I. Applicant
Full Name: Mingqian Liu
Department: Architecture
Level: Graduate
Contact: mingqianliu@tamu.edu

II. Project Title
Blog Posts for Texas A&M University Office of Graduate and Professional Studies

III. Project Abstract
This project is a series of nineteen blog posts I wrote for Office of Graduate and Professional Studies (OGAPS) website. I served as Blog Ambassador for OGAPS since Summer 2017. OGAPS’ goal is to promote a diverse campus climate, enhance graduate experience, and develop all students as global citizens. Aligning with this goal, the purpose of my project is to communicate student experience from an international perspective, inform students about different on-campus and community resources, help students from all backgrounds to better adjust to campus life, and most importantly, promote cross-cultural understanding and mutual respect.
I have four overarching themes in my writings. The first one is international student experience. Coming from a different culture, I am very aware of some common struggles international students face. Therefore, I wrote about organizations and programs that international students can go to connect with people and services on campus; effective teaching strategies for international Teaching Assistants in American classrooms; job hunting tips; as well as interesting places to experience Texan culture. Such contents provide valuable information and a welcoming environment for international students – a major part of our student body both in the College of Architecture and in the university.

The second overarching theme is graduate student learning, research, and teaching experience. I wrote about benefits of participating in Student Research Week; Center for Teaching Excellence’s workshops on inclusive pedagogy; and also my experience of study abroad and conducting research in different countries. These aspects not only speak to students of all majors, but also emphasize on graduate students’ contribution to our university, including active learning, producing high-quality research, and serving as mentors for our undergraduate students.

The third theme is daily life in our surrounding community. I wrote about museums and historical sites around College Station; diverse cultural traditions we all can experience in this part of Texas; the importance of healthy living; and opportunities to get some outdoor exercise. Last but not least, I wrote about campus events and campaigns that focus on diversity, inclusion, and building a safer campus environment. I talked about the Race, Identity, and Social Equity Conference hosted by Department of Multicultural Services, and Texas A&M’s “Step In Stand Up” campaign, including important resources available to students in need.

Through OGAPS website and social media, my project reached thousands of readers. It helped to advance campus diversity and inclusion because it gave voice to students from different backgrounds about their first-hand experience at our university; it was an information source of on-campus and community services that are helpful for people with a variety of interests; it also offered academic and emotional support for students who may struggle due to a lack of peer-support network.

This is an on-going project and I will continue writing for OGAPS next year. I hope to introduce more resources to a broader audience base. Since my future career goal is to work as a public educator, this project helped me to develop professionally and serve my surrounding communities at the same time.

(Word count: 500)

IV. Letter of Support from Office of Graduate and Professional Studies, Texas A&M University (see attached)

V. Letter of Support from Center for Teaching Excellence, Texas A&M University (see attached)
April 17, 2018

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing this reference at the request of Mingqian Liu, who is applying for the College of Architecture – Excellence in Diversity Award. Mingqian has actively participated in the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies (OGAPS) Blog Ambassadors Program since June 2017.

She has had a large reader-base and a high amount of engagement on her posts. Some of her top performing posts that are geared towards our international audience include “English Language Resources for International Students” with 191 views, “A Few Tips for First-Time International TAs” with 283 views, and “Summer Job Hunting for International Grad Students” with 790 views. She has also produced blog posts geared towards our study-abroad readers, like “A Traveler’s Guide to Bermuda” with 208 views, “Preservation Field Study in St. George’s, Bermuda” with 276 views, and “5 Things You Can’t Miss in Mexico City” with 436 views.

She has gone above and beyond the expectations of our OGAPS Blog Ambassador Program by submitting more than the required number of blog posts each month and has consistently produced content and articles that are engaging and interesting to our audience.

Mingqian has been a vital member of the OGAPS Blog Ambassador Program and it is clear that she has made a positive impression on our OGAPS Blog audience, especially in connecting with our international/traveling readers. If you need any additional information, feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

JaeCee Crawford
Senior Information Technology Consultant
Office of Graduate and Professional Studies | Texas A&M University
1113 TAMU | College Station, TX 77843-1113
ph: 979.845.3631 | jccrawford@tamu.edu
19 April 2018

IN RE: Mingqian Liu

When we learned that Mingqian Liu was applying for the Excellence in Diversity Award from the College of Architecture, we immediately and enthusiastically agreed to pen a letter on her behalf to tender our unequivocal support for her. Mingqian has not only served with distinction as a Graduate Teaching Consultant in the Center for Teaching Excellence, but she has sought out other venues to support her colleagues and promote inclusion and diversity on campus.

On several occasions, Mingqian has lent her expertise to new and aspiring international teaching assistants through moderated panel discussions about intercultural communication and American classroom culture. During those sessions, Mingqian thoughtfully shared her experiences as an international teaching assistant and explained some of the issues that she faced when teaching American students. Her comments about the credibility issues she faced as an international graduate student teaching American History were particularly eye-opening and constructive. The current and prospective international teaching assistants who attended this session benefited a great deal from Mingqian’s candor and practicality in handling classroom challenges.

And Mingqian’s outreach has extended far beyond the College Station campus. She has penned a number of blog posts that have appeared on the website for the Office of Graduate and Professional Studies. These posts cover a range of topics, but those related to the international student experience at Texas A&M University have been most uplifting and helpful to the international students that we serve in the Center for Teaching Excellence.

It is no stretch to say that international teaching assistants have benefited enormously from Mingqian’s outreach and service. And, no doubt, the future students of these teaching assistants will also benefit from her efforts. For this reason, we consider Mingqian Liu very deserving of the Excellence in Diversity Award.

Should you have any questions or require any clarification, please do not hesitate to contact us. It would be our great pleasure to elaborate further on Mingqian’s service to the Texas A&M community.

Sincerely,

Brandon Cooper & Ginessa Payne, English Language Proficiency Consultants
Center for Teaching Excellence, Texas A&M University
Blog Post #1:
TEXAS COTTON GIN FESTIVAL
Posted on Monday, Apr 02, 2018
http://ogaps.tamu.edu/Blog/Blog/April-2018/Texas-Cotton-Gin-Festival

Four years ago, a Heritage Tourism class took me to Burton, a small rural German community of 300 people, an hour’s drive outside of College Station, halfway between Houston and Austin on Highway 290. It is the home to Texas Cotton Gin Museum, where the historic 1914 Burton Farmers Gin is located. As Aggies we care about it a lot. This is an important piece of agricultural and mechanical landmark in Texas, and it is also the oldest operating gin in America. Ever since I got to know this place, I spent much time looking into its history and culture, and tried my best to attend as many events as this museum and small town could offer. The Texas Cotton Gin Festival is the largest annual gathering held every April, and this year, on April 20-21, I hope those of you who are interested can join me to support our local agricultural and mechanical heritage.

