

## Olivia Blackmon, Chinese, International Affairs, Asian Religions & Cultures, Class of 2023

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*“Moving forward, I want to take my passion for learning about languages and cultures and use it to help African Americans have a larger presence on the world stage ... In my career endeavors, I want to be a role model, showing that there are amazing career opportunities abroad. I can give back by encouraging the acquisition of language and culture among youth, and by helping minorities start thinking globally about their futures.”*

Olivia Blackmon is a senior triple majoring in Chinese, International Affairs, and Asian Religions and Cultures. She discovered her love of foreign languages in her middle school Chinese class. Now, after more than nine years of studying languages, she says foreign language has captivated her in every way possible, and it is what brought her to WKU.

She began studying Mandarin when she was twelve years old, and her love of studying languages led her to proficiency in Korean and Spanish and progress in Russian, Italian, Japanese, & French. When speaking on her experiences learning languages, Blackmon explained, “Learning foreign languages played a major role in my development as a burgeoning adult. It helped me conquer social apprehension, explore new cuisines, and evaluate my own cultural upbringing. What started out as my third choice for required coursework ended up becoming one of the best decisions of my life. I wouldn’t have it any other way. I become more engaged with each passing day.”

Blackmon encourages all students—regardless of their primary major—to consider studying a language. She emphasizes, “Human communication is at the core of anything important in this world. With increasing globalization, there’s no doubt that language is helpful for any field. We’re all desperately searching for that competitive edge in our careers: Look no further than foreign language.” Moreover, she states, “A

language is more than a subject, but a tool to use in the pursuit of whatever passion you may hold.”

For those struggling to learn a language, Blackmon’s advice is to stop believing you can’t do it. She believes that the key to successfully learning a language is maintaining a child’s mindset and believing that you are capable of acquiring a new language—just like you did when you were learning to speak. She encourages everyone to keep trying new methods of learning until they find what works for them. She articulates, “The problem is often not if we can learn a language, but how we can do so efficiently and enjoyably. Be okay with making mistakes! Foster a tolerance for ambiguity. Not knowing every word in the sentence is more than okay! Once we stop requiring perfection from ourselves, the growth we see becomes tremendous.”

Blackmon’s goal after college is to become a Public Diplomacy Officer in the US Foreign Service. She describes herself as having “an intense sense of curiosity, a heart for cultural engagement, and a penchant for people.” In this role, she will be able to represent American diversity while also connecting with people from across the world. She will have the opportunity to utilize her life-long passions, alongside the knowledge and skills she has acquired during her time at WKU, and truly follow her dreams.



