

THE EVANS LAM SCHOLARSHIP FOR STUDY IN HONG KONG

Summer 2015



In October 2014, a new scholarship was created to offer a month-long summer program based at UR's exchange partner, the Chinese University of Hong Kong. Interest was high, and five students were selected from a very competitive field. Their majors and minors represented the full spectrum of disciplines at UR, and the program was open to undergraduates in Arts, Sciences and Engineering as well as the Eastman School of Music. Preference was given to those with little or no experience in Asia.

Each student was enrolled in two classes. Their choices included such diverse topics as Mandarin Chinese, Chinese medicine, engineering innovation and entrepreneurship, energy and green society, and urban sustainability. The five students will do a joint presentation during International Education Week in November to raise awareness of the program among future participants, stressing the value and importance of Hong Kong and China as education abroad destinations. The students have provided here their brief summary reports of their time in Asia as Evans Lam Scholars.

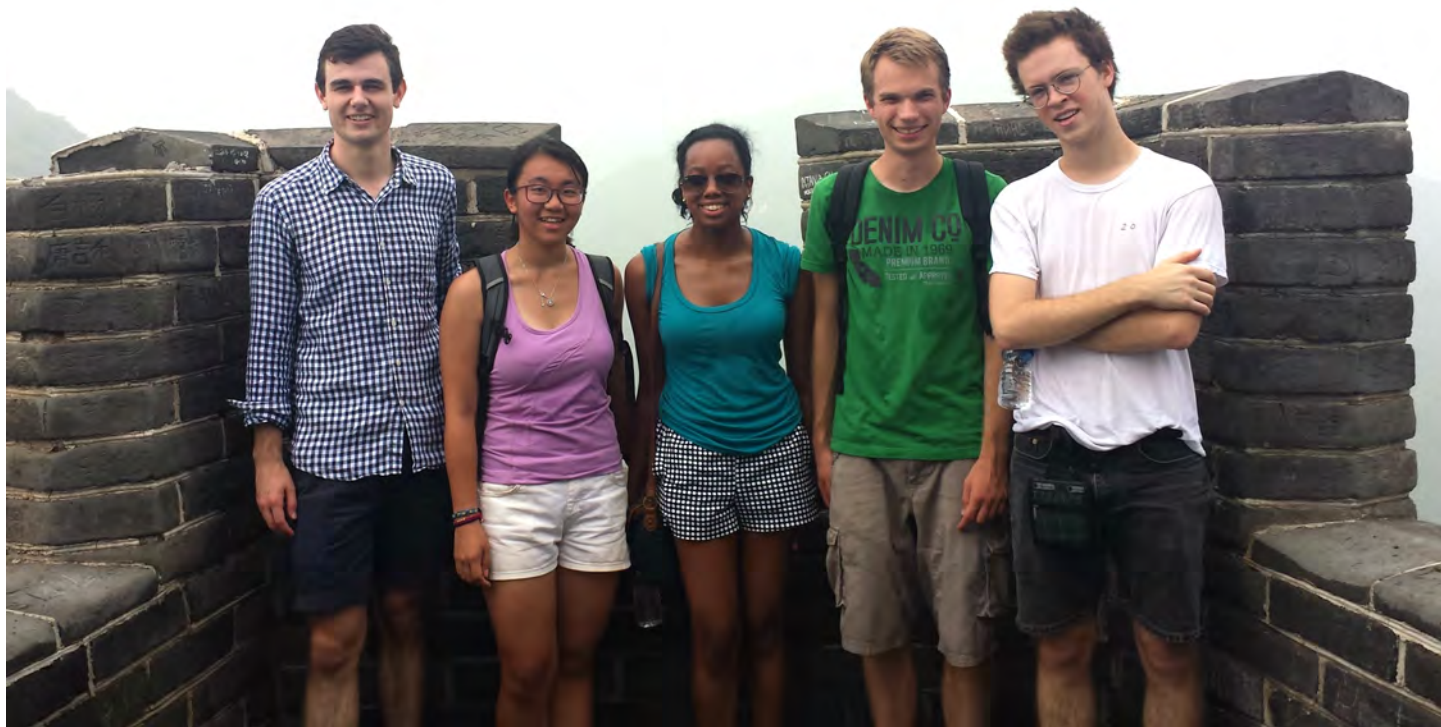
Ariana Valderrama

International Relations major, Class of 2016

Oak Park, Illinois

My parents have never had any desire to travel to Asia. Latin America? Absolutely, since my father is from Panama. Europe? Certain countries but not all of them. Africa? Maybe a safari one day. My father has always been picky about deciding where to travel; he likes to go places where he knows the language (Mexico, Panama, Spain). Thus, when the opportunity arose in the form of an email from the Office of Minority Affairs at UR informing me about the Evans Lam scholarship opportunity, I leapt at the idea. I knew this would be my one chance to go to Asia since I doubted it would be in my budget once I graduated as a struggling policy wonk and political junkie. I had studied abroad before, in my sophomore year. I interned at the European Parliament and took classes in Brussels. It had never occurred to me that I would be able to study abroad twice for financial reasons alone. But the Evans Lam scholarship was an enormous help and while I wasn't able to travel much around Asia I learned so much from my time in Hong Kong and China and I am truly grateful for the opportunity.

The program at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) was interesting because like to my semester in Brussels, there were very few Americans in the program. The majority of participants were from



Mainland China, Western Europe or Australia. However, what was different from Brussels was the lack of American presence. Outside of the program, there wasn't much English spoken. A few of my parents' friends had traveled to Hong Kong on business and they had said everyone speaks English there. I quickly realized this was not the case, especially in regards to cafeteria and office workers at the school. I think the language barrier is much less obvious when you're in the corporate world, but it becomes quite clear when you're searching for low-cost things to do and to eat. I would have to say the language barrier was the first thing that shocked me the most because there were times I was truly unable to communicate. In Brussels, French was semi-easy to pick up on, but I found Cantonese extremely difficult to remember aside from the basics of "hello" and "thank you."

