Have you ever dreamed of hiking the Great Wall of China, or watching Tiananmen Square light up at night? Ever wanted the opportunity to be one-on-one with the top leaders of international advertising and public relations agencies? Brave enough to go to the other side of the world, maybe eat fried scorpion, or toboggan down a mountainside?

The Grady Choose China Program offers students like us the opportunity to immerse ourselves in one of the world's fastest growing and leading industries in the field, as well as giving us an unforgettable cultural experience.

Grace Zeitlin
Account Executive
Major: Advertising & Psychology

- “What seems like a world away from home, China’s strong culture, history, and work ethic challenged and empowered me. Each agency visit inspired me to further pursue my interests in this field while every moment in the city made me want to pack my bags and move to China.”

Rachel Terns
Creative Writing & Editorial Director
Major: Public Relations & Fashion Merchandising

- “This study abroad is easily one of the best things I’ve done in college. An absolutely life-changing experience - I now have a far more comprehensive global perspective of the world, as well as newfound inspiration for my own career goals.”

Forrest Newton
Graphic and Social Media Strategy Director
Major: Advertising & Art

- “Had I not taken this incredible journey, I would have never been able to comprehend just how different, yet strikingly similar, the Chinese culture is to our own. I never would have known how much I love this beautifully bizarre place.”
With 14 lines and over 300 stations, the Shanghai subway reflects the fast-paced, intense life of the city. Different stations with unique designs are all colorful, modern, and clean - filled with advertisements in every possible crevice imaginable. The calm empty trains in the middle of the day sharply contrast the overflowing cars during rush hour, but make sure to push your way on and off the train or else your commute just got one stop longer.

The language barrier was apparent the minute we stepped off the flight and were fully surrounded by words, intonations, and written characters we could not understand. Among the confusion we experienced the majority of the time, we were able to pick up on a few phrases such as hello, thank you, and how are you. While communicating was frustrating at times, we all adopted a form of broken English and hand gestures that together seemed to do the trick.

Shanghai is definitely considered the fashion capital of China for a reason. Walking the streets when we first arrived, we could not help but notice the influence the fashion industry had on street style and retail - from luxury, mass markets, numerous fashion retailing districts, to giant shopping malls. Meanwhile, away from the spotlight, side streets offer a totally different kind of fashion - small boutiques and local designer stores. Many worldwide brands and designers were familiar to me, but other fashion trends - such as extreme platform shoes, androgynous looks, and athleisure designs - had their own Asian cultural flair.
This is the “classroom” experience of our trip. We have appointments with many professional agencies who specialize in advertising, public relations, and digital media. Representatives from each agency speak to us personally about their company, strategies, and offer advice as we enter our own professional careers.

Shanghai Normal University
Professor Wang Zhao of Shanghai Normal University met with us to discuss the university and their advertising department where she teaches video production and consumer behavior. One of her students presented work from this past semester of a social experiment video regarding gender roles and another student of Professor Zhao’s detailed the importance of QR codes in Chinese advertising. The university has a very impressive and awarded program with a hands-on learning approach.

Burson-Marsteller
At Burson-Marsteller, we were introduced to Cody Roberts, a consultant mainly dealing with sports clients. We also met Juliette Zhu, an assistant client executive, and Jambo Xie, an associate. Mr. Roberts and Ms. Zhu discussed the differences between many Western and Eastern ideologies and how they affect the media in China. Mr. Xie presented multiple case studies involving technology, airline, and consumer goods clients that all involved digital media campaigns.

PHD Media Worldwide
At PHD Media Worldwide, we met with Kindy Lei, AOR Director of Unilever China, who spoke with us about the “new normal” in the Chinese market. She specifically highlighted media planning, especially buying outdoor advertisements and the differences in outdoor in China versus the United States. PHD Media offers a creative global communications planning and buying network for their clients including Unilever and Bayer.

