

Student Thrives on Diversity of Asian Studies Program by Janette Ballard



After spending nearly two years, off and on, traveling and living in China, Denver native Hsing Tseng learned a thing or two about Chinese culture, and it sparked an interest to learn more about Asian cultures as an Asian studies major at DU.

The fourth-year undergraduate, who is also a journalism studies major, cites the variety of classes and interdisciplinary nature of the Asian studies program as what she enjoys the most.

“I enjoy being able, and actually required, to take courses in a wide variety of departments, including history, religious studies, foreign language, politics and art history,” she said.

Tseng began her travels to China in 2008, first to a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site where she lived amongst other American students and didn’t need to learn the language. She decided upon her second visit in 2010 to fully immerse herself in the culture.

“Armed with a 1988 Chinese-English dictionary and a very rudimentary knowledge of Chinese, I dove into the language and ended up becoming fluent and literate in that second, eight-month trip,” Tseng said. “That opened a lot of doors for me professionally and in terms of being able to really learn about China and its culture.”

Tseng volunteered to teach English in a public preschool and a public elementary school. She made up a basic English curriculum to teach the children. “Surprisingly, word of mouth spread throughout the town and parents started showing up with their kids!” said Tseng.

“One of the best rewards was watching children run up to their parents or grandparents and recite the alphabet flawlessly, then seeing the surprised, pleased expressions on the faces of the older generation,” she added.

Tseng also interned for a private company that tutored students for foreign college entrance exams. At just 15 years old, Tseng was creating and teaching college-level English curriculum. Not only did the experience test her language skills, but she also found herself working 12-hour days, navigating the overcrowded public transportation system for her daily commute, grading papers, preparing lesson plans and trying to be a good teacher.

“Is education my end goal? No, but I think becoming a teacher helped me learn so much more while I was in China,” she said.

During her first year at the University of Denver, Tseng discovered the joy of writing, and being paid to write, for the *Clarion*, the DU student newspaper. She worked her way up from contributing writer to staff writer and eventually copy editor.

“The writing process and its many facets of creative exploration along with the satisfaction from telling someone's story inspired me to become a journalism major,” said Tseng, who later became the campus editor for Uloop.com, a blog site by college writers for college readers.

“Uloop has a much more open forum for writing than most traditional newspapers, so I was able to practice writing about topics that I personally found interesting to me, like video games, costuming and entertainment reviews,” she said. “We also were able to practice publicizing our posts through social media, and through that I gained a readership and some of my articles went semi-viral in the costuming community.”

Following graduation, Tseng hopes to put both her Asian studies and journalism degrees to work.

“Working for a news outlet of some sort would be ideal, since working in media means encountering new experiences every day and continuing to learn and grow,” said Tseng. “I also have a side project, a niche news website about costuming, that I hope to continue working on not only as a resume builder but as a way to combine my hobbies with my professional aspirations.”