The positive side was that the diversity of the CUHK summer program made for absolutely fascinating discussions with my roommates and classmates. I was already used to certain assumptions Europeans held about Americans (we are all obese, and are gun owners) but on the other hand, I didn't know much about Australia or Mainland China. Through my two roommates, who hailed from each country respectively, I learned a great deal. My Mainlander roommate, Jenny, opened my eyes to how truly difficult it is to leave China and to study in America. The Australian, American and European students all discussed how self-segregated the Chinese students are at our home schools and while we all had a basic sense of why, because of Jenny and the severe culture shock of studying in HK, I better understand why they choose to separate themselves. The food, the fast-paced aspect (if they study or visit a big city), the diversity and the language is all so different for them and overwhelming. If it was difficult for me, someone who has Google, I can't imagine what it's like to come to a foreign country about which you have only received censored information. I would like to think our information session in Shenzhen for the new freshmen was truly helpful to the Chinese students as we gave them tips that only American college students could give.

I constantly found myself struggling to navigate a variety of aspects of daily life. I noticed the slower pace of walking in HK, and the fact that cold water was not served at restaurants. I didn't research Hong Kong very much and it was difficult preparing for it while spending a semester in DC. For example, I missed the

presentation Study Abroad held with students who had already been to HK. However I don't think all the research in the world could have fully prepared me, not just for HK but also for China. On the metro in HK I would receive stares from young children, as would my tall Swedish and Danish friends. In China, however, it turned from only children staring to people of all ages openly staring and even coming up to me and asking for pictures. Our tour guide in Beijing had mentioned this might happen to all of us because it was high tourist season in Beijing and most of them would be from rural areas where they never encounter foreigners. And yet it seemed as though I got singled out the most for photos along with the other Black person on the trip, who was from Norway. At first I was a bit startled by all of the people who went to take photos with me but after awhile I found it amusing and tried to be friendly and take as many as I could.

I think my least favorite things about Hong Kong and Beijing were the heat and lack of cold drinking water. In Beijing, dealing with the absence of Facebook, SnapChat and Gmail turned out to be harder than I expected as well (and squat toilets were not ideal). I found the trip to Mainland China challenging in a good way, and I will truly treasure climbing the Great Wall, something that had never even occurred to me that I would do.

