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China Internship Teaches New Grads Relationship-Building, Classroom Confidence

Winthrop University

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China Internship Teaches New Grads Relationship-Building, Classroom Confidence

Quick Facts

- Ashley Crossland is a special education major from West Columbia, South Carolina.
- Lauren Gabauer is a Spanish major from Fort Mill, South Carolina.
- Matthew Neal '13 is a secondary math major from Rock Hill.



Second from left, left to right:

Ashley Crossland, Matthew Neal, Mark Dewalt, and Lauren Gabauer

Gabauer joked, and “open minds,” Neal added.

The three were selected for the competitive six-week internship in the [Richard W. Riley College of Education](#) based on their academic credentials, outstanding written and verbal communication skills, their ability to be flexible and recommendations. The news of their acceptance elicited two main reactions: excitement and nervousness.

Like Crossland, Gabauer, a Spanish major from Fort Mill, and Matthew Neal, a secondary math major from Rock Hill, didn't have much experience with the Chinese culture.

“I could probably point it out on the map, but I didn't know anything about the culture and how to bridge that gap in the classroom,” Neal explained.

ROCK HILL, S.C. — **Ashley Crossland**, a special education major from West Columbia, South Carolina, who will earn her bachelor's degree during Saturday's Undergraduate Commencement Ceremony, had never been on a plane, much less out of the country.

But from March through April, she and two of her peers — and **Matthew Neal '13** and **Lauren Gabauer**, who will earn degrees at Thursday's Graduate Commencement and undergraduate commencement, respectively — found themselves teaching full time at the **Far East School** in **Shanghai, China**.

Throughout the six weeks they spent abroad, the three taught English, math and other subjects to classes in the fourth, sixth and eighth grades. At first, they thought they would be observing the classrooms, but they quickly learned they would begin teaching right away—armed with “just our brains,”

The new alumni quickly answered the call to action, taking lessons plans and strategies straight from their Winthrop classes. Had their education been from any other school besides Winthrop, Gabauer isn't sure they would have been as successful.

"I feel proud because not a lot of people could have done this," she said. "We made a good impression."

At the beginning, they noted some differences between American schools and the Far East school, mainly two: teachers follow the students throughout the grades and students are encouraged not through tangible ways like candy and stickers, but by the hope of getting a red star on their schoolwork.

The three will take valuable lessons and memories with them in the future:

- Crossland noted that the relationship-building with her students at the Far East School meant a lot to her. "That makes me want to be my students' friend in my classroom in August." Crossland has accepted a position at a high school in the Columbia area.
- Lauren Gabauer reflected that at the beginning of the six weeks, the students seemed shy. However, by the end they were saying, "We love Ms. G" and "Lauren is my friend." Gabauer hopes to find a teaching position in the Rock Hill/Fort Mill area.
- Neal remembered that he started every class by saying, "Hello, you all" in Chinese, followed by "I'm excited to be here as always because..." Weeks later, the students were responding and finishing his sentence. Neal will move to Charleston as a prominent Knowles Teaching Fellow and pursue another master's degree.

"I would be sitting in the school office [in China], and students would come in and say, 'I really like having Mr. Matt,' or 'I really want Ms. G or Ashley to teach our class'" said Mark Dewalt, chair and Professor of Educational Research at Winthrop. Dewalt traveled with the students to help oversee the beginning of the project. "Even if the class didn't have one of our students, they wanted them to visit. It was touching because I knew our students had made a difference in the lives of children."

Zoe Zhou, principal of the Far East School, said the school is very satisfied with the Winthrop students' work.

"We are impressed by their patience, their sense of humor and their imagination," she said. "They are very active in their classes. I think they will be very good teachers with their enthusiasm."

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