

# Witnessing History

by Tina Tarkington Underwood



Hannah Johnson '10 interviews with Singapore's Channel 8 news.

political science professor Cleveland Fraser, co-manager of the APEC program. After the four were selected, each wrote a more extensive paper addressing an APEC policy issue. These papers were the basis for acceptance to APEC's official United States Student Delegation.

Armed with passports, press corps credentials, belongings for the five-day trip and Flip® video cameras, the Furman posse of four students and one faculty member

embarked on the 30-hour journey to Singapore. Don Gordon, political science professor and executive director of the Riley Institute, arrived with the students in Singapore ready for unprecedented access to heads of state and other high-ranking officials. Joining student delegates from 20 other nations, Furman students sat awestruck as international leaders



Clodfelter and Cressy meet Secretary of State Hillary Clinton at a major press conference

filed in to deliver addresses. Prime ministers and/or presidents of Australia, Chile, China, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, Russia, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand and Vietnam were among the speakers.

Gordon says the APEC experience is invaluable to Furman students in two very real ways. First, the sheer experience of watching policy being shaped, up close and personal—even to the point where facial expressions can be observed among the delegates—is nothing short of incredible.

"There is no other place in the world where you can see and hear the nuances of trade policy change taking place in real time," says Gordon.

Second, according to Gordon, students come away with newfound self-assurance: "They are gaining massive confidence in what they're doing ... in being part of policy-driven processes."

This confidence also stems from Furman's role in preparing them for such high profile events.

"Even after having spent the day with dozens of exceptional kids from the other 20 countries represented," says Gordon, "our kids come back at the end of the day realizing Furman has prepared them well."

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## Four students step outside the classroom and take studies to Singapore's APEC

So you've checked out study abroad programs, overseas internships and research trips for the universities on your short list—pretty standard fare at most schools. How about opportunities for rubbing elbows with Pacific-Rim prime ministers, presidents and secretaries of state? What about lobbying questions to foreign dignitaries and leaders of international conglomerates?

Or making friendships with peers around the globe? At the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit held in Singapore this past November, four lucky (and bright) Furman seniors did just that.

Thanks to Furman's Richard W. Riley Institute of Government, Politics and Public Leadership, along with the departments of political science and economics, Furman has sent a student delegation to APEC every year since 2003. Established in 1989, APEC seeks to improve trade among 21 member countries from Asia and the Pacific Rim. Students and educators are invited to participate in APEC meetings through the program "Voices of the Future for APEC," with which Furman's Riley Institute has enjoyed a longstanding relationship. To date Furman students are the only U.S. undergraduates invited to attend the annual summit.

Dez Clodfelter, Kelly Cressy, Cary Fontana and Hannah Johnson, all class of 2010, were vetted from a pool of more than 20 Furman applicants through trade-related essays and individual interviews with



Dez Clodfelter '10 with Shaukat Aziz, the Prime Minister of Pakistan from 2004 to 2007



Kelly Cressy '10 with Dr. Vivian Balakrishnan, Singapore Minister of Community Development, Youth and Sports, Professor Don Gordon and Cary Fontana '10

### Liberal Smarts

Johnson relates how her liberal arts education equipped her for an interview with a business leader. During the summit, Johnson participated in a group interview with Peter Scher, executive vice president of global government relations and public policy at JPMorgan Chase & Co.

“Our group had only about 20 minutes to prepare for the interview,” says Johnson. “Some had a hard time coming up with insightful questions for Scher, but a delegate from another liberal arts school and I had an easy time deciding what piece of insight we wanted . . . It seems all those philosophy classes paid off because we had a handle on balancing the flow of conversation with the ability to direct it. I usually don’t believe my professors when they say they are teaching us to think for ourselves, but after that interview, I’m a believer.”

Incidentally, the interview slated for 20 minutes lasted a solid 45 minutes, according to Johnson.

### More Than Souvenirs

In addition to witnessing trade policy in the making and honing skills culled from a liberal arts curriculum, Furman’s entourage valued the APEC experience in other far-reaching ways.

“APEC not only provided me more knowledge about topics of global significance, but it helped me make networking connections and gain experience employers are looking for,” says Cressy.

For Fontana, who is a tour guide at Furman, the APEC experience reinforced his career path. With *carte blanche* access to dignitaries, Fontana was able to chat with Kurt Campbell, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and meet the prime minister of New Zealand, John Key. Fontana, who aspires to work with the U.S. State Department as a foreign service officer, says the APEC experience added a personal connection to the job he’s interested in.

Kelly Cressy with team member and roommate in Singapore



Cary Fontana interviews with Singapore’s Channel 8 news.



Sri Krishnan Hindu Temple

Learn about Furman’s study away program at [www.furman.edu/international](http://www.furman.edu/international).

“I got to talk with people who are doing exactly what I want to do,” he says.

Johnson, who had never really considered living in Asia, says APEC served to broaden her interest in possible employment venues. “I’m much more willing to look abroad for jobs now,” she says.

### It’s Not About You 101

As always, perhaps the most essential lessons are those no classroom can impart but are the progeny of the experiences themselves and the personal relationships built along the way.

Says Clodfelter, “Experiences like APEC are important because they expose you to new cultures and ways of thinking. As a U.S. citizen, I believe the most important thing to be learned in this setting is a better sense of humility. We are, undoubtedly, a ‘super power,’ but humanity as a whole depends on our ability to be global citizens.”

Fontana relishes the diversity of opinions he encountered while meeting students during the APEC conference: “I think that’s the main thing I’ll take away—to always remember there are so many other viewpoints out there. It’s nice to put a face with these different ideas

. . . it reminds me that these are real people who have legitimate concerns about issues in the world.”

Cressy echoes this thinking, saying, “When you bring together students and leaders from countries of all types—big, small, Muslim, Christian, Democratic, Communist, etcetera—you get a type of diversity few college students will ever experience. APEC gave me a new appreciation for people of varied backgrounds and a better understanding of myself.”

With ample time for networking with other students both within and outside the conference facilities, the Furman delegation received a crash course in dealing with cultural differences—a course whose lessons will be carried throughout a lifetime.

*“When I look back on my college experience, I know APEC will stand out as one of the greatest opportunities I’ve had and one I wouldn’t have had outside Furman University.” – Kelly Cressy*