Recent International Alumna Studies Emerging Field at Columbia
by Kristin Kemp

Xinghang Lu (BA ’16, economics) had never been to Colorado – let alone America – when she arrived on campus at DU in 2012. Originally from China, Lu made the decision to relocate to Denver to pursue her interest in studying economics.

The National Higher Education Entrance Examination (commonly known as Gaokao), is a prerequisite exam for admission into the majority of higher education institutions in China. Most Chinese universities use the exam to assign majors to students. In many cases, students cannot choose for themselves. Lu was assigned food science at Jinan University, Guangzhou, despite her desire to study economics.

“I love economics, ever since high school. I wanted to study economics and I could not change my major since the university already assigned me one,” Lu said. “I heard from my friends who studied in the U.S. that they could choose every major they wanted to learn in the U.S. Under consideration, I decided to quit my university in China and transfer to the U.S.”

It proved to be a life-changing decision for Lu. She excelled in DU’s economics department and received the J. Fagg Foster Award, which is given annually to the most outstanding students studying political economy. Now she is living in New York as an applied analytics graduate student at Columbia University.

With English as a second language, Lu was concerned about taking classes in English in America. She often stayed after class and met with faculty during office hours to get advice and counsel.

“I think one of the things that I found valuable is the relationship established with my professors in the economics department. The professors gave me a lot of suggestions with my future plan, and helped me a lot with my study,” she said.

“Xinghang is a very outstanding student,” said Dr. Peter Ho, associate professor and chair of the economics department. “I give a lot of credit to some of my colleagues for challenging her and patiently guiding her along. Xinghang was asked to do a lot of readings and writings in different economics classes. Many students – international or domestic – would have struggled. She worked very hard. She was tenacious in her desire to learn. I am very pleased that her hard work is paying off.”

Indeed, her hard work at DU landed her admission at Columbia to study an emerging field: applied analytics. “I had an econometrics class at DU, and I really want to learn how things relate to models. I think data would make a big difference in the future,” said Lu.

DU’s economics department had also recruited her to its master’s program when she was deciding what to do after college. But because she was interested in diversifying her
experiences, she accepted the offer at Columbia and moved from Denver to NY. Her goal is to land a professional position related to data analytics in the U.S. after she graduates.

Similarly, she was originally offered admission at several American universities as an undergraduate student. She had a difficult time selecting where to attend because she had never been to America before.

“The only thing I could do was to search online about the environment and culture in different states. I seldom saw snow in my hometown, and I heard about the small-sized classes at DU. Therefore, I chose to go to DU!” said Lu.

She now offers this advice to international students at DU: “I think DU is a great place, especially for international students who can meet students from different countries. As an international student, don't be afraid to talk with your professors. They welcome every question a student has.”

Lu also added: “and enjoy the days at DU. You will miss it after you graduate!”