The festival usually starts on Friday evening with an all-you-can-eat buffet (last year the main course was shrimp boil), for which you will need to reserve your ticket. On Saturday morning, there will be a parade in Burton, going through the major streets with a showcase of local business and organizations. Meanwhile, there will be several outdoor contests and country music concerts going on, which you can participate in and watch for free. The star event of the entire festival is the annual ginning of historic cotton bales. This is when the over-a-century-old Burton Farmers Gin will be up running. The giant machine, operated by professional mechanics, will process an entire 500-pound bale of cotton by the end of the festival. During this time, staff will lead public tours into the gin building to see the engine, the saw blades, the weight and scale, and the compressor. It is a truly exciting and unforgettable experience, no matter how (un)familiar you are with agriculture and mechanical engineering. Also on Saturday, the museum exhibitions and tractors in their collection will be open to the public, and the staff will answer questions about cotton-related industries in this part of Texas dated back to the early to mid-20th century.
The festival offers children and family friendly activities that people of all ages can attend. You can also bring your four-pawed friends. Weather is usually nice at this time of the year. The most important thing is that you can learn more about this small Texan town of Burton, its history, culture, folklore, and contemporary life. Fund raised by the festival will largely go back to the local economy and the protection of the gin. This is a great opportunity for us to get involved, give back to our community, and support the protection and promotion of our local heritage. I hope to see you there on April 20-21, 2018! :)

Blog Post #2:

**ANOTHER YEAR WITH THE STUDENT RESEARCH WEEK**

Posted on Wednesday, Mar 28, 2018
http://ogaps.tamu.edu/Blog/Blog/March-2018/Another-Year-with-the-Student-Research-Week

This is my fourth year at A&M, and my fourth time participating in the Student Research Week (SRW). Believe it or not, our SRW, which started 21 years ago, is now the largest student-run conference in the entire nation. When many students are very much in need of a friendly occasion to try out their presentation skills, students at A&M can register every spring for this event, walk to the conference venue in a couple of minutes, participate, and win awards for presenting their research. How cool is that? If you have never heard of SRW, or you are still hesitating about taking part in it, let me walk you through some awesome benefits that you can get at SRW.

As a presenter/competitor, you can register under ten different subject areas (the one that best fits your research topic, not necessarily your major/department) and two different formats (oral and poster), either as an individual presenter or as a group. Sessions are arranged in a way very similar to a conference setting: 12 minutes for oral presentation, and 10 minutes for poster presentation. Judge and feedback forms will be posted online before the event, so you can prepare your presentations according to the rubric. If you have a conference coming up, SRW is a great chance to present your initial ideas and get feedback from both content experts and lay audience. SRW has subject area awards and special awards every year for the highest scoring presentations. Why not win some extra money to support your research?
If you are willing to help your fellow Aggies with their research, sign up to be a judge for SRW! Both undergraduate and graduate students can sign up to serve as a topic judge or a layman judge (although a topic judge must have already earned the degree for the degree level of the student they are judging). You will get the experience to evaluate student presentations and provide valuable feedbacks!

SRW also rely heavily on volunteers (after all, it’s a student-run event). They take both individual volunteers and student organizations (the organization with the largest involvement will win a special SRW prize!). Schedule for volunteering is pretty flexible, and volunteers will have the chance to network with faculty, sponsors, and fellow students.

If you are interested in getting involved in the planning process of SRW, there will be a call for committee members every fall. Through serving on the committee, you will get extensive leadership experience, and will be able to organize an event at such a magnificent scale (SRW had 800+ competitors this year). Look out for the campus email about how to join the planning committee and make this fabulous week happen!

Blog Post #3:
INCLUSIVE PEDAGOGY SERIES
Posted on Monday, Mar 05, 2018

Since Fall 2017, our Center for Teaching Excellence and College of Liberal Arts have been hosting a series of workshops on inclusive pedagogy. The series focus on innovative and high-impact teaching practices to promote diversity and inclusion, increase student retention, as well as encourage student engagement in civil dialogue. Although the primary audience group of this series are faculty members, the workshops are open to graduate students as well. Since many
doctoral students have the goal to work in a Tier-1 Research University upon graduation, this kind of events are actually very informational and eye-opening for those who rarely get to involve in the administrative-level pedagogical discussions on campus. In other words, this is kind of a peek into the faculty and administration-level concerns. Although we don’t usually talk about these issues as graduate students, many of us will face them in the near future. So I highly recommend these workshops for graduate students who want to know more about our university and just higher education in the United States in general.

The series continued for Spring 2018. Past workshops include:

- **Facilitating hot topics in classroom**: how to facilitate controversial topics and discussions to encourage civil dialogue and promotes learning;
- **Creating inclusive classrooms for LGBTQ+ students**: how to better support these students in classroom and how certain practices can impact learning;
- **Aggie disability awareness**: how to promote strong dialogue about issues and information surrounding disability, and how to work with individuals with disabilities;
- **Enhancing first-generation student engagement and retention**: how to design projects and curriculum to help build social capital and increase the retention of first-generation students;
- **Designing International and Cultural Diversity (ICD) and Cultural Discourse (CD) courses**: how to re-design existing ICD and/or design new CD courses that can align with the newly updated undergraduate core curriculum requirements.

For the current schedule, please see the Spring 2018 Faculty Programming Guide: [http://cte.tamu.edu/getattachment/Workshops/CTE-Workshop/Faculty-Professional-Development-in-Teaching-Sprin/2018-Spring-CTE-Faculty-Programming-Guide.pdf.aspx](http://cte.tamu.edu/getattachment/Workshops/CTE-Workshop/Faculty-Professional-Development-in-Teaching-Sprin/2018-Spring-CTE-Faculty-Programming-Guide.pdf.aspx)

Or you can contact Dr. Srivi Ramasubramanian (Associate Professor, Communication), who is the coordinator of this workshop series, at sviri@tamu.edu
Every spring, International Student Association, together with many other nation clubs and international groups here at Texas A&M, host the I-Week on campus (I stands for International, of course). This year, events will happen during the first week of April. It will be a great opportunity to get to know people from different countries and cultural background, and to appreciate the diversity of our Aggies student body! Make sure to mark your calendar to attend some of these amazing events.

I-Exhibit: Monday, April 2, 10AM-3PM, MSC 12th Man Hall and Rudder Plaza. Varies nation clubs and international groups at Texas A&M will host exhibits on culture from around the globe.

I-Dinner: Monday, April 2, 5:30-7PM, MSC Courtyard. A feast for international food lovers, featuring curry, kimchi, sopapillas, semolina cakes and more.

I-History: Tuesday, April 3, 5-6:30PM, MSC 1400. Students from counties affected by the international travel ban will present and discuss the culture and history of their homelands.

I-Soccer: Wednesday, April 4, 6-10PM, Penberthy Field. A soccer tournament with teams representing eight countries.

I-Henna: Thursday, April 5, 11AM-3PM, Rudder Plaza. Come get a temporary tattoo from a Henna artist.

I-Fashion and Talent Show, Thursday, April 5, 7PM, Rudder Forum. Native costumes, dance, music, and other performances from around the world.

If you need further information regarding the I-Week 2018, please contact the International Student Association at isa-aggies@gmail.com
I study history but I also love outdoor fun! Playing outdoor is relaxing, good for our health, and can refresh our mind every once in a while. Do you ever wonder where you can go for a day-break in between papers, projects, endless grading, and all the other deadlines? The answer is always – mother nature. This kind of trip is easy to plan, low-cost, and a great cause to invite your friends to join. Here are some outdoor recreational places you can go in and around College Station. I’ve been to all of them and I absolutely love them.

1. Lick Creek Park  
Location: 13600 Rock Prairie Road, College Station, Texas 77845  
Hours: open around the clock except park curfew from 1:00AM to 5:00AM  
Check on-going events: https://www.facebook.com/friendsoflickcreekpark/  

This 516-acre small park is located to the southeast of College Station. It is not a tiny neighborhood playground, and it is also the nearest place where you can get to with a large nature trail system, very good for walking, jogging, cycling, and your dogs (this is important, right?). Every time I want to enjoy a nice afternoon conversation with my friends but run out of coffee shops to go, I take my friends to Lick Creek. It is a relaxing place in all weathers.

2. Lake Somerville State Park & Trailway  
Location: multiple park units around the lake, check the state park website for exact location of each unit  
Hours: open around the clock
Only half-an-hour drive to the southwest of College Station, Lake Somerville is my go-to place for fishing and outdoor barbecue. For y’all fishermen and women – you can catch crappie, drum, white bass and catfish, among others, both around the lake and downstream along Yegua Creek to the east. It is always fun to go freshwater fishing in a quiet and sunny afternoon, and the fish in our Texas lakes and rivers taste good! By the way, if you are a first-timeisher that want to try your luck at Somerville, don’t forget to buy a fishing license before you go.