I think my saddest observation was how beauty-obsessed Chinese culture is as exemplified by my Chinese roommate Jenny. . It took her a full hour to get ready for class and she was constantly obsessing over her weight. One night she told us all she wanted for her next birthday was for her parents to pay for a package of plastic surgery for her, ranging from her eyes to her nose to her body. She used skin whitening creams and a face shape roller that was supposed to make her face less round and more oval-like. It was intriguing to watch but also horrifying. It was heartbreaking to see someone with such low self-esteem. Ironically she felt better about herself when she was in America, saying she felt much less fat. She, my Australian roommate Nicolette, and I had great talks about the differences in beauty standards and dating in all our countries. Nicolette also had an interesting perspective. Since she is Greek-Australian, she said she often hears that she's not a "true Aussie" since she doesn't fit the blond, blue-eyed stereotype even though she was born in Australia.

My trip to Hong Kong even inspired me to write a piece about the importance of studying abroad not just for college students, but for Black college students in particular. I didn't deal with issues of race in America



as much in Brussels because many people assumed I was African so they either didn't ask about or, once they were well informed historically and wanted to talk about the way race affects present-day America. Whereas in HK my roommates had quite a few questions about American race relations both historically and in the present day, my Chinese roommate even had questions about Black physical features, expressing her desire to have a nose like mine. This was shocking since that's not something anyone in America would ever express. Furthermore, my experience in China showed me that sometimes, as a minority, you have to accept that at the moment, you represent your race/ethnic group/religion and need to be willing to answer questions. Some of them may seem offensive or silly but people are usually not asking them from a malicious place, but rather one of genuine curiosity. Excluding the Americans, I was the first Black person many of my Australian, European and Mainlander friends had ever talked to, let alone Black American. There were only six Black people out of 400 total at CUHK that summer so I learned to be patient. It was an amazing time overall and I wish every UR student could receive this scholarship.

Becky Chu

**Brain and Cognitive Sciences major, Biology minor, Class of 2016
Brookfield, Wisconsin**

I am incredibly blessed and grateful to have had the opportunity to study abroad in Hong Kong and travel around Beijing this summer, thanks to the tremendous generosity and support of Mr. Evans Lam. It was my first time traveling outside of the country, and I couldn't have picked two better foreign cities to explore - despite my aversion to the heat and humidity. Beijing was surprisingly different from Hong Kong, even though they belonged to the same region, and both were fun and rewarding. In Hong Kong, there were endless diverse adventures and breath-taking moments that I experienced! I met some of the most innovative, open-minded, and genuine students from all over the world. Although we all shared many similar traits and interests, such as a curiosity and thirst for knowledge and fun, our perspectives were uniquely our own because we came from so many different backgrounds. Talking, laughing, and sometimes lightheartedly



debating within different circles of people, I felt as though I had traveled to more places than just Hong Kong in those four short weeks at CUHK. Potentially, in the future I might actually visit my new international friends in Vietnam, Canada, Czech Republic, Taiwan, Mainland China, Spain, and Denmark - to name a few. I met people from all of these countries who were studying at CUHK.

Of course, studying at a prestigious university such as CUHK, I also met many accomplished and influential professors and I was exposed to a variety of interesting ways of teaching. I made some valuable connections, and I even obtained a letter of recommendation from one! I was especially inspired by Professor Sadan Kulturel and Abdullah Konak and the lessons and skills they taught me in my Engineering Innovation and Entrepreneurship Class. I am most grateful to them for teaching me successful strategies for creative thinking. It was a great benefit for a Brain and Cognitive Sciences major to take an engineering and entrepreneurship class, I still learned a lot of useful skills and strategies that I otherwise would not have had time to take at UR. For example, with my new knowledge of how to seek out a good opportunity and how to problem-solve using the SCAMPER (substitute, combine, adapt, modify, put to another use, eliminate, reverse) method, I have become a much more confident decision-maker and critical thinker. Consequently, I feel less tense and more in control of my life, compared to ever before.

The other class that I took at CUHK was Chinese Medicine. I plan to pursue a medical career, so I thought learning about some Eastern medical practices would be interesting. Courses in alternative medical practices are not readily available in the United States. When I began studying the fundamental philosophies of Chinese Medicine, I experienced culture shock, just as with many other different aspects of Hong Kong during my first week of arrival. Coming from a scientific research background, it was challenging to override my prior knowledge of basic understanding of human anatomy, biology, and genetics. It took an open mind to appreciate their ancient reasoning and theories, but it was fascinating to learn and experience firsthand how such effective and advanced treatments that were developed from thousands of years old are still used. It's even becoming more evident that there is a growing amount of scientific evidence for Chinese Medicine practices. Indeed, I am so intrigued and impressed by this course that I am considering pursuing it further, along with my US medical school education.



