During the 130 days Hao Nyugen spent as a KU student in the Jayhawk Semester program, he had two goals: challenge himself and collect stories about people’s lives. He accomplished both.

The junior from Foreign Trade University in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, came to KU as a Global Undergraduate Exchange Program (UGRAD) student, a program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State. Nyugen’s interests fit with the mission of Global UGRAD, which provides one-semester scholarships to outstanding undergraduate students from around the world for non-degree full-time study combined with community service, professional development and cultural enrichment.

Community service is a new idea in Vietnam. Nyugen got involved with UNICEF Next Generation through his older sister. On his home campus he was raising awareness among his peers. Volunteering is a formal process in Vietnam, involving applications and interviews, Nyugen said. He appreciates that it is an easier and more inclusive activity in the United States.

Nyugen has experienced some of the ways Americans perform community service.

Every Thursday and Friday he volunteered for Daily Bread, a KU group that provides volunteer support for the Campus Cupboard, the campus food pantry located in the Lutheran Campus Ministry. While volunteering at the food pantry, Nyugen met a woman who had been adopted by an American couple after being orphaned in China and learned about her life in the United States. Hearing stories like her’s, “makes [his] life splendid.”

Nyugen also volunteered for The Big Event, where he helped with maintenance at the Ecumenical Campus Ministries. He especially enjoyed the painting.

Nyugen’s American studies class was overwhelming at first because he did not have the same frame of reference as the American students. As he read more and became comfortable with academic language, he asked for additional readings so he could practice critical thinking.

Nyugen doesn’t know yet what he’ll do with the stories he’s gathered, but he knows that he will share them when he returns to Vietnam.
Housing Group Learns Up Close about China

After several years of planning, seven staff members from the Department of Student Housing traveled to China in March to learn about the country that is sending such large numbers of students to KU.

Diana Robertson, Chris Stone-Sewalish, Rick Rudnick, Nic Babarskis, Paige Hicks, Brock Sauvage and Adrienne Coz were selected to be part of the KU group after an application process. As the number of international students coming to KU increases, the group’s visits to four universities offered the chance for first-hand knowledge, with the goal of sharing what they learned with KU staff and being able to interact more effectively with Chinese students. The group visited Heng Seng Management College and City University Hong Kong in Hong Kong, Central China Normal University in Wuhan and Shaanxi Normal University in Xi’an. At each university the group toured the campus, visited a residence hall and talked with students and faculty.

To prepare for the trip the group had five pre-departure sessions with KU faculty to give them a historical and cultural foundation for their experiences.

Before the trip, some of Oswald Hall complex director Nic Babarskis’ thinking focused on “how can we improve our processes to support the integration of our international students into our wider community.” Since the trip his thinking has evolved to “how can I work to build a bridge through relationships and empathy so that we can transcend our processes to help our international students integrate into our wider community.”

“This trip really drove home the reality that many times, particularly when you are operating in a culture you don’t consider your own, you really gravitate toward those willing to take extra time to help you walk through a process or procedure successfully,” Babarskis said.

This was Ellsworth Hall Assistant Complex Director Paige Hicks’ first trip abroad. Her motivation to go was that she strongly believes that once we understand the students we are serving, we can effectively and efficiently cater to their needs and ensure they are excelling here at KU.

At two campus presentations in April, the group shared their insights into higher education in China. At Central China Normal University, which has 30,000 students and 45 residence halls, the group learned about the housing office’s future plans. KU is concentrating on some of the same things such as safety, staff training and connecting students.

During the presentation, goals for the future were mentioned, including continuing cultural competency training, multilingual signage and developing more information for international students for the student housing website.
What are you doing in Beijing?

I am a linguistics graduate student at KU currently in Beijing conducting my doctoral dissertation research in the Psychology Department of Peking University. Chinese is a tonal language (the pitch contour on a word can change it’s meaning), and my research deals with how native speakers of Chinese and advanced second language learners of Chinese use the tone to recognise spoken words. So, I am here in China recruiting advanced second language speakers to participate in my dissertation experiments.

How does being in Beijing inspire your linguistics research?

Being in Beijing has inspired me to take my work even further, I think. By speaking and hearing Chinese everyday it has evoked an even deeper passion for the study of Chinese and the study of the acquisition of Chinese as a second language. Also, being in a psychology department and talking about research with the students here has given me a different perspective on my own research and new ways to think about language and my research.

Has your research plan gone as expected or if not, what adjustments have you had to make?