3. Huntsville State Park
Location: 565 Park Road 40 West, Huntsville, Texas 77340
Hours: open daily 7:00AM to 10:00PM
Check on-going events: https://www.facebook.com/HuntsvilleSP/

An-hour drive to the east of College Station, the Huntsville park is inside of the Sam Houston National Forest. Here you will have a huge supply of fresh air, a 210-acre Lake Raven with plenty of water activities (the swimming area is packed during summer!), and large picnic and camping areas for day-long or over-night use. My favorite thing is the hiking trails in the park. Hurricane Harvey damaged a large portion of its longest 7-mile trail, but the park was actively cleaning up the routes. Now we can still enjoy the shorter 3-mile trails to the north side of the lake. Another good thing is that the park’s Facebook page hosts live Q&As with the Rangers every Friday, during which you can get information about the up coming events and programs in the park. I participated in their Women’s Hike several times, and enjoyed the friendly companions of many Texan ladies.

4. McKinney Falls State Park
Location: 5808 McKinney Falls Parkway, Austin, Texas 78744
Hours: open daily 8:00AM to 10:00PM
Check on-going events: https://www.facebook.com/mckinneyfalls/

We all traditionally hate that school in Austin but we go to the state capital city to enjoy arts and nightlife all the time. We all know that. But one thing I particularly love is the state park to the southeast of Austin, just across the street from the Bergstrom airport. It is a two-hour drive outside of College Station, and we go there mainly on our way to San Marcos or San Antonio. The park has multiple trails, camping sites, and a nice little fall (a bit dangerous to cross, but don’t worry). Some history about the park (as an architectural history major will always tell you): it gets its name from Thomas McKinney, one of Stephen F. Austin (the Father of Texas)’s first 300 colonists. Today the remains of McKinney’s original homestead, a two-story limestone building dated back to 1850, still stands inside of this park. You will see it as you go deeper into the woods.
Coming from a big city, visiting all kinds of museums has always been a huge part of my spare time. A good museum offers invaluable knowledge, eye-opening experience, fun time with family and friends, and most importantly, the feeling of connection to the local community. As the Spring Break is fast approaching, I write down a list of interesting museums in and around College Station (in addition to our George Bush Presidential Library and Museum on campus), so that those of you who are interested can get out of your offices, labs and library study rooms to embrace the great cultural traditions of our locale!

1. Brazos Valley African American Museum  
Location: 500 East Pruitt, Bryan, Texas 77803  
Hours: Tuesday to Friday 1:00PM to 5:PM, Saturday 10:00AM to 4:00PM  
Check on-going exhibitions and events: https://www.facebook.com/OfficialBVAAM/

The museum was built on the site of one of the original black schools in the Brazos Valley. It showcases a collection of African and African American arts and crafts, old photographs and stories of notable local African American residents, and oral history with written, audio and video materials. Just by browsing through their oral history records, we can learn so much about the struggles, achievements and activism of African American people in the Valley. The museum also hosts temporary fine art exhibitions with themes on African American life and culture. This is also a civic center for the community, a place you can attend town hall meetings and learn about the on-going issues in our society.
2. The Children’s Museum of the Brazos Valley  
Location: 4001 East 29th Street, Suite 80, Bryan, Texas 77802  
Hours: Tuesday to Saturday 10:00AM to 5:00PM  
Check on-going exhibitions and events: https://www.facebook.com/ChildrensMuseumoftheBrazosValley/  

This family-friendly place is known for its interactive and educational exhibitions: The High Flyer Wind Tunnel (designed and made by Mechanical Engineering Aggies!), Giant Piano, Train Table, Family Pet Center, and a reading corner. Occasionally, the museum hosts family nights for the moms and dads to enjoy some dancing and hands-on activities with their children. The interior space is bright and colorful, and for those of you who have kids, maybe consider booking the museum space for your little ones’ birthday parties in the future!

3. Brazos Valley Museum of Natural History  
Location: 3232 Briarcrest Drive, Bryan, Texas 77802  
Hours: Tuesday to Saturday 10:00AM to 5:00PM  
Check on-going exhibitions and events: https://www.facebook.com/BrazosValleyMuseumOfNaturalHistory/  

This natural history museum offers a wide range of exhibitions and activities – from Ice Age mammals and pre-historical fossils, to Native American tools and ranch wagons, and also, a Discovery Room with real (live) fish, snakes and turtles. This means that the natural history museum is for us of all ages. Right across the museum entrance is the Carter Creek Nature Trail as an outdoor classroom, where you can learn about numerous plant and animal species.

Location: 19124 Highway 6 South, College Station, Texas 77845  
Hours: Friday to Saturday 10:00AM to 5:30PM, Sunday 12:00PM to 5:00PM  
Check on-going exhibitions and events: https://www.facebook.com/MuseumOfTheAmericanGI/  

Flags, vehicles and uniforms – this is a small and yet exciting place for y’all military enthusiasts! The museum hosts a permanent exhibition to commemorate the Texas servicemen who died or went missing in action during the Vietnam War. In 2017, the centennial year of World War I, the museum opened a temporary exhibition that featured a large collection of original posters, uniforms, and vehicles (including a fully-operational tank!) from the American involvement in the Great War. Even though some of you, like me, might not be very familiar with the U.S. military (I study history, but not military history), you would still be drawn to the impressive outdoor display! Plus, occasionally the museum hosts living history weekend, where you can go visit and learn the actual operation of the real stuff.

5. Star of the Republic Museum (as part of the Washington-on-the-Brazos State Historic Site)  
Location: 23400 Park Road 12, Washington, Texas 77880  
Hours: open daily 10:00AM to 5:00PM  
Check on-going exhibitions and events: https://www.facebook.com/StarOfTheRepublic/
This is a fabulous place to learn the history of Texas, especially the Republic of Texas period. The museum is part of a 293-acre state historic site, with the Texas Independence Hall (where the constitution of the Republic was written in 1836), Barrington Living History Farm (site of the final home of Anson Jones, the last president of the Republic), and a 2.8-mile well-maintained nature trail. The museum has a two-story exhibition space for the display of historical documents and artifacts, and a very informative video upon entry. The site also offers a guided tour, which meets at the visitor center and goes through the stories inside of the Independence Hall and around the trail area. The Part Rangers are very friendly and answer every question. We as students can get a discounted combined ticket for all the activities at the site, and I think the museum and the living history farm (livestock, of course!) are the most interesting parts to visit. It will be a half an hour drive from campus, to the South of Navasota.

Blog Post #7:
NUTRITION COUNSELING SERVICES ON CAMPUS
Posted on Friday, Mar 02, 2018
http://ogaps.tamu.edu/Blog/Blog/March-2018/Nutrition-Counseling-Services-on-Campus

The Student Counseling and Student Health Services have been widely advertised across campus and I know that a lot of you are utilizing the great services they offer. But do you know that we have nutrition counseling for graduate students here at A&M as well? If you are struggling with finding a time to eat, trying hard to balance your work load and healthy living while getting graduate school done, or just wanting to hear some professional suggestions on eating and wellness, you should really consider this one.

The Nutrition Services under Student Health Services is located in Beutel as well. Meghan Windham is our registered dietitian that works with students to make healthy eating and living plans. She can answer your food, diet, allergy related questions as well. For us students, the
Counseling services are provided at a discounted cost of $9-$56 per visit, depending on the time actually spent. An average cost of the initial visit is $36, and follow-up visits average less than $20 per visit. As long as you are currently enrolled at Texas A&M, you are eligible for these services.

