Chinese culture and although there are modern buildings everywhere there is also a line drawn directly down the center of the city to help them maintain this important principle. All in all, the experience in Beijing was an incredible segment of the trip. The students lucked out with great summer weather and for the most part higher air quality than usual. It was very hot and a little hazy, but the group kept a good spirit and didn’t let anything stop them from seeing the sights and enjoying their time there.

“Rather than picking a singular event, I’d say the program highlight for me was the friendships and relationships developed. While being in close quarters with only six others (including our wonderful program director, Dr. Meng) has its challenges, I’m exceedingly thankful for the opportunity to get to know all these people better and secure new friends that I probably would have never met without this trip.” - Jamie Adams

Chopstick Time

Because of the time spent on tour buses and sightseeing, we had less time to revel in fancy dining or explore the cuisine in Beijing for ourselves (the tour company we used, in fact, arranged most of our meals during the week for convenience’s sake). Nonetheless, Beijing allowed us to continue to share in the intimacy of the group meal setting that we were now accustomed to. Fortunately, these meals featured many of the traditional Chinese cuisines that were favorites of the group by trip’s end. Oddly enough, Eggplant—a conventional, if unexciting dish in its usual state—seemed to be the most popular dish amongst us in Beijing because of the delicious way it’s prepared in China. Being that it was our last week in China, we were also enthusiastic by the marked improvement we had all achieved in our chopstick use. We now look forward to our chances of impressing somebody back home with our maneuvering of the foreign utensils.

“The Great Wall was a sight to see. I really enjoyed hiking up and down it. I would definitely go back just to do that again.” - Ryan Weinstein
One More Time

Beijing presented us with the opportunity to visit Edelman once again--fostering the continued bond between UGA and the company. While the office atmosphere in Beijing was less animated than that of Hong Kong’s, the visit proved to be just as insightful. Edelman took us through a review of their corporate practice and also delivered a breakdown of the business market in Beijing. The corporate practice review was interesting because it was unlike any aspect that we had experienced in previous agency visits. In this case, Edelman wanted to first explain the landscape of PR globally before speaking on the localized market they do business in. One important topic considered in the review was “corporate trust.” The Edelman Research team surveyed people in 27 countries and found that business is still more trusted than government. With this in mind, Edelman maintained that they strive to help businesses sustain and build upon this trust in the minds of consumers.

Eventually, the presentation narrowed in scope as we began to discuss the Beijing market specifically. Being the capital of China, Beijing is the city most affected by the strict media oversight the government currently has in place. Not to be bested by this challenge, Edelman explained how it manages to work successfully through other avenues that are popular with Chinese citizens, notably digital media. An astonishing 641 million people are Internet users in China, and 81 percent of the population use mobile Internet (compared to just 64 percent in the U.S.). The Edelman meeting was the last of our agency visits in China and summated nicely the knowledge we had acquired thus far, while also uncovering some new insight.

Great Sights

While Beijing was lacking in available nightlife for westerners who do not speak Mandarin, the daytime sightseeing and tourist attractions were hard to beat. First, we had the opportunity to explore Tiananmen Square and the Forbidden City--two spots that hold a grand amount of historical significance for the Chinese. The Forbidden City, in particular, was memorable for the artwork and artifacts that encompass the site. The cultural highlight by far, though, was our excursion to the Great Wall of China. Our tour guide arranged for us to see the Wall at a location two hours or so north of Beijing. Upon arrival, we rode a cable car up the mountainside to the Wall and were instantly astounded by the fortification we stood on. Thinking about the sheer toil that was required in the construction of the Wall was enough to make our heads spin as we climbed the steep structure and relished in the breathtaking panorama. It was an experience unlike any other and should be a requirement on any serious traveler’s bucket list.

Personal Testimony

Beijing has had many amazing experiences to offer us as we travelled through China. I think making our way up and down the mountainside of the Great Wall was easily one of the best parts of the trip. This is due to the fact that we did it in style. On our way up the mountain we rode a skilift. Not only was it a fun ride and an easier way up to the top than walking, but it also allowed for some amazing views. I couldn’t stop flashing pictures left and right, while at the same time praying I didn’t drop my phone hundreds of feet below. Although this wasn’t as authentic as hiking up, I would not have had it any other way. After exploring the Great Wall itself, we somehow managed to find an even better way to get down the mountain. This time we rode toboggans down a metal slide cruising around corners and weaving between trees to race to the bottom. With the sound of my heart beating in my ears and the rushing wind in my face I could not have had a better time. If we had the time to ride the cable cars up to do it all over again, we certainly would have. Unfortunately, we’ll have to wait until our next opportunity to visit the Great Wall, hopefully in the near future!
Ally Montemurro

Graduating public relations major and travel-fanatic took this opportunity to finally study abroad while also gaining insight on the quickly emerging Chinese market. Adventurous taste buds and personality made her the one to always encourage others to step out of their comfort zone.

Mara Steine

This senior public relations major from Nashville, TN came to China to explore a new place, have some amazing PR experiences and see some real Chinese pandas! She happily accomplished all of this during this trip while also experiencing things she never imagined.

Jamie Adams

Advertising major from Birmingham, Alabama with an expected graduation date of December 2014. Aficionado of sports, pop culture, and other similarly useless knowledge.

Ryan Weinstein

Graduating senior studying Mass Media Arts who enjoys music, movies, books, and the valued experience of being part of the first UGA Go Global China study abroad program. As a frequent world-traveller, he can’t wait to come back to China in the future and add on to the memorable experiences made during this trip.
Davis Lakeman

While this Advertising major would like to consider himself “fresh,” most of the time he’s ungraceful at best, but maybe that’s part of what makes him likable. As one of the most adventurous students on the trip, he makes a valuable contribution to the group dynamic through his outward optimism and generally positive attitude.

Jay Carroll

Rising senior studying Strategic Communications at High Point University born in Washington D.C. calls Falls Church, Virginia home. China’s rich culture helped him grow immensely on many levels. Learning about China’s communication, public relations and advertisement culture will help him achieve his goal of becoming a truly confident master in the industry.

For More Information

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