Every Maymester since 2014, the Advertising & Public Relations Department of the Grady College of Journalism & Mass Communication has offered the Global China Study Abroad Program to any University of Georgia student interested in the field of advertising in China. We, Emaline Carter, Emily Gimbert, and Chastity Van Dyke, are three of nine lucky students given the opportunity to participate in this amazing experience.
Unlike many of the modernized buildings of the city, the Garden's buildings featured architecture typical of most people's archetypical idea of China. The bridges, pavilions, and bogotas were woven over a pond full of ducks, koi fish, and turtles. At the main gate of the garden was the rain folding pavilion, the tallest in the entire imperial garden. It was amazing that in the middle of such an industrialized city we were able to marvel at one of greatest cultural and natural things that Shanghai had to offer.

As with most of China, bartering is a common practice in Shanghai's markets. Despite the various malls that sold designer brands such as Gucci, Michael Kors, and Balmain, anyone could get just about anything for less than half of the asking price when visiting a market. We made a visit to the Tianzifang art district in downtown Shanghai which housed hundreds of vendors and artists selling a variety of products like souvenir key chains, action figurines, shoes, or silk dresses.

While in Shanghai, we made a visit to the Yuyuan Garden. The Yu Gardens were surrounded by Mart vendors. The attraction served as another opportunity for us to practice our bartering skills. Emily and Emaline definitely took advantage of this and both purchased a selfie stick for 10 yuan, which with the exchange rate at the time was equivalent to about $1.60.

We also had the opportunity to visit one of the tallest buildings in the city, the Shanghai World Financial Center Observatory. The tower has office spaces, a shopping mall, and hotels. Our goal was to visit the observation decks on the 97th and 100th floors. Within the top 10 floors of the building is a hole, essentially making the top of the tower look like a purse handle. On the 97th floor, you can see the entirety of the city. Many of us attempted to identify our hotel, the Pearl Tower, the nearest subway station, and various locations from the high altitude. Yet on the 100th floor, while you can also see an amazing view of the city, you can also walk on the sky. The floors are thick glass, making up the underbelly of the “purse handle”. If you aren’t terribly afraid of heights, it makes for an amazing experience.

Karaoke is another staple of Shanghai, whose reputation we underestimated. In the United States we’re accustomed to the activity as either a pastime enjoyed with family at home, or a cheap alternative to a birthday dinner. Yet, in Shanghai, many young adults go to karaoke as a part of their nightlife experience. During our stay, we rented out a room in a karaoke bar downtown. The entire karaoke building was grand with gold upholstery, life sized teddy bears, and bedazzled mannequins as well as thousands of songs available for us to sing in both English and Chinese. It was evident that karaoke is seen not as just a mere leisure activity but as an extravagant experience.
While in Shanghai, we met Yiweh Xu and Yue Shen, two students from Shanghai Normal University who also served as our tour guides for the entirety of our stay. They brought us to their University which was a small, yet quaint community, that offered a stark contrast to the robust University of Georgia. We also met one of the advertising department professors, Dr. Wong and networked with students to learn more about their program. It was interesting to see how students are prepared for the advertising field in the context of the Chinese market. Their program has a lot of diverse course offerings, including message strategy, media planning, consumer behavior, production, and more, covering both the strategic and creative sides of the field.

The first agency in Shanghai that we had the pleasure of visiting was Hearst Magazines. We met with Hugues De Vaultibault, the DGM and Corporate Sales Director, who explained Hearst’s role as a magazine publisher of titles like Elle, Elle Decor, and Marie Claire. We were able to get insight on how the magazine industry works as an advertising medium, and furthermore, how it has adjusted to the switch from traditional to digital media while still maintaining a clean aesthetic look for the content. Furthermore, we discussed with Vautibault the characteristics of the Chinese market and how Hearst has adjusted its content with titles like Feminina and Elle Men.