Similar as other services at Beutel, you will need to make an appointment for the Nutrition Services by calling 979-458-8327 or emailing dietitian@shs.tamu.edu. Or you can go online to make appointments at: http://shs.tamu.edu/appointments/ A $25 no-show fee will be charged if you do not show up for the scheduled appointment and do not cancel beforehand.

If you suffer from eating disorders or concerns, there is an interdisciplinary treatment team (including mental health provider, physician, and registered dietitian) on campus that can help you. If you need an assessment or treatment for an eating disorder, you can call Student Counseling Service at 979-845-4427 to schedule an initial intake appointment.

Also, this is very important - if you know a friend who might have these kinds of questions or concerns, please refer them to contact the Nutrition Services or Student Counselling to get professional help. We are in this journey of graduate school together and we as Aggies always care about and support our fellow Aggies!

Blog Post #8:
TEXAS A&M RACE, IDENTITY, AND SOCIAL EQUITY CONFERENCE
Posted on Monday, Feb 12, 2018
The Department of Multicultural Services hosted the inaugural Texas A&M Race, Identity, and Social Equity (RISE) Conference on February 2, 2018. It was a great learning experience and a truly meaningful platform for students, faculty and staff to come together and talk about some hard topics and issues. The RISE Conference at A&M is modeled after the Iowa State Conference on Race and Ethnicity (ISCORE), and it is part of a year-long initiative, including research and education components, that provides students with a better understanding of race, identity and social equity in higher education.

As graduate students, we often spend a lot of time reading, writing, doing research, and may not being very aware of the campus environment that we are in. In fact, many of the resources on diversity and inclusion education are geared toward the undergraduate population. However, we are indeed part of the student body, and campus environment does impact everyone. Especially for us who will become faculty and staff members in a higher education institution in the future, we need to actively take part in this, in order to build a healthy and safe place for every single one of us.

During this year’s RISE Conference, Keynote Speaker Dr. Thomas Hill from Iowa State University shared the initiative and conference they hosted on social equity and mutual respect, and the importance of having such university-wide forum to address difficult issues, especially in today’s society. Student researchers, faculty, staff and community members also shared their concerns about different aspects of race and ethnicity. A team from the College of Architecture shared their experience of using design project to foster community engagement and support the Brazos Valley African American Museum. A team from Cushing Memorial Library & Archives shared their efforts to acquire LGBTQ-related archival materials in recent years, and the history of LGBTQ on Texas A&M campus. A graduate student from the English department discussed the neo-imperialist discrimination faced by many international TAs. A professor from the Sociology department explained a series of white framing and white supremacy scenarios to inform people the danger of racist mindset and negative influence on small children. In many sessions, debate got heated and people continued to discuss things even outside of the conference rooms. People from different kinds of social and cultural background came together to tackle the problems and discuss possible solutions. The amount of knowledge, experience-sharing, and respect among all participants were extraordinary.

Race and ethnicity cannot be fully discussed in a single-day conference. The RISE initiative represents our school’s commitment to build an inclusive environment all year round. A good way for graduate students to get involved in such issues is through participating in the Department of Multicultural Services’ programs (e.g. Aggies to Aggies). If your college has a Diversity Council, you can also attend their meetings and help with their initiatives. Everyday on campus, we need to be aware of race, identity, and social equity, educate ourselves to understand people from different backgrounds, and take responsibility in countering or disrupting discriminative comments or actions. The idea is that no one need to do all the things, but everyone needs to do something.
Step In. Stand Up. Is an award-winning campaign here at Texas A&M, aiming to raise sexual assault awareness and reduce sexual violence in the campus community. As the Aggies core values suggest, every single one of us has a commitment to serve our fellow Aggies and protect each other from assault and violence. The first step is to start this conversation and share information for victims and among allies. If you ever wonder how you can get involved in this campaign and contribute to a better campus environment, here are a few tips:

1. Attend a Green Dot Bystander Intervention Training

If you see a sexual assault or violence going on, what should you do? Do you have concerns or questions as to how to effectively help out and be safe at the same time? The Green Dot trainings are designed to give you the confidence and skills you need in order to intervene in difficult situations (do Green Dots). Through videos, group conversation, discussions, role plays, and interactive activities, students will learn about how to detect a red flag situation (Red Dot), the barriers that exist for all of us sometimes when we try to do Green Dots, and how to take the most helpful action for every situation. These free trainings often last for three hours and include one meal. You can browse through the Green Dot website and register for a training session at: http://greendot.tamu.edu/register-for-gd-bystander-intervention/

2. Attend a Stand Up Workshop

Green Dot trainings give you the skills to step in, and Stand Up workshops are designed to assist individuals in learning positive and helpful ways to have conversations with individuals who have been involved in a traumatic event. These workshops provide information about sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking; social perspectives; the impacts of trauma on the brain; listening techniques; tools for mandated reporters; and campus and community resources. Register through the link above and select a time that works for you. These presentations usually last for three hours.
3. Attend a presentation offered by the Office of Consensual Language, Education, Awareness and Relationships (CLEAR)

CLEAR offers a variety of workshops, programs, and presentations that help students to learn how we can be allies in the fight to end power-based personal violence here at Texas A&M and the greater global community. Presentations include “In Their Shoes” (how to help someone with an abusive partner), “Love the Way You Lie” (discussions on the way our society views and sometimes even glorifies violent relationships), “Consent 101” (information on what consent is and what consent is not), etc. These free events often last for about an hour. If you are a leader or officer of your student organization, consider requesting a presentation from CLEAR to help educate the entire group and raise awareness of sexual assault and violence on campus.

4. April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month!

The Sexual Assault Survivor Services Survey conducted by the Office of the Dean of Student Life in Spring 2013 found that in Aggieland, 25% of all women and 7% of all men experienced unwanted touching of a sexual nature, comparable to national statistics. Sexual violence can cause people to experience negative reactions, including less social interaction, depression, distractedness, missing class, and stress. In order to reduce and ultimately end sexual violence on campus, everyone should get involved. Look out for campus-wide emails and announcements on events and opportunities during this April.

5. Attend a SHARP Self-Defense Class

This is a 4-hour specially designed class for women (age 17 and older). It teaches easy-to-learn techniques for a variety of situations. Students will learn situational awareness, how to better protect themselves, and how to defend against an attacker. If you are interested in attending, take a look at the time and register through this link: http://studentlife.tamu.edu/wrc.sharpregistration You will need to sign a liability waiver, bring it with you, and wear workout clothing and athletic shoes to the class.
Last month I participated in a historic preservation study abroad program in Bermuda, and I wrote a blog post about our experience there documenting historic buildings. This one is nothing about class or research, but a quick traveler’s guide to some of the worth-seeing attractions in Bermuda. Whether you are a history buff or a natural science person, or just enjoying the feeling at sea, you will all find your favorite spot in this lovely place. I hope this post can help you to plan your future Atlantic getaway!

- **St. George’s UNESCO World Heritage Site**
  Located on the eastern end of Bermuda, this historic town was founded in 1612, being the oldest remaining British overseas territory. It has a large number of surviving 18th and 19th century buildings, and the historic urban fabric is well preserved as well. Spending a few hours walking around in St. George’s, you will see the harbor and Somers Wharf (named after one of the first British colonizers in Bermuda), the town hall square (where the new year’s countdown event happens), the State House (sole survivor from the town’s earliest days), St. Peter’s Church (the oldest continuously used Protestant church in the New World), and many other historic houses along Water Street, Church Street, Duke of York Street, and Duke of Kent Street. The beautiful Bermudian architecture and colorful colors of the buildings are impressive, not to mention the ocean view with turquoise color waves.

