

CHIN 201/ECNU (East China Normal University) Experience

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The Global Classroom is a program Drexel instituted in collaboration with universities abroad in order to engage their students with the global landscape and international students. This makes for a cooperative learning environment where students at Drexel can both learn and teach students abroad through interactive technologies. The Global Classroom in the Chinese department partners with East China Normal University (ECNU) to assist students in their Mandarin and cultural understanding. One of the methods used is a series of one-on-one video calls with ECNU students over a ten week period.

After hearing that our class, Chinese 201, a Drexel Global Classroom, would be working with Chinese students via web call on a weekly basis, I was immensely excited to meet my partner. Over the course of the term, we were required to spend at least 45 minutes every week on call, which provided ample time to not only get to know my new friend from Shanghai but to gain a more diverse understanding of China *and* the US.

Unfortunately, my first call did not go as planned– and neither did the second... or the third attempt. With our different schedules, time zones, and sleeping habits, planning calls with my partner became our first obstacle. Some of our WeChat messages went as follows: “Beijing Time or Eastern Time?” “Sorry, that time is too early/late.” “Oh! You meant tomorrow! Sorry!” By the time we actually got on our first call, I thought Serena, my partner, would have been annoyed at my persistent struggle to get on a video call. On the contrary, she was incredibly polite and we meshed very well, which contradicted my expectations and assumptions.

Serena was in her mid-twenties, I was still 19. She was a graduate student, having already completed at least one degree, while I was in my first undergraduate year. She lived with her parents and commuted to ECNU by subway, while I lived on campus in my dormitory. Nevertheless, we became very close with every WeChat video call.

Conversations often started with the program's guideline questions— questions involving the partner's university, major, hobbies, etc. More importantly, though, after speaking about these subject matters for several minutes, Serena and I would get off topic and ask about each other's personal lives, which I felt was even more meaningful and informative.

Our calls often took place in the evening time for me, but in the mornings for Serena as she made her way to university. She would be shoulder to shoulder with a crowd of Beijingers with COVID masks on the subway, all while making conversation with me. After getting off the subway she made a quick walk to campus as she told me about the activities she was involved in through her field of study, which was business.

She was taking business courses while teaching an English class at ECNU to earn another degree. Despite being an obviously talented and bright student, she always maintained a modest demeanor; and I sensed no frustration whatsoever with her demanding schedule. I have found American college students, on the other hand, to be less responsible and much more stressed with their workload when compared to Serena.

After studying through the Global Classroom, I personally found myself more comfortable trying to use my Mandarin, even if I lack the tonal and vernacular proficiency needed. I was especially grateful to gain a better understanding of what education can look like outside the US, and to be a part of that education was very rewarding. While Serena and I's

educational paths and personal lives are vastly different, it was a blessing to have those paths meet through academia and to have helped each other along the way.



Taken out:

One keen observation that I frequently picked up on was the heightened academic and social expectations put on her by not only her parents but herself. I could sympathize with the pressure on Serena to meet these professional and academic expectations— albeit to a different extent. And I could also get the sense that she was often weighing the cost and value of meeting certain people’s expectations— whether personal, familial, or societal— over others.

While I lack the space to elaborate on all our discussions, our last one was especially profound. After updating me on the most recent occurrences with her ex-boyfriend, Serena was planning on focusing on her physical health by losing weight and exercising. I was glad to notice a notable change in her outlook on her life by our last call; and I was especially pleased to see a positive response to what had been causing her some distress in her personal life. This instance— along with others— really reinforced some of my initial impressions of her— a relentless work ethic, honest personality, and gentle soul that I was very happy to get to know.

One common topic was Serena’s boyfriend (who ended up becoming an ex-boyfriend by the end of the term!) This appeared to consume most of her life outside of academics and when she was teaching/learning English at ECNU.

As a result, I learned much about the romantic and social aspects of Chinese culture through these calls, as well as the shortcomings of her Chinese boyfriend. Still, though, many of the issues that arose from their relationship were synonymous with American relationships, so it was interesting to take note of both the similarities and striking differences. (This paragraph could maybe be changed? It is showcasing cultural differences/difference/similarities, but maybe a different topic could be focused upon?)ed tires, the)