At OgilvyOne China, we met the President, Jacco ter Schegget, who showed us a brief history of the agency, its clients, China’s market characteristics, and the agency’s strategy for its work. This was a wonderful opportunity not only because we got the chance to meet the president of one of the top agencies in the world, but also because we were able to have an interactive conversation. We discussed extensively the growth of the Chinese market in domestic production and innovation, and also how in the future we may reach a point where China becomes a primary influencer of westernized markets rather than the reverse situation, which holds true today. These sort of ideas offered a great perspective into China’s value as a market.
During our visit at PHD, we met the [AOR] Director, Kindy Lei. With her we discussed PHD’s role in the industry as the coordinator of media platforms like Baidu, Alibaba, and Tencent following the creation of a client’s media plan from an agency like Ogilvy. We also talked in depth about the rise in popularity of the use of QR codes in advertising initiatives. In so doing, companies use the code graphic during television programming or commercials so that consumers can scan, have access to the products used in the programming, and make a purchase utilizing an online payment platform such as WePay, thus streamlining consumer purchase decision making significantly. Also what was largely interesting was the campaign to redefine the term, “Made in China”. The idea is to reverse a sentiment that Chinese products are cheap and low quality, a concept that is already becoming apparent. This shift in Chinese pride for domestic luxury items could change relationships between nations in the future, which we found is consistent with the statements made by Schegget of Ogilvy One in our previous visit.

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Our final agency visit in Shanghai was with the public relations and communications firm, Burson-Marsteller. We met with consultant Cody Roberts and assistant client executive Juliet Zhu, with whom we discussed the Chinese market and Burson-Marsteller’s role in public affairs, finances, and crisis management. Overall, the agency places a high priority in delivering tangible results to clients through communication strategies that are deemed most appropriate based off of their consumer base.

At LKK Design, we met Yan Zhang, the Service Design Department Director and Business Innovation Consultant. Zhang presented us the goals and functions of the agency in industrial design, advertising, marketing, brand development, and more. We also had an engaging conversation about the agency’s service strategy development process. Afterwards, we were given the opportunity to participate in a workshop ourselves to redesign the service strategy of a client. This was a lovely experience and we appreciated being able to get a taste of what the strategic process is like in design companies like LKK.
While in Shanghai, we took a day trip to the Wuzhen Watertown, which is a small rural village about a 2 hour drive away from the city. The village itself is practically a time capsule, somehow managing to preserve the charm of a civilization relatively untouched by modern society. The Ancient Watertown is often referred to as the “Venice of Shanghai” as it sits on the Grand Canal which provides a majority of the residents’ transportation via ferry. Overall, it provided a stark contrast to the busy, fast-paced environment of Shanghai.

First, we took a tour of the East side, which features the more ancient characteristics of the Watertown. There were multiple museums exhibiting displays of ancient Chinese customs and current practices by the Wuzhen community including the ancient bed and wedding museums. One of the highlights of our visit was the rice wine display. Not only were we shown how the wine is made, but we were also allowed to try a small sample of it. Chastiy remembers that, “It tasted like rubbing alcohol.”

Afterward, we visited the indigo dye display. Our tour guide, Jenny, detailed the process of how they hand dye the pieces of cloth with patterns and hang them to dry.

Next, we rode a bus and took a ferry to the West side of the Watertown. While it was still relatively untouched, it was a bit more modern than the East in architecture, stores, and restaurants.
After departing Shanghai, we headed for the capital city, Beijing. Upon our arrival, one of the first things to take us by surprise was the amount of people trying to take photos of us. We had been forewarned that it was a common show of curiosity in China; we even had it happen a few times in Shanghai. Yet, while we were visiting the Water Cube and Bird's Nest Olympic Park, one curious tourist with a photo request, quickly turned into 10. Many people would even take photos from afar without asking. Our tour guide, Merry, explained to us that because Beijing is the capital, more people from various, especially rural, cities are often visiting. Such people often haven't seen people of non-Asian descent outside of television before, thus the astonishment, curiosity, and need for pictures. Considering that many of us have very distinct features like Emaline's blonde hair or Chastity's thick curls, it's understandable that we'd garner so much attention.

One of our first tourist destinations was Tiananmen Square, located at the center of Beijing. Merry, had explained that the Square is where the flag is raised every morning at sunrise. The ceremony is basically held at the same esteem that many hold the pledge of allegiance in the United States. Tiananmen also acts as the gate to the Forbidden City, our next destination. Enclosed by the walls of the Imperial City, the Forbidden City is the preserved palace and political space for the royal families of the Ming dynasty through the Qing dynasty until 1912. With over 900 buildings, we were astounded by the sheer size of the palace itself, but even more so with all of the rich artifacts and symbolism woven throughout all of its architecture.
Not far from the Forbidden City is the Temple of Heaven, which falls in the Outer City southeast of the Inner City. The temple was historically often utilized by the emperors living in the Forbidden City to communicate with Gods and/or regular religious practices. As we walked through we noted that the temple had altars and spaces for prayer like many other temples. They also had stones in the center of certain buildings that believers could stand on to literally communicate with God.