- **Royal Naval Dockyard and National Museum of Bermuda**
  At the opposite end of the island is the Royal Naval Dockyard, which served as British Navy’s principal base in the Western Atlantic from late 18th century to mid-20th century. Today, the dockyard is also the port of call for mega cruise ships arriving in Bermuda. Principle buildings including the Commissioner’s House, the barracks, the ordnance yard, the victualing yard, and the clock tower are major attractions for the tourists. The National Museum, located in the Keep, has exhibitions on Bermudian maritime history, military presence at the dockyard, as well as culture of contemporary Bermudian society. There is a glimpse of Aggie pride here, as one of the underwater archaeology exhibitions mentions Texas A&M Department of Anthropology’s work on discovering and preserving shipwrecks in Bermudian water.
• Bermudian forts
Today there are more than 90 surviving forts in Bermuda, built by British and U.S. Navy in the past few centuries. They signify the strategically important location of this island in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. The Victorian-era stone garrison called Fort Hamilton, near the post-1815 capital city of Bermuda, offers a picturesque view of the harbor. Another example is Fort St. Catherine, near Tobacco Bay to the north of St. George’s. They are great places to learn military history and defense constructions.

• Aquarium and Zoo
Located at 32N, Bermuda’s coral reefs are unique as they are the most northern massive coral reefs in the Atlantic. Today, visitors can see a range of animals and marine life in naturalistic environments at the Bermuda Aquarium and Zoo, including living coral reefs, sea turtles, the endangered golden lion tamarin, pink flamingos, and many kinds of tropical birds. The natural history museum here tells the then-and-now story of Bermuda’s natural environment, and the environmental protection efforts currently underway.

• World-famous Beaches
Bermuda is world-widely known for its pink sand beaches (actually, the beaches get their beautiful pink color because of a very small marine organism: the red foraminifera). They are year-round locations for water sports and simple relaxation in the sunshine. Most welcomed spots include the Horseshoe Bay and Elbow Beach along the south shore, and Tobacco Bay to the northeastern tip of Bermuda.

Blog Post #11:
ENGLISH LANGUAGE RESOURCES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
Posted on Friday, Feb 02, 2018
For international students who use English as a second language, oral communication is always a huge challenge in both academic and professional sense. Good news is that Texas A&M have many on-campus resources that can help with the learning process. Recently my friend asked me where he could go to practice spoken English, in order to be more confident in public speaking. I double-checked with the Center for Teaching Excellence-English Language Proficiency program, and here is a list of opportunities:

- **English Language Proficiency for Current and Future Instructors Practice Group**

This is a series of workshops hosted by the Center for Teaching Excellence. The group meet in Evans Library every week throughout the semester. Although its original intention is to train international TAs, they welcome perspective TAs and other international students as well. Participants will interact with each other, with language experts, and with experienced TAs. It is a non-judgmental safe environment for people to practice using English as much as possible, and become confident about speaking in public. For the current semester’s schedule, students can contact the office at: [http://cte.tamu.edu/Graduate-Student-Support/English-Language-Proficiency](http://cte.tamu.edu/Graduate-Student-Support/English-Language-Proficiency)

- **University Writing Center**

We all know that UWC provides writing consultations, but do you know they have individual consultations on speech and presentation skills as well? They even help students to design posters for conferences. The service is included in the undergraduate and graduate student fees, so please utilize this resource as much as you can. If there is a specific project that you want to improve (for example, a forth coming conference presentation or teaching session), take your ideas and background materials to UWC and get professional help! Appointments need to be pro-booked online: [http://writingcenter.tamu.edu/Students/Graduate-Students](http://writingcenter.tamu.edu/Students/Graduate-Students)

- **International Student Mentor Association**

I have been part of ISMA for two semesters and I absolutely love my experience with this organization. Through mentorship, I made American friends and international buddies, and learn new cultures at the same time. The organization does require a certain level of commitment, but the time and energy I put in is quite worthy. Everyone in this group is super friendly toward international students. People are interested in knowing you as a person, and help with your struggles as an international student on campus. The chance to practice speaking English is just a side gift of joining ISMA. If a student organization is what you are looking for, I would highly recommend this one. You can find ISMA on Facebook: [https://www.facebook.com/ISMATAMU/](https://www.facebook.com/ISMATAMU/)

- **Dinner in a U.S. Home Program**

This is a great way to get to know the Bryan/College Station community. Many of the hosts are in some ways affiliated with Texas A&M, but there are long-time local residents as well. International Student Services matches people together according to the students’ dietary and transportation needs. I have made great friends through this program, with whom I kept in
contact even after they left College Station. Sharing dinners together, the program setting is very informal and family-friendly. Again, practice speaking English is one of the goals, but the more important thing is to meet new people and get connected with the community. Program details can be found here: http://iss.tamu.edu/Side-Menu/Community-Involvement/Dinner-in-a-US-Home-Host

Blog Post #12:
**PRESERVATION FIELD STUDY IN ST. GEORGE’S, BERMUDA**
Posted on Monday, Jan 22, 2018
http://ogaps.tamu.edu/Blog/Blog/January-2018/Preservation-Field-Study-in-St-George%E2%80%99s,-Bermuda

Two weeks before the start of the spring semester, a group of graduate students in the Department of Architecture, led by Professor Brent Fortenberry, conducted a series of preservation field study in St. George’s, Bermuda, the oldest remaining British overseas territory and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This was my first time to do a study abroad program as an architecture major at Texas A&M. The international and interdisciplinary nature of the course and our student group, the on-site observation and field-recording skills we learned, and the experience of working in historic house museums are the best things I absolutely love about these two weeks.

We first started out walking around St. George’s historic town to get ourselves familiar with the overall landscape and architectural characters of this four-hundred-year-old town. Then our group spent a week at our case study site, an 18th century residential building called Mitchell House, to produce hand drawn floor plans and site plan. This helped us to better understand the
spatial evolution of this building, the connection between historical texts and physical evidence, and the overall architectural scene of the Atlantic world. In between our on-site drawing, we spent time walking in the streets, recording architectural elements and building conditions in St. George’s, and generating ArcGIS data for future preservation work. Each student also did his or her individual projects, including taking photographs of historic house museums, building 3D model and photogrammetry for our case study site, collecting architectural color examples, assessing adaptive reuse effectiveness, and designing exhibition panels for local museums. In our spare time, we also got the chance to visit local attractions, including the Royal Naval Dockyard, Aquarium and Zoo, as well as the famous pink sand beaches.

The experience of working on-site, instead of sitting in a classroom listening to lectures, is extremely helpful for us students in architectural history and historic preservation. When we examined the use of decoration and condition of building material inside of the house, we were trained to read architecture first hand by our own eyes. Our mentors from the department and other preservation organizations, have spent decades working in the field. Their insights are invaluable. I learned to pay attention to details, work effectively in a group, and always be patient with field work. The experience also gave me inspirations for research ideas in the future.

I would encourage our fellow grad Aggies to take advantage of our school’s study abroad programs (after all, A&M is a leading institution in the entire country to send students abroad). Spending some time in a new environment, you will meet new mentors and friends, learn new knowledge and skill, experience new culture, and be able to better reflect on yourself.

Blog Post #13:
A FEW TIPS FOR FIRST-TIME INTERNATIONAL TAs
Posted on Wednesday, Jan 17, 2018
Recently I was on the panel of a new and perspective International Teaching Assistants training program, and together with other experienced TAs, we got many questions from the audience about what to do at the beginning of the semester. I thought those were typical for international graduate students to ask. Here I just want to share with you a few questions and my answers as recommendations. It is quite a challenge for people who are TA-ing for the first time, and it must be even harder for those who just came to the United States and are still trying to move into the American classroom culture. I experienced these difficulties first-hand a few years ago. However, we need to believe in ourselves that we will eventually overcome the panic and nervousness, because after all, we will be there in the classroom as educators, making positive impacts on our students’ lives.

