



 INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE

 NAME

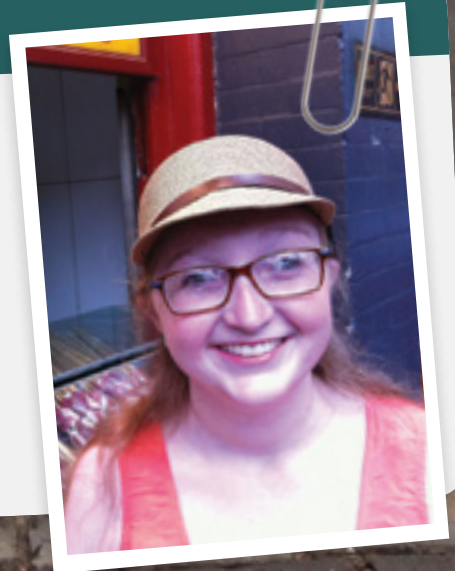
STEPHANIE COLLINS

 LENGTH

EIGHT WEEKS

 PROGRAM

CRITICAL LANGUAGE SCHOLARSHIP  
- CHINA



# A Ripple Starts in China

Early on in Stephanie Collins' stay in Dalian, China, she had coffee with her language partner, the person assigned to help her practice Chinese. Having had few opportunities to meet blind individuals, the language partner asked Stephanie about her vision, how she studied and how she navigated through the world. Stephanie explained to her partner about using her cane and even let her try it out.

Later, the two ran into one of her partner's friends. Stephanie was walking with her cane, and her partner explained to the friend how and why Stephanie used it. Stephanie was delighted to let her partner do the talking.

"She repeated everything I had just told her. I was so excited—the ripple had started."

Stephanie was a junior at the University of Oregon's Clark Honors College. She spent eight weeks in China on the U.S. Department of State's Critical Language Scholarship program, whose goal is to expand the number of Americans studying and mastering foreign languages that are critical to U.S. national security and economic prosperity.

Stephanie guided her program administrators in the United States through the disability-related accommodations she would need for access abroad and found them to be supportive.

**"I explained the difference between being blind and legally blind and why I only sometimes use my white cane."**

Stephanie found herself doing a lot of educating in China as well, where students with disabilities attend different schools from their non-disabled peers. Her teachers had never worked with a blind student, so they, too, asked her many questions about her vision, her cane and how she used her iPad to help her in classes.

"I took a lot of photos of the board in class. I think teachers found that a little strange. I also asked more questions than other students; I was more blunt than they were used to."

Stephanie began learning Chinese in high school, partly because she was attracted to Chinese culture, but also because she liked the challenge of learning such a different language.

In Dalian, Stephanie had all the challenge she could handle. Some hurdles, like chopsticks,





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were minor. Others were more daunting, such as navigating through a busy city with a population of 6 million.

“Chinese traffic is chaotic. In America, it’s pedestrians first. In China it’s vehicles first. It’s quite scary, even for sighted people.”

Several months before she left for Dalian, one of her professors at the University of Oregon told her about MIUSA. Stephanie looked up the National Clearinghouse on Disability and Exchange resources on MIUSA’s website, which she now credits with helping her adopt a new attitude about her mobility.

**“MIUSA gave me the mindset to be very proactive, to find ways to get around independently.”**

At first, Stephanie’s host mother would walk her to school each morning to help her cross a wide and busy street. Stephanie realized she was too dependent on her. But one day a friend showed Stephanie an overpass that allowed them to avoid the street altogether.

“It clicked that there were ways to get around without having to cross the street, that I didn’t have to be dependent on my host mom. Before MIUSA, I wouldn’t have paid attention to that.”

Stephanie’s time in the CLS program improved her Chinese and boosted her self-confidence. She is thinking about pursuing a career with the U.S. Department of State or a position where she can work with the disability community in China.

“I want to be very active with Chinese and American relations, whether one-on-one, or at a greater scale. One of the first steps towards that is to learn the other country’s language. It helps my career, but it shows a bigger gesture of respect and encouraging good relations.”



**Critical Language Scholarship**

**[clscholarship.org](https://clscholarship.org)**