Each building has a purpose from weddings or political meetings to housing. Furthermore, the importance of each building is indicated by the number of dragons on the roof. Dragons are not only recognized as ancestors in Chinese culture, but are utilized to ward off bad luck and to protect the home. Another symbol we found interesting were lions. Lion statues were posted outside of gates throughout the city. Situated in pairs, one lion holds a ball beneath his paw. This lion is regarded as The Father holding what is symbolic of power. The other lion, The Mother, rests its paw on a lion cub, symbolizing protection. We found this so impactful that Chastity even decided to buy figurines of the lions for her parents.

After we exited the Forbidden City, we found Jingshan Park. Though it used to be a part of the Forbidden City before the 1900s, the park now currently sits separately, immediately North of it. We were able to climb the hill to the very top where we could enjoy a magnificent view of the Forbidden City in its entirety.
The Great Wall of China served as perhaps the most climactic portion of our trip. One of the New 7 Wonders of the World, this is an attraction we’ve all been aware of since childhood, yet here we were with the opportunity to climb its stone and gravel ourselves. It was surreal! During the drive there, we learned that the 13,000 mile expanse was built to protect China from its enemies, the Mongolians and Russians especially. The wall touches down in 10 cities including Gansu, Shanxi, Hebei, Liaoning, Qinghai, Ningxia, Shaanxi, Inner Mongolia, Tianjin, and of course Beijing. While the part in Beijing has multiple well-known sections, we climbed the Mutianyu section. We all took a chair lift up the mountain to the wall and were able to climb the section in about an hour. The hike up the wall is no joke. We soon realized how much we underestimated the climb as we were panting endlessly the top. It was all worth it once we saw the impeccable view. Afterward, we all reconvened as a group and went to toboggan back down the mountain.
Overall, there is no better way to describe this city to an American than as a mix of Miami and New York City. It’s complete with blue water, traffic, tall and compact buildings, and crazy high housing prices. We expected it to be similar to Shanghai, yet we found there were many things that differentiated it: they use an entirely separate currency, the Hong Kong Dollar, over using the Yuan Renminbi; the people are incredibly diverse, in the context of a Chinese city; the power outlets are European; there’s no firewall blocking Facebook, Twitter, Google, and other western websites; Cantonese is spoken over Mandarin; and plenty more.

As we learned more about Hong Kong’s relationship with Mainland China and how it was originally owned by the British until 1997 when it was returned to China as an independent territory, it seems only reasonable that such stark differences exist.

On our first night, we went to the Victoria Harbour to watch A Symphony of Lights, a light show that the city of Hong Kong plays every night. Regarded as the world’s largest permanent light and sound show, laser lights dance to the rhythm of the music from Hong Kong’s tallest buildings.

Our last full day in Hong Kong was spent on an excursion to Macau, a peninsula located in Southeast Asia. Previously a Portuguese Colony, Macau is a rich in both Chinese and Portuguese culture as seen in its architecture, food, and more. After being transferred to China in 1999, Macau currently operates as an autonomous territory, much like Hong Kong.
While there we visited many attractions. First we saw the Monte Fort, a centuries old stone fort that acts as the historical military center of Macau. There we found cannons, yet they only faced the south and west sides. Because they cannot face China, the north and east sides were removed years ago. Next we saw the ruins of St. Paul’s Cathedral, one of Macau’s most well known landmarks. Built by the Portuguese in the 16th century and burned down in 1835, the cathedral holds a lot of history of both Chinese and Portuguese influence. On the building are carvings of jesuit images like the Virgin Mary stepping on a 7 headed creature. Beneath it is the phrase, “Holy Mother Tramples the Heads of the Dragon” written in Chinese letters. In contrast, we also visited the Temple of A-Ma, a traditional taoist temple. Because residents are free to practice whatever religion they prefer, both are sites of heritage. We also visited Senado Square, and town square and shopping area. As we walked through it, we were offered samples from almost every restaurant down the road. At one bakery, we tried Portuguese egg tarts, a pastry made with egg and sugar.