• I am assigned to be a TA, but I’ve never TA-ed before. What should I do?
Congratulations, someone in the department believes in your knowledge and ability to be a great teacher. Now take a deep breath, and write an email to the professor (instructor of record) of that course. You will need to first of all, set up an appointment to meet with your professor and discuss his/her expectation of your job. This include (but not limited to) the following things: what the course is about; what is your background in this subject; who are the target students; how many of them will be in the class; what do the exams and assignments look like; do you need to help prepare course materials or you are just the grader; how long is the turnover time for grading; does the professor expect you to teach some of the class sessions or not; do you need to physically sit in the classroom every time or you only need to be there for several occasions; when and for how long should you host your weekly office hours; etc. These are crucial points you need to be clear about before getting into the actual semester. Believe me, knowing these will help greatly reduce your panic level.

• I am assigned to be the TA for a course that I’ve never taken as an undergrad. What should I do?
Talk to the department advisor/director of graduate programs and see if this is the best arrangement, only if you really feel like you are lacking the ability to handle such a course. Truth is that, many departments run General Education courses and they don’t really have a choice but to assign all their TAs to a very limited number of course choices. I was put into the exact same situation several years ago, and I talked to the professor of that assigned course before the semester started. The professor told me one thing that I still remember today – as a graduate student I should have the learning skills to absorb information and critically analyze course materials way much faster than the undergraduate students do. Therefore, I should be confident about my ability to handle the TA job. I switched major between my Master’s and Ph.D., so that course was completely new to me at the time (I never took that course as an undergrad). I did end up spending extra time every week reading about the subject, and my grading work went extremely slow at the beginning. However, together with my professor, we were able to build that confidence as the semester went. So my tip here is – work with your professor, spend that extra time, and be confident about yourself.

• I am a shy person and English is my second language. So I feel quite nervous every time I stand in front of a large classroom of American students. What should I do?
Yes, they are native speakers, but you are the expert! Whether you are just a TA for your professor or teaching a class session all by yourself, you will need to remember that you are the graduate student that knows the course materials and the professor’s expectations the best. Yes, you will make mistakes because you are still practicing your public speaking skills. But the most important thing is the actual course content. You need to focus on that instead of thinking about being a non-native speaker all the time. From my own experience, I found it better to be honest with my students at the first time. When I was teaching discussion sessions, I let my students know that I am still practicing English as my second language, and if I am not clear about anything, they should speak up in class immediately and let me know. They helped me a lot to improve my teaching in the English language, and I offered them “an outsider’s view” on many American history subjects that we were talking about in class. It was a meaningful exchange and a wonderful experience. One other thing about this – my professor always tells me that it is important for the students to understand “why you are there” – what attracts you to this major and this subject, and how did you transform that curiosity into actively learning as a student. These will be interesting ice breakers that your students enjoy hearing about, so please tell them at the beginning of the semester. In this way, your students can get a better idea of who you are and why you become a TA or a teacher in that class.

Blog Post #14:
**5 THINGS YOU CAN’T MISS IN MEXICO CITY**
Posted on Monday, Nov 06, 2017

Last week I presented my paper at a museum studies conference in Mexico City, and it was totally an amazing experience. Although I’ve been to other parts of Mexico before, it was my first time in the capital city. Here I’m showing you five things that I think you can’t miss in this fabulous place. This is by no means a comprehensive city guide, so just take it as a traveler’s notes.
1. Mesoamerican Indian sites
   • Templo Mayor: Mexico City was built on top of the Aztec capital city Tenochtitlan, and Templo Mayor was one of the Aztecs’ main temples. The archeological site is right next to the Metropolitan Cathedral (seat of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Mexico), on the southeastern corner of the Constitution Square. There is a multi-story museum dedicated to the temple, with the archeological findings organized and displayed by theme. Surrounding the site are the wooden walkways that allow us to see the different stages of development throughout the temple’s history. It is a very cool site to see if you are into Mesoamerican culture and just ancient cities in general.
   • Teotihuacan: Home of the largest pyramid in the world (not Egypt, as many Mexican friends always proudly say). You will need to take a bus from Mexico City to get to Teotihuacan, and it’s about a 50-minute ride to the northeast. The Pyramid of the Sun and the Pyramid of the Moon are located at the center of a pre-Columbian city, and today we can still see the broad avenues and urban layout of the surrounding area. Make sure to bring sunscreen and sunglasses while visiting, as it can take three to four hours to walk through the entire site and the museum.

2. Historic city center
   • The Constitution Square (or as the locals call it, Zocalo) is the historic center of Mexico City. If you remember the opening scene from 007: Spectre (2015), the Day of the Dead parade and the magnificent helicopter fighting scenes were filmed right here. I visited the city in late October and early November, so I was fortunate enough to see all the beautiful Day of the Dead decorations and installations, and to enjoy the live concert shows at night as part of the festival celebration.
   • Madero Avenue is a pedestrian street linking the Constitution Square to the Palace of Fine Arts. Here you can find all kinds of street shops, cafés and restaurants, as well as museums. Many Spanish colonial buildings along this street have lavish Baroque designs, and you can actually go into some of the open-to-public buildings to see the beautiful decoration inside. For example, the Palace of Iturbide, or the House of Tiles. The Latin-American Tower is to the northern end of the street, which offers a panoramic view of the entire city on its observation desk.

3. Museums
   Mexico City hosts countless museums of all sorts of interests. Just to name a few that absolutely worth a visit.
   • National Museum of Anthropology – It’s on the northern edge of the Chapultepec Forest in the western part of the city, famous for the Sun Stone, an Aztec calendar caved in the 16th century. The museum also has collections on artifacts and exhibitions on folklore across all the different regions of Mexico.
   • National Museum of History – Located in the Chapultepec Castle in the Chapultepec Forest, the museum tells the history of Mexico from pre-Columbian time to the 20th century. Historical maps and documents are among the many things to see in this history museum. For those of you who come from Texas, it would be interesting to see how 1836 is portrayed from the Mexican perspective.
   • National Museum of Cultures of the World – This is actually the venue of my conference. It is located to the southeastern corner of the National Palace, minutes of walk away from
the Constitution Square. They have exhibitions on foreign arts and culture, and the anthropologists working there tell fantastic stories about how they curate the artifacts in their collections into themed exhibitions.

4. Markets
I’m a huge fan of collecting local arts and crafts while travelling. Therefore, I would really recommend you to dig into the local markets (where the locals shop and eat!) to pick up things other than airport souvenirs that are specifically catered to tourists.

- La Ciudadela – This is maybe the largest arts and crafts market in Mexico, where you can find glassware, ceramics, colorful fabric, clothing and jewelries.
- Coyoacan Market – it is minutes of walk away from the Frida Kahlo Museum. The food vendors here are absolutely amazing for authentic Mexican tacos and tortillas.
- Xochimilko – The little town to the southern end of Mexico City is famous for waterways and boat tours. However, the central market in town is where you can find all kinds of fruits, veggies, flowers, and snacks.

5. 21st century architecture
The very modern aspect of Mexico City can be seen in the Polanco district, home to international corporations, brands, and huge shopping malls. My favorite place here is the newly opened Soumaya Museum. It hosts works by famous artists including Rodin, Dali, and Renoir. The spiral walkway design reminds people of the Guggenheim Museum in New York, but the galleries here are set on flat ground. The museum’s exterior is made of curved steel columns and aluminum tiles (therefore super shining in the daylight), and just in case you think this looks familiar in some way, Frank Gehry, the architect of Guggenheim Bilbao, works on this building as one of the engineers.