Outside of class, CUHK planned several tours and field trips to facilitate our exploration of Hong Kong. Every Saturday, there was an all-day tour, including trips to the Big Buddha, Victoria Peak, Stanley Market, Lamma Island, Ocean Park or Disneyland, and Cheng Chau Island. During the week, there were also afternoon trips to the Tai Po Food Market, Cathay Pacific Airlines, and the Koon Chun Soy Sauce Factory. The majority of the classes were held Tuesday through Thursday to allow those students who wanted to travel to neighboring countries and cities to do so without worrying about missing class. They organized everything extremely well, so there were no incidents and everyone always had a good time.

Most importantly, this trip to Hong Kong meant something especially meaningful to me because my parents started their life in Hong Kong. So for me to experience – finally – my own heritage and culture leads me to define who I am, where I come from, and where I belong. After experiencing Hong Kong, I have come to a better understanding of myself, my family, and my history, and I have gained a wider yet more nuanced perspective. Having been raised by a Chinese family, I did not expect to be shocked, but I realized that my family had become significantly Westernized when they immigrated to America. In particular, as a BCS major interested in language, I found it exceptionally intriguing that some of the local Hong Kong natives would notice that sometimes the particular way that I spoke or expressed myself reflected more American culture than Chinese culture, or it was a strange mixture of both. For instance, I knew that sarcasm was not used much in Asian culture, so I tried to use more similes or metaphors to relate. However, I soon became aware that the things that I used for comparison didn't always convey the same kind of meaning I wanted. Sometimes when I wanted to compliment someone, I sang the Katy Perry lyric "Baby, you're a firework!" and the Hong Kong locals just stared back, confused. When I tried to explain that, like fireworks, they had personalities that electrified the atmosphere and amazed people, they responded that they had thought I was complaining that they were too loud and explosive. We had many laughs over how our different cultures influenced our words and interpretations.

Overall, UR Study Abroad in HK was a complete success! Obtaining a student visa was quick and easy because CUHK sent over the necessary paperwork and highlighted the applicable sections for you. Getting a China visa was a little trickier, maybe because I wasn't familiar with the process and it was a little bit rushed. The dorms and bathrooms at CUHK are comparable to the standard double rooms and shared bathrooms at UR, with the additional benefit of air conditioning. The views, however, were incomparable. Because CUHK rested on a hilltop, residents had a humbling view of the surrounding city and of the natural landscape. Every day I was inspired when I looked out the floor-to-ceiling windows as I ate breakfast. Speaking of food, I personally loved all of it, even the food at the canteens. Food was made to order, and there was a good selection of options. As with all universities, some places to eat were tastier than others. My favorite was Morningside College. It had the best view of the harbor, shortest lines, and most diverse options. CUHK was significantly more vegetarian-friendly than off-campus restaurants. My friends and I went on an exhausting hunt for an obscure vegetarian restaurant in Mong Kok. When we finally found it in the corner of a busy alley, we were elated. It was one of the few newly opened vegetarian places in the city. So, for vegetarians and vegans, the tremendous inconvenience of finding a filling, let alone nutritious, meal probably down-rated their experience, but for meat-lovers, Hong Kong is paradise.

One suggestion to expand the Study Abroad in HK program is to offer a more research-focused version too. I met numerous students, especially from universities from South Carolina and California, who really enjoyed the laboratory research experiences at CUHK. My major adviser Professor Florian T Jaeger was recently invited to talk at CUHK early this September, and we think it would be a great idea to form a partnership with CUHK where UR students can study abroad and/or do research abroad. Since UR is a research university, there would be lots of interest in a research abroad program. Again, thank you to Mr. Evans Lam for funding me and my cohort, to allow us this phenomenal opportunity to enjoy Hong Kong and Beijing. It was an unforgettable journey!

Ryder Eaton

**Jazz Studies and Contemporary Media major (ESM), Class of 2017
Rochester, New York**

Though many of the small details have begun to slip from my memory, the more profound moments from this summer are ossifying. These soaked-up experiences are quickly becoming structural in the foundation of my thoughts, my perspective. Back at school, a familiar environment, these changes in my perception make themselves very clear.