Not many things have actually gone as planned, but in my experience this is actually common. Two main issues I had were with computers and recruiting participants. First, I had a lot of technical difficulties in the beginning of my time here. My research uses a piece of equipment called an eye tracker, which tracks a person’s eye movements as they perform linguistic tasks. I designed my experiment on the eye tracker at KU, however the one they have here is slightly different, so it took some time to make adjustments to the settings to get it working properly. The second issue is actually recruiting my second language learners. I came to Beijing because I need highly advanced learners of Chinese, which usually requires that the participants are living in a Chinese speaking environment. As such, there aren’t many in Kansas. I expected that it would be very easy to find the learners here in China, however it has proved to be more of a challenge. They are here, but getting in contact with them has been extremely difficult and is taking much more time than I had expected. I have had to get creative in thinking of ways to locate and contact English speakers living in China. I also adjusted my schedule to focusing on recruiting native speakers first while I worked out a few plans to contact learners.

As this is your first international experience, how are you acclimating to a new culture?

I actually surprised myself at how quickly I adapted. I credit my undergraduate studies in Chinese mainly with this success. As a Chinese major I studied history, culture, art and so on, so upon arriving I was already pretty well prepared for what to expect. I also have several friends who are from China and so they helped prepare me for some things I may not have learned in a classroom. In my opinion, for the most part the cultural differences here are pretty minor compared perhaps to other parts of the world. My experiences are of course limited to the places I have been in China, which are all large modern cities, so that is also likely a reason for my quick acclimation.

How did you spend Chinese New Year?

The professor I work with here was so kind as to invite two other international students and myself to his home in Yangzhou, a city near Shanghai, for the New Year. During this holiday everyone goes home and ‘home’ is generally outside the large cities. For this reason the cities pretty much empty, and everything is closed. I really do mean everything, so we would have had a hard time living in the city for that time when nothing was open and you couldn’t even buy food. The trip to Yangzhou was an amazing experience. We were there for the first 5 days of the new year and over our time there we had the opportunity to have several large meals with various members of the family, as well as old friends, travel around the city to see some sights, and really see what the holiday is all about by experiencing it first hand.
Ashlie Koehn is known at KU as the person who learned from Chancellor Bernadette Gray-Little over Skype that she won a Truman Scholarship. Koehn was studying at the American University of Central Asia in Kyrgyzstan as a Boren and Gilman Russian scholar when she received the news from Chancellor Gray-Little. Her accolades also include receiving an Udall Scholarship and being a Global Scholar. Most recently the senior from Burns, Kans., majoring in environmental studies, economics, and global and international studies, received one of The Rusty Leffel Concerned Student Awards and was recognized in the 2016 KU Chancellor Report as one of “the best of KU.”

Her journey to KU was not typical. Her three years in the Kansas Air National Guard spent analyzing drone images from Iraq and African countries were a “window into another world.” When she left, she knew she wanted to study abroad as much as possible. Her first study abroad experience was a two-week program on international governance in Geneva, Switzerland. She also studied in Germany.

Because of her positive study abroad experiences, she has served as a study abroad peer advisor, and used analytic skills to help students determine their best options. She also writes posts on jayhawksabroad.dept.ku.edu about her international experiences.

“As a student veteran and first-generation college student, I was fortunate to find a good support group at KU,” Koehn said in a press release. “One of the most gratifying experiences I had while at KU was the opportunity to study abroad, which I was able to do three times. My experiences reminded me that, while places and cultures can differ tremendously, we’re still all connected and have more in common than differences.”

Her international interests extend to academics. Koehn’s thesis topic is “Testing the Porter Hypothesis and the Transitioning States of Eastern and Central Europe.” Using the data that came from a professor at the University of Oregon, Koehn is applying economic theory to determine the impact on environmental regulations on businesses.

Koehn will spend the summer in Washington, D.C., interning for the Office of the US Trade Representatives while participating in the Truman Summer Institute “with a good group of sharp people.”
Former Fulbrighter Joins Journalism Faculty

Hong Vu “came back home” when he joined the School of Journalism faculty last fall. He received a master’s degree at KU in 2011 as a Fulbright student. Now he is on the other side of the classroom.

This spring semester Vu taught international strategic communications and information management. Teaching international journalism means examining how American media covers other countries and how ideology and objectivity influence one’s perspective.

As a journalist reporting for the Associated Press from Hanoi, Vu applied for a Fulbright so he could go back to school and learn about multimedia changes in the field. He wondered about journalistic practices and the “unwritten rules” that journalists follow.

“For example, why stories must follow certain formulas; why we tend to give more credibility to government officials; what happens to objectivity if we selectively pick sources and quotes from the sources we interview. My first degree was linguistics so I always thought that it was because I did not learn journalism in a proper way. But when I came here and began reading about journalism theories, I found the answers to those questions. It was illuminating and fascinating,” he said.