Macau has also gained a reputation as the “Las Vegas of the East”. Full of high-end luxury hotels and casinos, it is considered the world’s top gambling city. We made a visit to The Venetian Macao, a luxury resort and casino. While unfortunately due to the 21 year old age requirement, Emily and Chastity couldn’t go inside the casino and instead walked around the shopping mall, Emaline enjoyed the slot machines and roulette tables inside and only lost 20 Hong Kong Dollars in the process.
Our first visit was with Strategic Public Relations Group, where we met the chairman and founder, Richard Tsang. We were excited enough to learn that it is the largest public relations network operating in Hong Kong, but it was even more interesting when he explained that typically in most markets, the local companies are the biggest in terms of clients with smaller scale target markets. Yet, for clients with more regional or international target markets, larger international firms are typically the first choice for clients. To combat this, local companies, including SPRG, from various markets around the world collaborate in a partnership called Public Relations Organisation International (PROI) Worldwide. Through this, SPRG and other partner companies are able to offer a wider range of markets and services to larger clients. It also makes the entire network, when viewed as a single company, the second largest PR group in the world. Furthermore, Tsang has recently been appointed the global chairman PROI Worldwide, making him the first Asian to fill the position. Tsang’s pride in his work was extremely infectious. Following the visit we all felt motivated to hopefully make a comparable impact in our future careers.

At Edelman Hong Kong, we met the Head of Corporate Communications, Adrian Warr. One of the first things Warr discussed with us is what sets Edelman apart from other communications firms. We found it interesting that he didn’t utilize awards or prestige of clientele to differentiate the agency. The main thing that sets them apart is their independence. Edelman doesn’t have a large fiscal responsibility to shareholders; there are not as many interests competing with the interest of the client. Therefore, Warr and other specialists in Edelman have more flexibility to satisfy their client. We also had the opportunity to ask him for his best piece of advice. To our surprise, his immediate response was to not pursue advertising. This was initially unsettling to many of us, especially considering that a lot of us are reaching our last few years in the advertising major. He continued to explain that if we move forward with advertising rather than PR, it is best to look for a company that focuses more so on digital advertising over the more traditional firms because of their outdated business model. The industry as a whole is shifting at a rate that traditional firms can’t reasonably adjust their business model to in time. Furthermore, they still have stakeholders to satisfy, and realistically the required changes would result in a loss that they can’t afford, thus the inevitable decline. Smaller, “weird”, or unorthodox firms with no shareholders can make adjustments much more easily. This was a refreshing take on the industry that we hadn’t considered before.
Our last office visit was with the advertising agency, BBDO. There we met Poi Yu, the Corporate Communication Manager. It was refreshing to see a young, energetic woman in a position of power in an agency, especially considering most of the presenters and executives we’ve seen throughout this trip have been men. Their mantra, “The Work, The Work, The Work” perfectly exemplifies their dedication to the quality of their work. Quality, as further defined by Poi, is dependent on the work’s creativity or ability to attract the attention of consumers and its effectiveness in delivering the desired result. Afterward, she showed us a few campaigns and advertisements that BBDO has done for clients in previous years.

Having enjoyed our visit with the Shanghai office, we were ecstatic to visit Burson-Marsteller Hong Kong. We were very delighted to meet with Antoine Calendrier, the Market Leader and Managing Director. Though his time with us was short, it was remarkably impactful. Not only did he share his professional journey with us, he also gave us advice especially emphasizing our need to be clear and ruthless about what exactly we want to do as early as possible. When Chastity asked how to define or clarify these passions we need to be clear about, he suggested that we maximize our exposure to as many different things as possible. In doing so, we can be more certain in identifying what our passions are. Ultimately, his words resonated with all of us and we’re certain they will be valuable as we shift from University students to young professionals. Following Calendrier’s departure, we also met Associate Director Susie Li and Senior Associate Polka Yu who introduced us to the work Burson-Marsteller has done for their clients.
Dinner at Pop Restaurant
Located at “3 on the Bund”, the restaurant itself was beautiful enough, but the rooftop had an amazing view of Shanghai overlooking the Huang Pu River. Though the restaurant sold American food, it still clearly had an eccentric twist with small changes that caught me by surprise such as popcorn on top of the chocolate cake and anchovies in the salad.

Din Tai Fung
which we were told had some of the best soup dumplings in the world. And yet of course they were right. The chicken, pork, and shrimp flavors were all good but the crab was amazing.