I applied for this scholarship hoping to find some great inspiration for my art. After a long time living in Rochester and my time at Eastman having proved to be emotionally very taxing, I needed to rebalance the input output ratio of creative material in my life. I felt that in order to create anything new I would need to be exposed to something new. Naturally, a trip to the other side of the planet was very attractive. I had also long found myself doubting whether what it is that I do here at university was worth my while. Should I be pursuing something else? What else is there even to pursue? At my age it is quite difficult to perceive of oneself in relation to the rest of one's life. I was having little luck convincing myself that this era of my life is but that, an era. And so I was searching for a rebuttal to (or an affirmation of) these doubts, anything to kick me off of the fence between what I perceived of as various, concrete futures. Of course, one of the larger things that I learned in Hong Kong is that those various futures are not concrete. They are not brittle, they will bend. And should I chose to abandon entirely one path or another, I doubt that I will ever be too old to climb back over that fence.

It seems to me that there are too often things we haven't a sufficient knowledge of that we will happily relegate to the "not to know about" part of our brains. At least in my experience this is true. Prior to this summer Hong Kong had been imprisoned there, with the other "not to know abouts," not for any reason other than that I possessed too little information to spark any real interest. Not enough fuel to get the engine running. I am so grateful to have been provided the means to study in Hong Kong not because I discovered so much in a place I never would have known to look, but because I have become inspired to free the "not to know abouts." As many as I can in this lifetime.

And I will be climbing over many fences. For the first time I feel larger than where and when I am; the constituents of my surroundings do not constitute all of my reality. It is difficult to describe but having seen myself on the other side of the globe, I am beginning to perceive of myself in terms of myself. A separate entity. I feel as though I have been sneakily snipped from the canvas of Rochester NY, and returning home I am as much of a traveler as I would be anywhere else. I feel a degree separation from and mastery over my



environment. I will take what I need and return what is needed, but my life is larger than this particular location. A summer in Hong Kong was but a glimpse into the nature of new experience, and it has instilled in me a hunger for the new like I haven't experienced before. I am thrilled to be back at Eastman studying music. Not because this summer informed me that music was all I should care for, it informed me precisely the opposite. I am so excited to be here because I see now that it is temporary, and I will not waste it. Thank you very very much. The influence of your contribution to my college experience is profound.

Kenneth Imade

**Electrical and Computer Engineering major, Class of 2016
Bronx, NY**



Not one word accurately describes the type of experience where one gets the opportunity to not only study abroad in Hong Kong, but also partake in a Mandarin class while there. I have seen and done it all; I spoke Mandarin with the locals, received a tour of Beijing, endured the Great Wall of China, correctly learned how to use chopsticks, and developed friendships with people coming from different parts of the world such as Sweden, Italy, Spain, Belgium, Switzerland, Australia, Denmark, and Japan. To say I'm grateful for the opportunity is not enough, however, I am thankful for the priceless experiences and memories.

Studying at the Chinese University of Hong Kong is similar to studying at any other university except for the language barriers. Nevertheless, that did not discourage me from meeting some of the locals there. As I started to build up the confidence to understand and learn more Mandarin, I seized the chances to speak it

and to my surprise the locals understood me. Although Hong Kong's main language is Cantonese, there were actually locals around that knew Mandarin well. In addition, personally, I found Hong Kong to be similar to New York City. It is similar in a sense that it is crowded, the quick and convenient train stations, and the bright nightlife summed up the resemblance that made me feel like I was in a foreign part of New York City, where the only thing that is different is the spoken and written language. As I discovered this, my perception of China and even the whole world changed. Despite us all growing up and being raised in different parts of the world, we are all socially interconnected. The cultures, languages, and the environments are what separate us. Through active immersion such as learning Mandarin, I gained a stronger understanding of the different types of people I have met during my time in Hong Kong.