With the guidance of Associate Professor Tien-Tsung Lee once his advisor, now his mentor, Vu’s master’s thesis examined the effect of South Korean soap operas on Vietnamese women. Using a survey, Vu learned that women’s daily soap opera viewing led to expectations of high quality of life. With the help of various agencies, a number of women married South Korean men wanting to have the lifestyle they saw portrayed in the television shows.

After returning to Vietnam and later completing his doctoral degree at the University of Texas, Vu knew he wanted to teach and do research. He was thrilled when a job became available at KU.

When asked if there was a moment when he realized that he is now a faculty member, Vu said that he hasn’t had that experience.

“However, when I was here as a student I used to spend a lot of time in Watson [Library]. So, the first visit to Watson was really like taking a trip down memory lane. I still remembered my favorite spot, the stacks where books about mass communications are, and even the first time I saw snow was when I was walking back to our apartment from Watson. That was the moment I felt this place, this campus and this city are parts of how my life has been lived and how my family has spent our time together.”
Fulbright Experience Opens Up Special Education Field

When she came to KU, Mariche Llanto “brought her piece of the [special education] puzzle” based on her experiences of working in the Philippines. She described her time as a Fulbright student working on her dissertation in special education as deconstructing what she knew and rebuilding her knowledge.

In the Philippines, Llanto teaches in a teacher preparation program at the University of Southeast Philippines in Davao. In her country, educators “stand apart” from social issues and politics, fearing being targeted by insurgents, Llanto said. So special education is seen a service. Here Llanto engages in daily conversations that examine big ideas critically without fear of reprisals. Her new way of thinking has included learning how to read a journal article, expressing complex thoughts in English and being comfortable asking for help. Llanto’s experience fits into the goals of the Fulbright program to build relationships, knowledge, and leadership in support of the long-term interests of the United States and the world. The program prepares participants to address the major global challenges, from sustainable energy and climate change to public health and food security.

Llanto described her presentation at the annual American Educational Research Association conference as “an affirmation” of her research in policy studies and systems. Her speech, “Student Teaching Handbook as Boundary Crosser,” focused on how a student-teaching handbook, used by one of the teacher education institutions in southern Philippines, describes its boundary-crossing function. Using interviews, she learned how university supervisors, school mentors and teacher candidates perceive how their interactions were mediated by it. She is considering developing this subject into her dissertation topic.

Llanto’s next challenge will be working as a GTA for an online course in the fall. To gain the context for understanding education in the United States and to be prepared for the teaching position, she’s meeting with the professor and learning about the technology required by the course.

When she returns home in 2017, the Fulbrighter has many ideas about what she wants to do, including focusing on research. “I want to engage in questions about practices,” she said. She keeps a research notebook where she jots down ideas and questions for future examination.
Hilltop Children, Families Benefit from Global Presence

Children from numerous countries, including Afghanistan, Brazil, Germany, Iraq, Russia, Saudi Arabia and the United States, fill the classrooms at Hilltop Child Development Center. The 293 youngsters come from a blend of countries and cultures. Having international classrooms means that the children benefit from international exposure and that teachers must be aware of and sensitive to the diversity of their classes and their families.

100 students, including ones in the after-school program, from 19 countries make up about one third of the students.

“We have such a very diverse population here that I can’t remember of a class that I haven’t had to think to myself, ‘Hmmm...how should I present that in such a way that it will have the most positive impact on all of my families.’ Structuring your classroom, just having materials, toys and books that are thoughtful and representative of your population is important,” Hilltop teacher Annie Weeth said.

When Weeth teaches a unit, she tries to take a world view. If they are studying constellations, the zodiac from China and from India might be included. The class would look at constellation names and stories from around the globe, paying special attention to those countries represented by the diverse populations in the class.

With the help of the parents, one of the preschool teachers has created a set of blocks with numbers, letters, color words and such in all the languages currently spoken in her classroom, with the corresponding word in English. They include Korean, Farsi and Mandarin Chinese.

Because the youngest children, ages one to two years old, are dual language learners, the curriculum encourages the youngsters to speak their home language, said Director Jeremy Fite. Teachers learn key phrases in the students’ native languages. They also use hand signals and body language to supplement as the young minds soak up the new language.

At the beginning of the school year all parents go through orientation. A group meeting is held with the international parents to make sure they understand school policies and curriculum. Cultural differences can lead to behavioral issues, so Hilltop teachers and administrators have to communicate their expectations. Fite pointed to longtime Hilltop parents as valuable resources for new families.
Thank you to everyone who supported International Programs from July 1-December 31. Your gifts enable students to study abroad, faculty to conduct international research and international students to come to KU.

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