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Katie Lowery: Trip to APEC brought hidden gift

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Written by Katie Lowery

Receiving the honor of attending the 2013 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation CEO Summit in Bali, Indonesia was the biggest gift I've ever received. Furman University and The Richard W. Riley Institute presented me with the opportunity of a lifetime, for which I will forever be grateful.

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APEC is the leading Asia-Pacific economic forum, whose goal is to support economic growth and well-being in the Asia-Pacific region. APEC is made up of 21 economies of Pacific Rim countries including Russia, China, the United States and all countries bordering the Pacific such as Indonesia, the host of the Summit meeting this year.

Four Furman students and two professors began our journey to Indonesia on Sept. 29 in the Greenville Airport. As I boarded the plane and prepared myself for a trip to the other side of the world, I highly anticipated hearing the heads of state from many Asia-Pacific economies speak. I was overwhelmingly excited, and nervous if I must admit, to rub elbows with some of the most important business leaders in today's constantly expanding global economy. As we traveled to the Chicago O'Hare Airport and then on to Singapore, the hours on board flew by as I

Katie Lowery is a Furman University senior from Rock Hill. She is majoring in political science, and is scheduled to graduate in May of 2014. Her email address is katie.lowery@furman.edu.

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imagined all that the trip would have in store.

On Oct. 1, the United States government shut down. I remember hearing this news as we sat in the airport in Singapore, awaiting our final connector flight to Bali. At the time, I didn't realize the impact that the shutdown would have on our trip.

After finally arriving in Indonesia, some 30-plus hours later, it didn't take me long to realize that I would be the target of many questions about the government shutdown and the state of our political distress. I found it hard to explain to the youth of other nations why a government of such stature as the United States would just up and shut down. These conversations led me to ask questions about the state of other governments and the major issues that they struggle with. I was amazed at the amount of uncensored, genuine dialogue that I found myself engaged in.

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