

5-30-2013

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Lawrence University

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Recommended Citation

Lawrence University, "Junior Katie Blackburn Awarded Fulbright-Hays Scholarship for Field Studies Program in China" (2013). *Press Releases*. Paper 64.

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Junior Katie Blackburn Awarded Fulbright-Hays Scholarship for Field Studies Program in China

Posted on: May 30th, 2013 by Rick Peterson

Just about the time most Lawrence University students head for home this summer, Katie Blackburn will be returning to school — in China — as both a student and a teacher.

Blackburn, a junior from Brookfield, will spend much of her summer in China as the recipient of a Fulbright-Hays Scholarship for the 2013 Associated Colleges in China (ACC) Summer Field Studies Program.



Katie Blackburn '14

Administered by the U.S. Department of Education, the Fulbright-Hays Group Program Abroad seeks to strengthen foreign language expertise through advanced overseas study and research opportunities and by providing experiences and resources that enabling educators to strengthen their international teaching.

Beginning June 14, Blackburn will spend seven weeks in China, including the first three at Beijing's Minzu University, taking classes focused on Chinese language and the country's educational

system since the 1978 reformation.

Following her classroom work, Blackburn will spend two weeks working with third- and fourth-grade students in rural Henan and Hunan provinces at academic-based day camps.

“I’m told this will be *very* rural China,” said Blackburn, who is majoring in linguistics and Chinese language and literature. “We may be the only Americans these students will ever see in their lives, so we want to make sure we leave a positive impression. Part of the mission of the Fulbright-Hays program is to serve as informal cultural ambassadors.”

Blackburn said she was encouraged to teach subject matter she was personally interested at the day camps. Among the topics she plans to cover with her students are knot tying, constellations, and as an ice-breaking activity, American camp games she played herself when she was younger.

The program also includes a week-long academic conference Blackburn will attend in Fujian province before returning for a week in Beijing.

“I’m looking forward to gaining a better understanding of the Chinese education system as a whole, especially the rural system, which I’m sure differs greatly from the urban education environment,” said Blackburn. “I hope to improve my Chinese language skills as well. As China increasingly becomes a global power, especially economically, I think it will be all the more important to be able to communicate in their language.”

Ruth Lunt, associate dean of the faculty, associate professor of German and one of Blackburn’s academic advisors, said Blackburn is “passionate” about all things Chinese.

“The Field Studies program will give Katie the opportunity to

immerse herself further in the language and culture,” said Lunt.

The scholarship will send Blackburn to China for the second time in less than year. She spent the 2012 fall term in Beijing on the ACC study-abroad program.

“It’s such a completely different world than anything I had ever been exposed to,” Blackburn said of her first experience in China. “You walk down the street in Beijing as a tall, white American girl and everyone notices you. And they really notice you if you can speak their language.”

After studying Spanish in middle school and French in high school, she decided to tackle Chinese as a Lawrence freshman.

“It just seemed like a good challenge,” said Blackburn, who had to pass an interview conducted entirely in Chinese and write a paper in Chinese to qualify for the Fulbright-Hays Scholarship. “I was looking for something more out of the ordinary. Chinese is so completely different than Western languages.”

After completing her senior year next year, Blackburn plans to pursue her teacher certification in Chinese and English as a Second Language with the hope of eventually teaching at the high school level.

“I’m excited for the opportunity to go back to China and get an in-depth look at how their education system operates,” said Blackburn. “I can master the language, but this scholarship will provide insights I would never get from sitting in a classroom.”

The Fulbright-Hays Scholarship covers Blackburn’s round-trip transportation, lodging, tuition, books and some meals. The Department of Education awarded 12 Fulbright-Hays Scholarships to China this year.