

## Student Profile

# THE LANGUAGE OF DIPLOMACY

For senior **Ashley Tousana**, learning languages is the first step to building foreign relations. She has spent enough time studying Mandarin and living abroad in China that she considers it a second home. It has also reinforced her interest in possibly pursuing a career in China-Africa development affairs, specifically in their trade policy and economic relations. An interdisciplinary studies major with a concentration in international affairs and minor in economics, Tousana was awarded a Fulbright scholarship to study language in-country, and she chose Kenya and Tanzania to work on learning Swahili next.



Ashley Tousana on Mount Tai in Shandong Province, China, the home of Confucius.

### Q: What made you decide to focus on international affairs?

**A:** Studying with State Department [funding for] my first time, I knew I wanted to learn Mandarin, but I was unsure of how I could make cultural anthropology, language learning, policymaking, and community service/engagement/advocacy a career. I found direction within international affairs, economic development and the women's/youth empowerment initiatives.

### Q: What are some critical issues on the global front that you're particularly interested in focusing on?

**A:** I have always respected both China and the African continent, and I want to see that their relations are inclusive, sustainable, equitable, respectful, humane and beneficial for both. Of course, as an American, I am always interested in China-U.S. relations, but mainly in the creation of pathways for Black students from America (and the rest of the diaspora) to study languages, travel abroad, and understand how we better the world as representatives of our own nations and initiatives.

### Q: What was the biggest takeaway from your study abroad experiences?

**A:** I have been to China three times (TaiCang, Jiangsu in 2015, Suzhou in 2016, Dalian in 2018). My biggest takeaway is that success in anything, especially in learning languages, is based on your personal discipline, patience and drive. My second and third trips were both Department of State-sponsored and I found them on my own. There are so many opportunities, and where there are none, make them. Be the first if you have to!

### Q: Why Mandarin?

**A:** I have been studying Mandarin for about eight years now, starting in middle school at an international baccalaureate school in Atlanta. I have had some pretty dedicated professors that pushed me to study abroad, participate in competitions and contests, and apply for Chinese language camps. Naturally, I fell in love with the art and intention within the language [as well as the] deep history and rich culture you see in China. Traveling abroad really solidified my language skills and cultural competency.

### Q: What are your post-graduation plans?

**A:** I am looking into opportunities in international development, specifically in the women's and youth empowerment and economic development field. I have my options open now to explore exchange initiatives and positions in American [nongovernmental organizations]. I would ultimately love to come back to Howard to pursue a Ph.D. in African studies with a concentration in Sino-African relations!