Now every time you may feel stuck in the middle of Texas and try to think about your next holiday destinations, consider Mexico City. It’s only two hours of flight away from Houston with very affordable airfare and accommodation. If you are an art and history buff like me, it’s even better. Mexico City offers a long lists of sites to see and things to experience. There is a reminder though: if you are an international student, check with our International Student Services before planning the trip, to see if you need additional visa or documents to enter Mexico. After all, it’s an international destination. When everything is set, go prepare yourself for a place and culture so different from Texas and the United States!
Last week I presented several teaching workshops at the Teaching Assistant Institute (TAI) held by our Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE). This was part of the mandatory all-day training for first-time teaching assistants at Texas A&M, regardless of major and department. Throughout the day, we discussed How Learning Works, Teaching Strategies, Classroom Management, Effective Communication, Grading and Questioning Techniques. The sessions were designed to be as interactive as possible. There were a lot of group activities, physically moving around in the classroom, scenario discussions, and case studies. This was my first time to facilitate the TAI, and I just realized how much I learned from my students (TAs) during these sessions.

As graduate students we are often trapped by our own disciplinary knowledge, and one thing excited about college teaching is the diversity and variety of interests coming from our students. During the TAI, I heard numerous stories about our new TAs’ previous experience in the classroom, good or not-so-good student behaviors, and struggles they had because of the subject content or the classroom environment, as well as the confusions and nervousness they faced (or thought they would face) in a college classroom setting.

I have been a TA for two years and have taught my own discussion class for one year before this. Every time I step into my classroom, I still feel that pressure of being the instructor or leader of the class. However, one thing I always keep in mind is that teaching is a process of learning as well. The students look at the TAs as the role model (someone who has been through this and knew exactly how hard it was to go through all these coursework), and they did not expect the TAs to be the perfect expert, knowing everything. The curiosity, excitement, confident and patience you bring to the class – that’s the most important thing that would be very beneficial to your students.
As we go into the world of college teaching, I would encourage everyone to share his/her teaching experience with our fellow grad Aggies. You never know how useful and mind-blowing a tip from another discipline could help you with your own class. By this I mean not only teaching strategies or syllabus design, but also the attitude and work-study-life balance that we all (at some point) struggle with.

And if you are interested in the future, check out the Graduate Teaching Consultant program at CTE. You can pass on the torch of teaching and be the next generation of instructional coaches or peer mentors for TAs across campus. We are a big family of experienced graduate teaching fellows, and the CTE is a great place to start the initial steps of building our college teaching career.

Blog Post #16:
TEXAS PRESIDENTIAL TRAIL
Posted on Monday, Jul 24, 2017

Living and studying next to the George Bush Presidential Library and Museum, most of us may have already visited this famous institution and beautiful site at least once during our time attending graduate school here at Texas A&M. Well, there is another president in American history that has very close bonds to Texas – Lyndon Baines Johnson, the 36th president of the United States, in office from 1963 to 1969.

This past weekend, me and my friends traced the LBJ trail in central Texas and visited several sites related to this significant 1960s figure. The first one is Lyndon B. Johnson National Historical Park in Stonewall, about 50 miles west of Austin. This 1600-acre site consists of the birthplace, childhood home, a working ranch, retirement house, as well as the family cemetery of LBJ. Even when he was in office, the president spent one fifth of his time living and working at this ranch with all his close advisors and staff. The site witnessed many historical moments in the
60s, including important decisions regarding the Great Society programs, the Vietnam War, and the Civil Rights acts. The tour through the “Texas White House” (LBJ’s house on the south edge of the ranch) was amazing, as the National Park Ranger shared a lot of interesting stories of the former president and first lady, and many of the settings and objects were left untouched from their original conditions, since LBJ past away in the early 70s and Lady Bird past away in 2007. Colors and patterns of the 1960s fashion came back to life, when I peeked through Lady Bird Johnson’s walk-in closet in the house. The limousine and jet plane the first family used to travel around Texas were also kept on site. We particularly enjoyed the actual ranch part of the estate. We were able to touch the cattle and goat, who were the descendants of the livestock LBJ raised by himself.

The other site we visited during the weekend was the LBJ Presidential Library in Austin. The site was chosen because Lady Bird graduated from UT-Austin, although the president went to another school in south Texas. The library and museum was first opened to the public in 1971. All the public papers, recorded telephone correspondence, photos, and original Oval Office furniture are all kept in its archive. Exhibitions led us through a historical timeline of LBJ’s political career, along the way with many documents and objects on display, that have become the 1960s icons (for example, the Kennedy/Johnson campaign posters for 1960). Because of the series of Civil Rights legislations passed during LBJ’s era, the library has been used to commemorate many special occasions related to this great achievement, including the Civil Rights Summit of 2014, when Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama all gave their speech at the 50th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act.

Visiting presidential sites is definitely a great way to learn American history, politics and culture, and they remind us of the legacies that are still influencing our lives today. Since LBJ was only one of the two U.S. presidents that were actually born in Texas, you might wonder where is the other one we can go visit. Well, Eisenhower was born in Texas, but was raised in Kansas. The Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Museum and Boyhood Home is in Abilene, Kansas, 140 miles west of Kansas City. And for the other Texas-grown president we are all very familiar with (although he was born in Connecticut), George W. Bush Presidential Library and Museum is in University Park, a northern suburb of Dallas.
While it’s half way through summer, many of my friends have been asking me about job hunting for this particular time of the year. As an international grad student, I understand perfectly the confusions and frustrations of summer job hunting. Here are some suggestions and tips for y’all to have a productive and financially-secured summer.

First of all, figure out (or double-check) your immigration status before starting to search for jobs. There are many issues related to: whether you are allowed to work legally in the United States; how many hours you can work during summer (it’s different for non-TA/RAs, and for 9-month and 12-month TA/RAs); what kinds of jobs you can take (on-campus or off-campus positions); as well as how your payrolls will be processed (trust me, this is a super complicated process). The only place to clear all the confusions is – our International Student Services (ISS). Advisors there are experts in immigration laws and they’ve been helping international students to figure out their individual situation day in and day out. While every student has his or her unique visa and immigration status, only the ISS can give a clear and correct answer.

Second, identify potential employers as soon as you come across them. People usually apply for summer jobs for two reasons: to get more major-related experience, or just to make some extra money to pay for study and living expenses. Or both. If you are open to both major-related and non-major-related jobs, my recommendation is that you keep close connections with everyone on
campus and in the community. You never know who will help you and refer you to your next summer job. Most of the summer employers start recruiting in spring (from February to May), and some even start earlier in the school year. This means that last minute panic won’t help, and to make life much easier, creating your own resource list would be much useful. Throughout the school year, write down any information or any contact that you think might lead you to your next summer job. If you miss a particular summer job posting this year, it won’t hurt to keep it on the list and consider applying for it next spring.

Then the big question is – where to go? While there are typically three kinds of jobs that international students often encounter.

1. On-campus positions (on TAMU Payroll)
   Jobs For Aggies is the website for Student Employment Office, and it’s the most handy search engine for on-campus jobs. While their Job Search list won’t specifically separate on-campus and off-campus postings, you can always figure it out by reading the job descriptions. There you can find both hourly-paid student worker positions (although often not closely related to your major), and fixed-pay temporary researcher or assistant positions. Examples include working for the Libraries, Admissions, Residence Life, Campus Tour, Transportation, Rec Sports, as well as offices in different academic departments and colleges. If you keep checking this website, there is a big chance that you can find your ideal summer job as soon as they appear here. Keep in mind that on-campus employment (jobs on TAMU Payroll) will save you from the complicated process of CPT (Curricular Practical Training) approval, therefore it’s a good starting point for international students.

2. Off-campus positions (but employed by TAMU departments, therefore also on TAMU Payroll)
   Many departments on-campus have local partnerships with institutions, companies or organizations in B/CS area. Working for these partnership programs will allow you to build local connections, while at the same time, stay on TAMU Payroll, which is still less complicated regarding the HR approval process. Jobs For Aggies website, TAMU emails, and contact referrals are common ways of locating this kind of employment. Indicating your interests for summer job while talking with your advisor and committee members is also a good idea. If you are not sure whether a position is on TAMU Payroll or not, contact your potential employer and ask this specific question. This is a common concern from international students, so it won’t hurt to ask them to clarify this before you decide to take any further step.