Dolar Shop
For our Shanghai farewell dinner, we went to Dolar Shop to enjoy what was for many of us our first hot pot dinner. Though Emily has had a melting pot dinner which is similar, none of us were exactly prepared for the clumsy, yet delicious experience. We were each given our own pots of broth boiling over a flame along with a huge selection of raw meats, vegetables, and noodles to cook in the pots. Overall our meal was very good and we managed to finish without burning or poisoning ourselves.
Peking Duck
As soon as we arrived in Beijing, we immediately headed to [restaurant] to try the world renowned peking duck. Chastity, for one, had never had duck itself, much less peking duck but we were all eager to try it nonetheless. Once the chef brought it to the table, he cut it in front of us into servable pieces. When eating, we were instructed to place it onto a pancake, much like an enchilada, along with our choice of pineapple, cucumber, sauce, and other items. It was delicious!

The Night Street Food Market
Around the corner from our hotel in Beijing, we walked to a night market. There along about a mile of the street were dozens of vendors selling various food items, from sticks of pineapple and melons to whole crabs and roasted chickens. Yet what we found really bizarre were the scorpions, snakes, jelly fish all served on sticks. Emily felt adventurous and decided to try the scorpion which she claimed tasted like fried shrimp. She also tried the stinky tofu whose potent smell we had noticed multiple times.

Birthday noodles
In Hong Kong we celebrated a birthday. Of course in Chinese fashion, we had dinner at Crystal Jade. There we all had a bowl of noodles which is a customary way to celebrate birthdays in China. The long noodles symbolize longevity. By eating them, you wishing longevity to the birthday person’s life.
Everyones Favorite Misconceptions

BE SAFE. IT’S DANGEROUS OVER THERE!

Many people that haven’t been to China before are often fearful due to the language barrier, stories of scammers, and general stereotypes. Yet, considering the large amount of surveillance in China, street crime and violence is rare, especially when compared to other countries like the United States. Its so safe, that one could walk alone in the middle of the night without an issue, though we don’t recommend that nonetheless.

“EVERYTHING’S SO... SMALL THERE”

Due to the perception that Chinese people are short, this was a concern many of us heard before arriving in China. Yet, Chinese people are not necessarily extremely short. Yes they may be around 3 inches shorter than an American on average, but not to the extreme that many believe. We all slept comfortably without our feet extending the edges of our beds and entered rooms without hitting our foreheads on the doorway. Yet the only thing that may have merit is the presence of squat toilets: a toilet situated as a hole in the floor, rather than a porcelain chair. They come complete with toilet paper and a flush button, yet it was a strange bathroom feature to get used to.

“I CAN’T STAND CHINESE PEOPLE! THEY’RE SO RUDE AND PUSHY”

Due to a culture of hyper competition in China, there is general attitude among its people that they will miss out on their spot if they don’t hurry and take it for themselves. Of course there is a huge population and limited resources, so it only makes sense that the sentiment exists. Yet, not all Chinese people are this way. Throughout this trip, we’ve met plenty of people who have been nothing but kind to us including Yiwei, Yue, Merry, and more. A fast paced, competitive lifestyle isn’t indicative of someone’s personal values and likeability.

Before coming to China many of us had friends or even personal prejudices that made assumptions about the country of China, the standard of living, the residents, and more. Yet with this trip, we’ve not only been able to see for ourselves that many of these misconceptions are untrue, but we also now have a little more knowledge to correct and teach our communities back in the United States.
Our Team

Emaline Carter
I am a graduate student in the Grady college of Journalism and Mass Communications; obtaining my M.A. in Mass Communications with a concentration in PR. I am full of wanderlust and having the opportunity to travel to China was life-changing and inspiring. I’ve enjoyed gaining valuable industry knowledge at the same time while experiences the different cultures of Asia.

Emily Gimbert
I’m currently in my third year at the University of Georgia studying Advertising & Public Relations with a concentration in Fashion Merchandising. This trip has enlarged my view of the world and impacted my understanding of my own life with the different cultures that I’ve emerged myself in these past 3 weeks.

Chastity Van Dyke
I’m a rising 4th year studying Advertising, Marketing, and International Business at the University of Georgia. Due to the fact that I’ve never been outside of the United States before, I have always made it a goal of mine to study abroad during my collegiate experience. Yet, by choosing China, I’ve been able to get a perspective of a culture entirely different than my own. I’ve challenged myself to get outside of my comfort zone and learn new things and I believe that this is only the beginning of my personal growth period.

Photos by: Emily Carter, Emily Gimbert, Juan Meng