

Triple major and honors student completes coursework, navigating 13-hour time difference

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Kaiyu Wang, a triple major in chemistry, mathematics and economics, stayed connected to his professors and classmates despite a 13-hour time difference. Wang remotely finished his coursework at Tulane while living in his home country of China because of COVID-19 restrictions. He received the Outstanding Senior Award from

the American Chemical Society, was invited to join Phi Beta Kappa and was accepted into the 2021 Newcomb-Tulane College William Wallace Peery Society. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

One need only peruse his resumé to recognize just how demanding the past four years at Tulane University have been for Kaiyu Wang, a graduating senior from China.

A triple major in chemistry, mathematics and economics, Wang boasts numerous awards, honor society memberships, published research, scholarships and leadership experience. He also played trombone in the Tulane University Marching Band, served as a freshman orientation leader and tutored students in the Tulane Asian Studies program.

But perhaps his most impressive accomplishment was completing his coursework during the COVID-19 pandemic, all while quarantining alone in a hotel room in China, where he returned when campus shut down in March 2020.

“I was enrolled in 22 credit hours and working on my honors thesis at the time,” Wang said. “Zoom was new to everyone then, and on top of that, the 13-hour difference made it extremely challenging to do coursework, especially scheduling appointments with professors and working on group assignments.

“I found that virtual courses are more challenging than in-person classes, and I had a very full schedule. I was, at that time, a little upset about not being able to maintain my grades and performances in my courses.”

Wang said he had to quarantine for 34 days – 14 in Beijing and another 20 in his hometown of Shanghai — before reuniting with family and friends. Despite the setbacks, he worked with his thesis committee and the Honors Program to revise the deadlines for submitting and defending his thesis, which he did successfully, via Zoom, on June 2, 2020. In the fall, he will be heading to graduate school at the University of California, Berkeley, where he will be enrolled in the PhD chemistry program.

When Wang looks back on his four years at Tulane, he thinks about Tulane’s campaign slogan “Only the Audacious.”

“I find that my experience echoes with Tulane’s campaign,” he said. “I interpret ‘audacious’ as to keep challenging oneself to try something new. And this is precisely what I have intentionally been enjoying doing at Tulane.”

He is thankful to his professors — Dennis Kehoe, a professor of classical studies; and chemistry professors Mark Sulkes and Bruce Gibb, whom he credited with helping him become a better scholar and person. He is especially thankful to Gibb, his first adviser and in whose lab he has conducted his research.

“He enlightened and guided me to the doorstep of independent chemical research for my chemistry career,” Wang said of Gibb.

Earlier this month, Wang received the Outstanding Senior Award from the American Chemical Society, was invited to join Phi Beta Kappa and was accepted into the 2021 Newcomb-Tulane College William Wallace Peery Society, an elite group that honors the 15 seniors annually who have risen above their peers in scholarly accomplishments.

“I am feeling that my efforts are acknowledged and recognized,” Wang said. “I am a proud Tulanian.”