OgilvyOne China
Here, we had the privilege of meeting with their president, Jacco ter Scheggete. He spoke to us about the complexity of China’s market, on an economic and cultural scale, and also explained Ogilvy’s philosophy of combining scientific thought and process with creativity and innovation. OgilvyOne China is the number digital agency in China, with top clients including: H&M, Carnival, Budweiser, and IBM.
Wuzhen is one of six small historic water towns that lies in the southern region of the Yangtze River. On the east side of Wuzhen, you can explore where they make hand-dyed fabric from indigo plants, sample their homemade rice wine, and explore the Ancient Bed Museum. The west side is more developed and easier to navigate, with wider roads and less tourists. Make sure you go visit the large koi fish begging for food throughout the west side!
Walking around Mainland China and especially near the tourist attractions, we instantly became celebrities to many Chinese tourists and locals who may rarely see Westerners like ourselves in their day to day life. At first, we did not mind the occasional picture, but the glamour of the camera faded very quickly. It was a domino effect – if you took a picture with one person, then all of a sudden there was a group waiting for their turn. Of course we still did not mind when someone asked politely or if there was ever a child involved, but some people were a little more aggressive as they shoved their cameras in front of us or even tried to film us without our noticing. At times it felt like we were a show, as people would point, take videos, and even laugh at us while not breaking eye contact. We were relieved to find, as we entered Hong Kong, a more international and diverse population that did not feel the need to follow us like paparazzi.

bargaining

We visited the Silk Market, which is seven floors of individual stores with a wide range of products available at low prices - if you know how to bargain, that is. While most items have price tags on them, the price tags are extremely high compared to what you can actually get the product for with the right skills and perseverance. We found that the most effective way to get the best price is to start with an offer that is about 75 percent lower than the sticker price, then to slowly increase as the salesperson starts to meet you in the middle. Not working? Another great technique is to simply walk away from the store and you most likely will not even make it out the door before the price drops again. We call this the “playing hard-to-get” tactic. At the end of the day, people in the markets are just trying to make a sale and are willing to negotiate if you stand your ground. It is easy to get flustered in the whirlwind of people trying to lure you in their stores and all of the flashy items, but remaining in control while bargaining is key to a lower price.

Forrest found a knock-off pair of Kanye West + Adidas “Yeezys” and walked away a proud owner.

Manufacturer’s Suggested Retail Price: $200 USD

Silk Market’s Offering Price: ¥1,000 YN, or $150 USD

The amount Forrest paid: $85 USD
We checked one wonder of the world off our lists as we walked along the Mutianyu section of the Great Wall. We took a chairlift to the top and then began trekking along what felt like never-ending stairs until we arrived at a watchtower with a stunning view of the Great Wall and surrounding greenery. As we stood in the watchtower, we contemplated the manpower and craftsmanship to build such a long-lasting, massive structure and were completely in awe of where we were standing. To make leaving such a breathtaking sight a little easier, we tobogganed down the mountain, racing through the trees and trying not to crash into the person in front of us.

The city of Beijing is built around the Forbidden City, an ancient palace that was home to 24 emperors throughout the Ming and Qing dynasties. With striking interiors and detailed artifacts, the palace is the heart of the city, its culture, and its history. Directly in front of the Forbidden City lies Tiananmen Square, a large gathering space known for its role in many cultural and historical aspects of Chinese history. At the square, you can watch the flag raising ceremony early in the morning and its lowering in the early evening right before the square and Forbidden City are lit up.
HONG KONG

Until 1997, Hong Kong was under British rule, and the influence of this history are still distinguishable today. While crossing the street, make sure to look the correct way as cars in Hong Kong drive on the left side of the road. It is also noticeable as people tend to walk on the left side of the sidewalk and escalators are also to your left. On the street, you may notice a lot of double decker buses adopted from British culture and you may even hear words pronounced with slight British accents. Other British words will make an appearance throughout your stay in Hong Kong such as “lift” instead of “elevator.” The city depicts Western and Eastern cultures colliding and meshing together to make Hong Kong a unique blend of two worlds.