3. Off-campus positions with non-TAMU payroll
   There are many times we go to job fairs while still in school, and instead of looking around and talking casually with people at the booth, you should consider to present yourself seriously as a summer intern or temporary position seeker. Especially when you are looking for a summer experience that can be directly applied to your academic program and your future career trajectory. This is crucially true for the Master’s students, since the summer months between the first and second school year might be the only time for you to get real-world experience, before joining the job hunting grad student crowd.
This is also when the complicated CPT approval process kicks in. Because it may take our ISS and your employer several months to process your paperwork, you need to plan sufficient time before the start of summer for your off-campus job application (non-TAMU Payroll positions). Depending on your visa and immigration status, ISS may need signatures from your department, your academic advisor, your future employer and the HR person over there. It is your responsibility to cross-check your own situation with all the parties involved, to ensure that this approval process won’t prevent you from having a successful summer.

Finally, you have summer job offers in hand. Now what? The most important thing to keep in mind is that nobody can maintain a perfect job/study/life balance. We are all working on that, and it’s ok to feel frustrated sometimes. Talk to your friends and family, and maybe talk about your summer schedule with your advisor. Make plans together, seek help from mentors and peers, and don’t let summer jobs drain your energy for the fall. Whether you’re experiencing new and excited stuff during summer, or just making extra money so that you can travel and play more for the rest of the year, I wish you – my fellow grad students – a safe and productive time!

Blog Post #18:
THE HIDDEN TREASURE OF HISTORIC CENTRAL TEXAS TOWNS
Posted on Tuesday, Jun 27, 2017

For many of us who come from other parts of the country or even elsewhere around the world, one of the most frequently asked questions about grad life here is where to go and what to do for a day trip so that we can escape the small academic world of Bryan/College Station once in a while. The Texan towns around us, is usually the answer.
Last weekend, me and some of my fellow grad student friends drove to Hearne, Texas, a historic town 20-minute to the northwest of Bryan, for a day break from research and summer anxiety. First thing first, we enjoyed a basket of ribs and steak at a local restaurant along the farm road, which ranks as the Top 50 BBQs in Texas.

Then, as nerdy as us, we spent the rest of our day visiting a museum and a local historic site. Camp Hearne is a World War II Prisoner of War camp in northwest Hearne. It hosted more than 4000 POWs (mainly Hitler’s Afrika Korps led by “the Desert Fox” Erwin Rommel) from 1942 to 1946 (more people than the residents of Hearne at the time), and the camp was set up and operated according to the Geneva Convention, which required the treatment of POWs to be as the same living standard for the country’s own combat forces. The camp was abandoned after the POWs were shipped back to Europe, and the land was sold to the city. Later in the 1990s, a team of Texas A&M archeologists excavated the site and now it has an exhibition hall and a visitor center (thanks to my committee member from the Recreation, Park, and Tourism Sciences department), where many Texas A&M humanities courses hold their field trips.

The second site we visited is the Southern Pacific Railroad depot in downtown Hearne. The city’s more than 150 years of history is closely related to the development of railroad. As the crossroad of railroads and highways in central Texas, businesses and industries were set up, and the town flourished as a transportation hub. Nowadays, the historic depot hosts exhibitions on the railways across Robertson County and the surrounding area. One thing stands out immediately to us Aggies is an old painting of the former “College Station” depot, during the time when our institution was still called “the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas”.

Many of the small Texan towns around here have very interesting historic and cultural sites for us to explore. Next time when you are tired of Bryan/College Station for whatever reason, try visit these hidden treasures for a day trip. I bet you will learn more than expected and enjoy your time with friends!
For the entire month of June, I’ve been teaching non-stop in a K12 environment and it’s safe to say that this was the most challenging summer job I’ve ever had in the United States. Most of us were trained for college teaching throughout our graduate school career, and probably none of us would expect that teaching kids would be much more complicated than dealing with college freshmen. However, here are what I learned this summer from teaching Chinese language and culture at Spring Creek Elementary School in College Station.

First of all, effective teaching and learning always starts from understanding the nature of the audience. My students are incoming second and third graders, and most of them are non-heritage learners, which means their parents are not Chinese Americans and they don’t speak Chinese at home. On top of that, the students are still in the process of learning English as their native language, which leads to the situation that they are developing their literacy skills in both native and foreign language at the same time. This situation requires the teachers to prepare age-appropriate textual and visual materials, refine the instructional words and phrases that we use in class, and always be consistent about translation and meanings in both languages. I get to know the importance of checking my students’ understanding and learning results day by day, and how my instruction would improve to be accessible for audience of different age groups.
Second thing I learned is to analyze and implement program-specific guidelines for my class. Our summer course is part of the nationwide STARTALK (Start Talking!) foreign language program, sponsored by the National Security Agency, and the goal is to encourage the next generation of American citizens to start learning critical foreign languages at a younger age. With this goal in mind, the program not only requires us to teach Chinese language and culture, but also to build a classroom environment that uses the target language for more than 90% of the time. This specific requirement from the funding agency pushes us to brainstorm a lot of solutions to use instructional efforts in Chinese, but at the same time, to ensure that our students could understand and follow our instructions. Dual-language slides, visual materials, repeating and being consistent in using the target language all help so much in achieving this goal.

The third thing that is very important to me is that I build my own team of teaching staff for this program. As a teacher, I’m responsible for supervising seven TAs (middle schoolers, high schoolers, and fellow undergrad and grad students at Texas A&M) that are all part of my classroom and help me a lot with science, craft, and culture classes. We develop course content together, brainstorm ideas that can incorporate language lessons into other types of classes (our students even used Chinese to work in teams and built their own robots!), and prepare materials and tools for the students. This experience transforms me from being a TA for Texas A&M professors to be a lead teacher who works with a large team of assistants of younger age. I learn to plan ahead, to give clear instructions, and to distribute all kinds of work to my diverse team members according to their schedule, interests and abilities. Trust me, it is way more challenging to build an effective working team than to take every responsibility to your own.

Last but not least, is that I get to know the College Station community better. Our program is affiliated with the CSISD (College Station Independent School District) Summer Enrichment program, and we receive a lot of help from the CSISD facilities and personnel. Although I’ve been volunteering in elementary schools elsewhere in this country before, coming from a foreign educational system, the world of K12 in America (and specifically in Texas) is still an unfamiliar sphere for me. I have this career goal of working as a public educator in museums, so teaching for any age group is a valuable experience. However, being a graduate student, our horizon is often limited to the world of college teaching, while there is a whole new world of teaching different types of audience out there for us to explore.

Not everyone of us will encounter K12 professionally in the future. However, I do want to encourage everyone who is interested in knowing more about our local community and the younger generation of students/audience to participate in programs and events alike, and get out of our comfort bubble to explore the world of teaching with different possibilities!
Blog Ambassador Bio:
http://ogaps.tamu.edu/Blog/Blog-Ambassador-Bios/#Mingqian

Mingqian Liu is a fourth year doctoral student from the Department of Architecture. Her research interests include architectural and urban history, historic preservation, museum studies and public education. Her dissertation focuses on the preservation policies and practices of Beijing’s historic neighborhoods. Prior to coming to Texas A&M, she earned a Master of Arts in History of Art and Architecture from Boston University, and a Bachelor of Arts in International Studies from The University of Iowa. Born and raised in a Manchurian family in Beijing, China, Mingqian came to the United States for her college education. While travelling a lot between these two countries, Mingqian is proud to experience both American and Chinese culture at the same time. She participates in many on-campus organizations and community events, and her goal is to help the international student body to be better integrated into the American education environment.