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WKU student from Elizabethtown travels abroad to connect to Chinese roots

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Aug 2, 2024

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Langley Williams presents research from her internship through the Institute of Biomedical Informatics at the Asian Microbiota Consortium held in KaoShiung, Taiwan.

Submitted

An Elizabethtown woman has taken her dreams across the globe.

Langley Williams of Elizabethtown has spent the last year in Taiwan under Western Kentucky University's Chinese Flagship Language Program. During her year, Williams has explored, learned more about herself and determined her future path.

The program consists of a full year of study and experience in Taiwan. This capstone year follows four years of Chinese study at WKU.

"There's actually a lot of funding that goes towards critical languages such as Chinese, and at WKU, we have this program called the Flagship Language Program and through that, I spent four years in college intensively studying Chinese," Williams said. "That all culminates in our capstone year abroad. The basis of the program is that we have an intensive year studying Chinese through one semester of classes, through direct enrollment in a university in Taiwan and then another semester that is class with an internship portion."

The beginning of Williams' journey goes back to before she even started college. While touring Western Kentucky University, the Flagship Program was a turning point in her decision of where she would receive her secondary education.

“Before I was applying to colleges, I had this vision of studying medicine at the University of Louisville and doing all 11 or so years of secondary education there. Towards the end of high school, I started wavering on that image of going into medical school,” Williams said. “So when college selections came around, I started touring a few different places and I just happened to fall in love with Western’s campus and I was really thrilled because they had the Chinese Flagship Language Program.”

Williams took the opportunity to study abroad in Taiwan as a way for her to connect with her culture and identity as an Asian American.

“Some people may think that the reason I want to study Chinese is to go back and find my birth parents or something like that. When in reality, I felt kind of disconnected with my identity as a Chinese person,” said Williams, who is adopted. “I just wanted to be able to understand a little bit more what people might be seeing in me because I am someone who is outwardly Chinese so I felt like studying Chinese would be a good way for me to navigate my understanding of that aspect of my identity.”

While she was in Taiwan, she knew she wanted to explore the natural side of the country and embrace all it had to offer.

“My favorite moment from my year would have to be whenever I was standing at the peak of a mountain. I wanted to enjoy the nature of Taiwan so I went with a friend to hike the West Temple Hiking Path,” Williams said. “This peak was around 500 meters tall and it opened up to this beautiful valley. When I looked over it and felt the burning in my lungs, it just clicked for me that I was abroad and out on this adventure as a college student by myself and I had such freedom.”

Over time, Williams career path has changed many times, but her time abroad has led to her taking a new approach to her future career.

“My year abroad has definitely changed my career path. Being a biochemistry major, I had no clue how I would tie that with Chinese, but through one of the scholarships that I applied for to fund my study abroad was the David A. Boren Award, I have more of an idea. The award is offered by the Department of Defense, so they encourage students to study a critical language and then come back and do federal service to pay back that scholarship,” Williams said. “As a side effect of going on capstone and getting this scholarship, instead of becoming a medical doctor, I’m thinking of leaning more into the Ph.D. kind of research field and potentially carrying out more of a duty in federal service.”

Williams encourages anyone who has an opportunity like hers to seize it and make the most of it.

“In general I think that if you have the opportunity to study abroad, take it,” Williams said. “It is a very eye-opening experience. Put yourself out there and go see the world, it can be very beneficial to your personal development.”

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