Food for Thought

Dim Sum
Lady M. NY

british invasion: history 101

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Mandarin is the official language of China, but Cantonese is the language used in certain areas, including Hong Kong. Tense and complicated government relations between Mainland China and Hong Kong can be noticed when speaking Mandarin in Hong Kong. If you choose to use Mandarin, some people will ignore you and would even prefer broken English.
Strategic Public Relations Group Limited
We had the pleasure of meeting with the chairman, Richard Tsang. SPRG is one of the largest public relations firms in Hong Kong that originally started as a four-person staff. Over the years, the group grew immensely and became incredibly respected and accomplished. Mr. Tsang spoke to us about the ways that the industry differs between Chinese and Hong Kong markets, down to details such as how journalists’ approaches towards PR agencies differ.

Burson-Marsteller
At Burson-Marsteller Hong Kong, we met with Market Leader and Managing Director, Antoine Calendrier. Mr. Calendrier discussed with us how public relations is a field that is rapidly evolving to include both advertising and digital media. In describing his own career journey, he offered us valuable advice. Additionally, we met with Market Leader, Polka Yu, and Associate Director, Susie Li, with whom we discussed tools used in public relations and a case study involving a large technology company.

BBDO Hong Kong Limited
“As an advertising student, you learn about the history and development of the advertising world and one agency that is always mentioned is BBDO. From coining the term ‘brainstorm’ to being the number one awarded creative agency in the world over the last decade, BBDO’s work is innovative, effective, and timeless. I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to meet the Corporate Communication Manager in Greater China, Poi Yu. Ms. Yu shared her insights on the Chinese market focusing on the middle class and the changing dynamics occurring in the market. I enjoyed discussing how to create works that work in China and am inspired by the array of advertisements she shared with us.”

- Grace Zeitlin

Edelman Hong Kong
While visiting Edelman Hong Kong, we were lucky enough to meet Adrian Warr, Head of Corporate Communications Hong Kong and Head of Employee Engagement North Asia and Zamir Khan, Senior Manager of Marketing and Business Development. Mr. Warr detailed the structure of Edelman as well as offered valuable résumé and interview advice to eager ears. In addition to meeting with Mr. Warr and Ms. Khan, we were introduced to multiple members of different departments who each presented a recent campaign or report. Our trip to Edelman was an enlightening and thought-provoking experience.

Adrian Warr, of Edelman Hong Kong, explaining the role of directors, managers, and employees in a highly leveraged agency.

Above is a picture of the whole group posing in the lobby of BBDO with Poi Yu, the Corporate Communications Manager in Greater China for BBDO.
Rachel Marie at Venitian Casino Macau.

Just now · Macao, Macau · Διόνυσο Διονύσου

Feeling glamorous for the day at the Venitian Hotel Casino!

The city of Macau is a fascinating blend of Chinese and Portuguese culture. A one hour ferry ride took us to this densely populated peninsula, where we explored beautifully tiled streets, temples, ancient Catholic churches, and even a casino.

choosechina

Our Graphic & Social Media Director, sweet Forrest, posing next to the beautiful Victoria Harbour!
Things We Learned

1) stinky tofu tastes like it sounds

2) Be prepared, pack a “mom” bag. Everyone will make fun of you until you are the only one with hand sanitizer and tissues.

3) Don’t be afraid to throw some elbows to make your way on and off the subway - it’s almost necessary.

4) Get ready to work those thigh muscles as you perfect the squat toilet.
5) Practice your chopstick skills because you will never see a fork and knife once you are here.

6) Bring a converter before your laptop dies and all your friends at home can’t be jealous of all your cool ~international~ posts.

7) Savor the water bottles the hotel provides and avoid drinking tap water at all costs.

8) Download a VPN for Shanghai and Hong Kong or say goodbye to Google for a few weeks.

9) Luggage gets lost, but if you pack extra clothes in your carry-on, then you will just have a funny story to tell.

10) Live in the moment. Wifi is limited and slow, but the independence from your phone will allow you to enjoy your surroundings like never before.

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