As a summer intensive course, studying Mandarin at CUHK was definitely a challenging experience. I was enrolled in two mandarin classes: vocabulary class and oral speaking class. Known for being one of the hardest languages to learn, I'm proud that I persevered and even surprised myself as the locals were impressed with me speaking Mandarin. The vocabulary class consisted of daily grammar exercises and learning how to write the Chinese characters. Moreover, we were quizzed on a daily basis. By the end of that class, I had memorized and learned about 200 Chinese vocabulary and characters in a five week span. In regard to the oral speaking class, the name speaks for itself as participation weighed heavily in the course. My classmates and I learned how to properly pronounce the words as we were frequently given listening quizzes on the Chinese tone marks and pinyin. The best feature about the whole experience in regard to learning Mandarin was the teachers. The teachers were extremely resourceful and helpful. Their desire and willingness to reach out made the classroom environment comforting. Comparing that to Hong Kong as a whole, the worst feature would have to be the weather. One week would be so humid that one would have to take multiple showers and the next week would be filled with non-stop raining. Overall, my mindset at how I perceived Mandarin to be difficult started to change. For example, diving into Mandarin is difficult in the beginning. However, just like any other language course, through repetitive and consistent studying, the experience definitely becomes worthwhile.

Coming back to college in America, I developed a more positive view on the Chinese and other international students. Being in such a diverse school makes it wonderful for people to learn about the different types of cultures and traditions people from other countries grew up with. The only hard part about being in such a diverse environment is taking the initiative to getting to know one another. Despite the cultural differences, you will be surprised as to how many common similarities exist such as music, sports, and the love for academics. Reflecting back to the Hong Kong experience, my whole career and academic outlook has had a tremendous positive effect. For instance, I'm currently and continuously learning Mandarin on my own whether it is through reading a book or conversing with people who also speak it. Furthermore, I would like to stress the fact that anyone who has the opportunity to study abroad anywhere should definitely take advantage of it. The effects on your mind, academic, and career outlook instill a life-changing effect.

In conclusion, not only would I want to go back to Hong Kong again whenever I have the opportunity, but also travel to other countries and explore their cultures. To this day, I still keep in touch with one of my friends I made who come from Japan. From learning Mandarin at CUHK to now, we always helped each other out whether it involves enduring those late night study sessions to conversing with each other in Mandarin using Facebook and other tools of social media.

Brendan Knight

Mechanical Engineering major, Class of 2016

Longmeadow, Massachusetts

I found the summer study abroad experience to very educational. I learned not only through the classes, but also through my cultural experiences outside of the classroom.

As a rising senior mechanical engineering major, I took Green Energy and Society and Urban Sustainability in the hope that they would help me chose a field to work in next year. The professors were excellent and helped me make the decision to move into the renewable energy field. The excitement the professors showed about the topics, and their willingness to answer questions in detail in and outside of class help me explore the topics on a deeper level. Since the classes were three days a week, we had long weekends, which gave us plenty of time to see everything we wanted to in Hong Kong, and had time to travel to Shenzhen and Macau. I was very surprised at how similar, but at the same time different Hong Kong was from what I had seen in America. I found the food to be the most interesting. The food considered normal in Hong Kong was something we consider a novelty, and vice versa.

Meeting people from countries around the world at school and in the city really helped me understand my place in the world. Meeting locals and experiencing the cultural differences between the East and the West have help me relate to, and understand the Chinese students in my classes. Before this experience I had a difficult time understanding what the term "cultural differences" really meant and how those differences affected my classmates. Now that I have been to Hong Kong and China, I have a better understanding of what

they are talking about when they talk about home, and how little things that we overlook every day, such as food and music can be totally different and sometimes uncomfortable for them. The food and time change made me the most home sick. Very quickly I found myself craving what I considered 'normal' food and only have a few hours at the beginning and end of the day to talk to my friends and family back home only made things more difficult.

I also found the Beijing trip to be just as educational as the time in Hong Kong. I have seen pictures and heard stories of Beijing and the cultural sites such as the Great Wall and Tiananmen



Square, but seeing them in real life was totally different from anything I could have imagined. Our tour guide was also very helpful and made sure that we understood what we were looking at, why they were important and making sure that we were all having a good time. The tour guide was constantly stopping to explain little details such as the gate to the Forbidden City or the architecture of the buildings, which added to our understanding of what we were seeing.



Field Trips and Other Travels



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Dewey Hall 2-161 - University of Rochester

PO Box 270376 - Rochester, NY 14627-0376

Phone: 585-275-7532 - Fax: 585-473-6494 - abroad@admin.rochester.edu

www.rochester.edu/college/abroad