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# A New Worldview: Studying in Taiwan, Israel, and South Korea Creates a Global Citizen

Tollan Renner

*University of New Hampshire - Main Campus*, tdb26@unh.edu

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## A New Worldview: Studying in Taiwan, Israel, and South Korea Creates a Global Citizen



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# International Educator

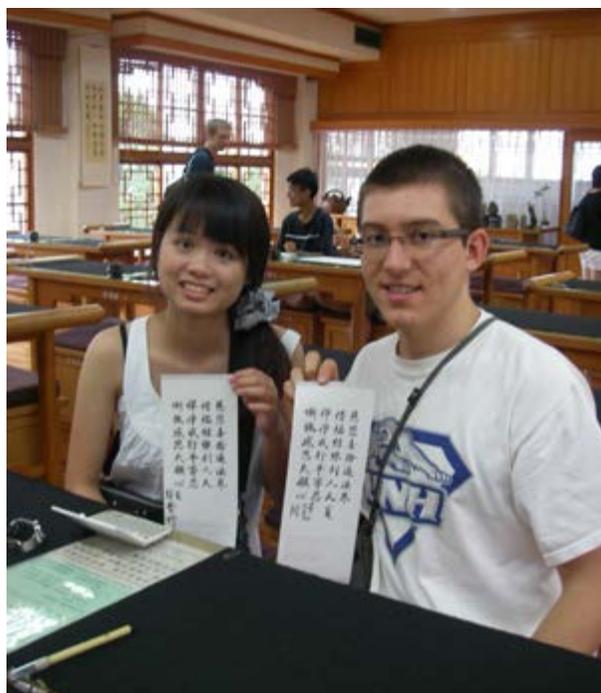
The UNH Center for International Education Newsletter

Spring 2012

## A NEW WORLDVIEW: STUDYING IN TAIWAN, ISRAEL, AND SOUTH KOREA CREATES A GLOBAL CITIZEN

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By Tollan Renner '13 (B.S. Statistics & Economics)



*Tollan Renner practicing calligraphy with his study partner*

The international opportunities I have experienced this past year were unimaginable when I enrolled in the University New Hampshire as an undeclared major in the College of Engineering and Physical Sciences (CEPS) three years ago. My exposure to foreign cultures was limited growing up in a small New Hampshire town. We shared an almost homogeneously white high school with a neighboring town. I had known a lot of my graduating class since elementary school. With a strong math and science background, I entered college geared to be an engineer or scientist. Then, unexpectedly, I discovered economics. The interest was born running a painting business for Collegiate Entrepreneurs, Inc. my freshman year at UNH. As a branch manager, I met professionals in many sectors of the workforce and was exposed to hundreds of diverse perspectives. The business experience combined with the international presence on campus inspired me to think macro. Through a University Honors Program notification, I heard about an opportunity to learn more about China, one of our largest trading partners. I took a chance and applied for the 2011 Taiwan-U.S. Sister Relations Alliance (TUSA) Summer Scholarship Program. Thus began my studies abroad.

TUSA brings scholars from the United States to Taiwan through the Taiwanese Ministry of Education, strengthening ties between the U.S. and Taiwan by building friendship and understanding. My fellow TUSA recipients and I spent two months, some of the best times of my life, learning Mandarin in Pingtung City in southern Taiwan. We lived with Taiwanese students, and although I had never studied Mandarin before, the Americans in the beginner level classes and I were soon able to communicate with our new friends. We attended the National Pingtung University of Education for a language and culture class each day. To learn more about Taiwanese culture, every other weekend we went on an excursion to a different part of Taiwan. On one such adventure we visited Fo Guang Shan, a Buddhist monastery outside of Kaohsiung. The grandeur and prominence of the temple impressed me, and continues to inspire me to learn about East Asian philosophy.

As I familiarized myself with Taiwanese norms and customs and learned the language, I delved deeper into Taiwanese culture, and began to explore more. A prominent feature of Taiwanese cities, and a novelty for me, was the presence of Chinese night markets. The night markets, which when I first arrived in Taiwan I thought were a kind of restaurant called, "Nine Monkeys," (—because

of the heavy accent—) turned out to be incredibly popular nighttime gathering spots, home to vendors of all kinds of exotic Taiwanese food and small shops. Although I had many novel experiences in Taiwan, I only scratched the surface and discovered more cultural inquiries than time permitted to pursue.

I returned to the States with a whole new outlook and global perspective, and a motivation to continue my international education. Back at UNH, I voraciously sought out opportunities to return to Asia and explore further afield. Following a tip from one of my former economics professors, I applied online for [Caravan to Israel](#), an interfaith mission hosted by the Jewish National Fund. Twenty college students from across the United States were selected for their leadership skills. Once landing in Tel Aviv, the adventure began. We toured throughout the country, from the heights of the Citadel of Old City Jerusalem down to the Dead Sea, and the northern Lebanese border to the southern Gaza Strip. Along the way we met political, spiritual and community leaders, and explored Israel's diverse democracy. The religious and ethnic tensions and ominous threat of conflict was clear from our Israeli tour guide and security guard.

Despite the challenges Israel faces, the young state has developed from a patch of sand in the desert to a modernizer of the Middle East, with strong civil rights activism. I left Israel with new-found gratitude for the religious and political freedoms we enjoy in the United States of America.



*Tollan Renner at ancient fort of Masada, Israel*



*Tollan Renner with Korean traditional performers*

Finally and most recently, I traveled to South Korea through a scholarship program I first learned about in our own Center for International Education newsletter. As a recipient of a Korea Foundation scholarship, seventy-three other American students and I were part of delegation fostering diplomacy between the U.S. and South Korea, the 2012 [South Korea-U.S. Youth Network](#). We were hosted by Yonsei University, South Korea's most prestigious university, over spring break, and participated in several cultural exchange programs with our hosts. Despite the vicinity of Taiwan, I was impressed by the differences in food, cultural norms, and language between the two Asian economic powerhouses. The most memorable day of the week was our tour of the Korean demilitarized zone (DMZ), which included a chance to interview a North Korean defector. The importance of the United States' actions in the Korean

War and our alliance with South Korea has never been clearer. As I prepare for my next trip to Asia this summer—to mainland China and Hong Kong—I look forward to discovering more similarities and differences among the various peoples of East Asia.

The Republic of China (Taiwan), Israel, and Republic of Korea are all allies of the United States on the front line of the United States' security interests. Experiences in each of these countries and the people met through the programs have hammered home for me the responsibility we as American citizens have to each other and the world. J. K. Rowling, author of the popular Harry Potter series, highlighted this position well in her 2008 commencement speech at Harvard University. Addressing the class, she laid out our situation: "The great majority of you belong to the world's only remaining superpower. The way you vote, the way you live, the way you protest, the pressure you bring to bear on your government, has an impact way beyond your borders. That is your privilege, and your burden." Globalization has heightened our civic duty to uphold democratic values. I no longer feel far removed from the news headlines about affairs abroad, having visited some of the hot areas most discussed in American media. Beyond pursuing a graduate degree in internationally relevant economics, I am driven to bring about positive change, and play a

part in our foreign policy. The world is a lot smaller than it once was for me, and a lot bigger than I could have ever imagined.

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223 Hood House • 89 Main Street • Durham, NH 03824  
tel: 603-862-2398 • fax: 603-862-0169  
[study.abroad@unh.edu](mailto:study.abroad@unh.edu) • [international.affairs@unh.edu](mailto:international.affairs@unh.edu)