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Perfect preparation

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Perfect preparation

There I was, a 19-year-old girl from a small town in eastern Kentucky, about to board my first airplane flight.

But this was no ordinary trip. I had decided that my initial experience in air travel would be a trans-Pacific flight to Shanghai, as part of a Furman study abroad program.

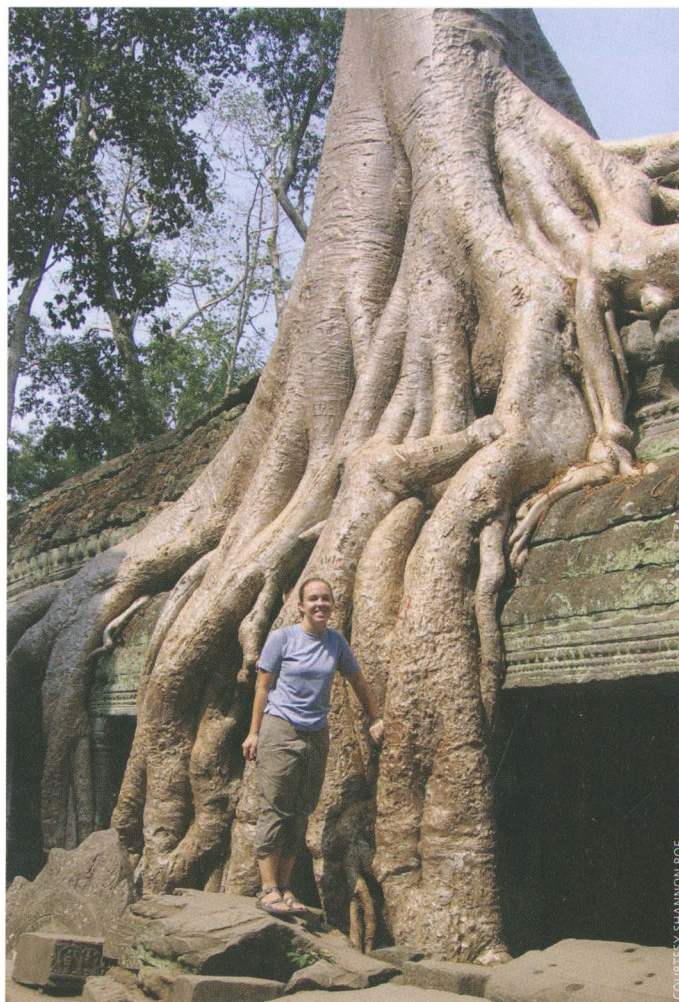
Somehow I overcame my jitters and climbed aboard. Hours later, we arrived at our destination.

I didn't know it at that moment — I was just happy to be back on solid ground — but the most fateful part of my undergraduate experience would be the time I spent studying in China.

When looking for colleges, I had been attracted to Furman because of its wealth of study abroad programs and focus on engaged learning. During my years at Furman I was "engaged" both in and out of the classroom, from simulations and direct field experiences in my political science classes to advance team work with the Riley Institute and summer internships in Washington, D.C., and New York.

But it took only a few short weeks of making my way on the other side of the world to realize that I was hooked on China.

I would go on to study two years of Mandarin at Furman — the university now offers four years of the language — and this, combined with my interest in civil society development, led me to return to China after



Shannon Roe on a visit to Cambodia during her student days.

graduation for my first job. As a Princeton-in-Asia Fellow, I worked with a non-governmental organization on a pesticide reduction project in the southwestern city of Kunming.

After spending a year trekking through rice paddies and developing relationships with international foundations, I knew I couldn't go back to a "normal" desk job. So I landed a summer position with the Global Young Leaders Conference (GYLC), which soon turned into a full-time position with GYLC's sister program, the National Young Leaders Conference.

Both of these experiential education programs focus on bringing top high school students to Washington to examine leadership through the lens of civics and government. They grapple with what it truly means to be public leaders, experience interactive simulations,

and hear speakers from the three branches of government and the international community.

In all, I spent nearly three years engaging with talented students from all over the world and serving as their liaison with members of the D.C. community. I can't imagine a more perfect preparation for the job than the experiences I had at Furman.

Today, as I'm considering graduate programs, I find that my years as an undergrad still shape what I'm looking for. When I visit schools, I notice how the students interact with each other and how the

professors facilitate discussions.

Furman offered me the chance to be part of a special community in a truly life-changing environment. And now I'm content to accept nothing less.

— SHANNON ROE

The author, a 2004 graduate, lives in Washington, D.C., and was until June the program manager for the National Young Leaders Conference. She was recently promoted to program officer at the Academy for Educational Development, where she designs and implements short-term youth, sports and professional exchange programs on behalf of the State Department. This article is reprinted from Engage Furman magazine (Volume 4, Issue 3), a publication of the Office of Admissions.