

Kim Hancock

Why Princeton in Asia?

Every Tuesday and Thursday in 7th grade, I would stay after school for math team practice then immediately after go to dance classes. On days when I had math team meets, I would arrive late to dance. However, I was embarrassed by my inner ‘mathlete’ and never wanted to tell anyone why I was late. This childhood predicament speaks to a broader tension between my interests, much of which I get from my parents. My father is a mathematician and has always encouraged my siblings and me to pursue a career in STEM. My mother, on the other hand, has always encouraged my extracurriculars in the performing arts; further, her work with refugee communities shaped my desire to learn about other cultures. In a similar vein, early on at Bowdoin I was conflicted about whether to focus on my interest in Asian Studies/Anthropology, or my interest in computer science.

Fast forward to my junior year, where I am in New Delhi, sitting in the front row of the Republic Day parade with my friend Drishti. We had woken up at 4am, yet when we arrived we couldn’t see anything past the dense wall of people that had engulfed us. Drishti comes from a military family, so she spoke to an officer in an effort to get us closer, then asked me to introduce myself in Hindi. After just a few words (I was only 3 weeks into my abroad program!), the officer led us through the crowd to a section in the front. However, my now perfect view of the military tanks and soldiers only made me feel uneasy being there as a non-Indian citizen.

In that setting, I felt tension due to my own lack of knowledge about what I was engaging in. The parade was one small example of many where I witnessed the special treatment being a white woman in India grants me. But, I found that dissolving this tension was simple: establishing a routine filled with conversations about the Delhi elections with my classmates, getting *momos* with the teaching fellows at the elementary school where I volunteered, and going to Satsang at a nearby yoga studio.

While my interest in Asian Studies stemmed from the side of me that grew up performing and wanting to learn more about people, I no longer think of it as separate from my love for computer science. Rather than perceiving my broad range of interests as tension, I see it as what makes my skill set unique. Embarking on a Princeton in Asia fellowship would allow me to continue merging my interests in international relations and information technology (IT), as well as continue studying language and culture abroad.

In the future, I hope to study computer science from an anthropological lens by addressing issues such as algorithmic bias and digital access rights, ultimately working towards making digital technology more equitable for all. Princeton in Asia is the perfect post-graduate experience to bring me towards this goal.