The Distance from China to America
By Jiangqi Guo

I never expected before that my first night in America would be spent in O’Hare Airport all by myself. Sitting on a bench in the baggage claim area, I thought about my new life ahead. I felt cold but my thoughts were boiling. Excitement overwhelmed homesickness. I would major in my favorite subject—International Relations. I would meet a lot of new friends. I would have my first part time job. I would join many student organizations. I believed that there would be a bright future waiting for me. I wrote in my dairy in big letters, “After a long journey, finally, I arrived in America.”

Because I had read a lot of books about America and watched some American TV series before I came to America, I thought I have known enough about American lifestyle and culture. But I was too naive. I met difficulties as soon as I went to Walmart for the first time. The supermarket was too big for me and the way of arrangement was different from that in China, so it took me almost two and a half hours to find what I needed. I could not help multiplying every good’s price with six to see how much I would pay in RMB and felt very anxious because many things are much expensive than those in China. For example, a small plastic soap dish in China only cost me 2 RMB, but in America it was 2 dollars which roughly equaled to 12 RMB in China. When I faced the long and high shelves with hundreds of bottles of detergent, I totally had no idea about which one I should choose. I had never used detergent to do laundry before. In fact, I was even not sure if “detergent” was that liquid which I need to do laundry at that time. Fortunately, a kind Chinese women saw my struggle and helped me pick one. I felt I was detached from both America and China. All self-confidence and ambitions flew away and left me endless darkness. I felt lonely and I wanted to go home.

Later, I found more unexpected difficulties. I could hardly enjoy jokes. I had dinner with my American friends, and one of them apparently told a joke because everyone at the table burst into laughter except me. I could not think of anything funny about it. Also, I could not understand the meaning of the comics in the newspapers. I knew every single word but I could not understand when they were put together with pictures. I asked an American friend and she explained the story to me and told me that there was a meaning about politics hiding behind. From that day on, I realized that if I want to learn English well, I have to learn the culture at the same time.

As long as I just mentioned learning English, I want to talk more about it. At first I believed that I would only took one ESL or even none of them, but the English Proficiency Evaluation exam proved me wrong again. I have to take 3 ESL before I take Rhetoric. I also take Human Biology this semester, and I find myself struggling with bunches of long terms, in which many of them looks alike. I realized that my reading speed is not fast enough because I can hardly finish reading short articles in limited time in the ESL Reading class. I am glad that I listened to my advisor’s advice and did not register any course which needs large amount of reading.

When I heard I had to take 3 ESL, I was very frustrated like the sky fell suddenly. I thought it was not fair because I studied English more than 8 hours every day in the last summer and the result trampled all my efforts. Later, I thought I was a loser. Now, however, I can reasonably accepted the reality – my English ability is not good enough. I have learnt a lot of useful new
things in ESL, such as strategies of presentation. Believe it or not, I only had one presentation back in high school, so I nearly knew nothing about giving presentation in the class. I am very glad that I have chance to learn how to give presentations and I enjoy them, including those impromptus presentations. When I finish the presentation and hear other students’ applause, I see the light from the bright future from my imagination. I am in America, where I can pursue my dream.

I talked with other Chinese students who have been in America before I came. To my surprise, most of them majored in business or economy. I asked why they chose their majors, almost all of them told me that it was easier to find a good job after graduation and only one of them said he loved economy. I told them I choose international relations as my major because I wanted to learn something about politics and this time it was their turn to be surprised, because they thought international relations is “unrealistic”. Some of them reminded me that it is very hard for a Chinese student like me to learn politics because of language barrier. A girl who is in her senior year even asserted that I would change my major to a more “realistic” major like finance in the future.

At least I do not want to give up international relations now, but I am considering to have double majors. I chose Journalism not only because I want to have a job related to media since I was very young, but also because I think journalism and international relations can make a good couple. I can spread my ideas effectively if I know the method about mass communication. I also know that the journalism major of the University of Iowa has a high reputation. However, when I told my decision to that girl again, she said journalism is another “unrealistic” major because it was even harder for me to learn well. I asked another sophomore who majors journalism, and he told me it is really very hard and his score could barely reach B-.

I will pursue my dream. No, I will defend it. If I deceive my heart by choosing a major I do not really want to learn, I will lose the motivation to learn it well. I seek help if I cannot solve a problem by myself. Just like what a popular Chinese song’s lyric said, the fire of pride was extinguished by the billow of reality, then I realized that I have to work harder to reach my destination far away. I quit my part time job to save more time to study. I made flashcards of new words, including terms from human biology, as my professor told me so. I read The Daily Iowan everyday and ask my America friends about the meaning of the contents which I do not understand. I try to write an article in my blog every week. Indeed, it is hard for an international student like me to learn International Relations and Journalism well. Nevertheless, I will not surround to difficulties, because I believe that international relations and journalism can provide me with knowledge by which I can really make the world a better place. No one knows what will happen exactly in the future, so the only thing I can do is working hard and do not get scatterbrained by trivia and my own anxiety.

It is possible that I would not fulfill my goal eventually. Because the language and culture barrier, I may never do as well as my America classmates even though I do everything I can. I may find it very difficult to find a job after my graduation. But I will never forgive myself is I give up before trying hard. I do not think I will regret about my choice. When I decided to study abroad, my parents had told me that there would be many difficulties. Yes, I have met many difficulties and I have solved some of them. I am very busy, but I feel satisfied and happy because I know
after every minute that I spend, I get closer to my dream. I will make some small progress every day, just like a snail that climbs a tree. I walk slowly, but I will never go backward. After all, I believe that I deserve a bright future, though it may not be as colorful and bright as that in my imagination. Now I regard Iowa City like my home, because my dream is here. After a long journey, finally, my heart arrives in America.