Crystal Napoli ’17 had just landed at Logan Airport in Boston after spending the summer following her sophomore year in China, through the U.S. Department of State Critical Language Scholarship Program. The program had begun with signing a pledge to speak only Chinese for the entirety of the program. She sat on the plane feeling disoriented, but liberated. She had attended college looking to follow a very specific path, but instead found herself exploring other interests and passions. This intense moment of liberation is where she came to a crossroad. Her past, which she thought had a very defined direction, was now intersecting with thoughts of her unknown future. This moment in Crystal’s life had been shaped over the last three years when she stepped out of her comfort zone and started taking risks.

As a senior in high school Crystal was academically strong, well-liked by her peers, and extremely talented in music. Crystal’s future was headed in a positive direction. She had played the harp since first grade. She not only learned how to play, but excelled at it – playing on New Hampshire Public Radio and serving as a drum major in her high school band. Music was the guiding aspect of her life, even serving as her inspiration for selecting colleges to apply to. However, during her senior year, Crystal took a history class that led to a new passion. Over the course of one semester her passion transformed from music to history. Crystal went from exploring schools with strong music programs to schools that had many options, including history and education. After applying to nine schools, Crystal and her parents decided the University of New Hampshire was a good fit for her many interests.

From her very first step on campus, Crystal loved UNH. During orientation, Crystal dove into campus life by taking chances and embracing new experiences. When Crystal was registering for classes, she considered the language requirement. If she wanted to be a teacher, Spanish would make sense, but at the last moment Crystal registered for Chinese instead. She decided to take the classes she was interested in and take ownership of her academic experience. Crystal took honors classes because the classes were smaller and more intellectually engaging. History classes allowed her to play the role of a detective and to intentionally look at history through a critical lens. The numerous history courses at UNH led her to finding a passion for investigating historical narratives to find missing accounts. More specifically, Crystal became fascinated with exploring who decides what parts of history is taught. To Crystal, history is still alive and she wants to take every opportunity to learn as much as she can.

In the past three years Crystal has dedicated herself to her studies and has been a phenomenal student. Crystal’s CYOS nominator says, “Crystal is well recognized in the History department as an outstanding major”. She is dual majoring in history and justice studies, on top of a minor in Asian studies. Some of her many accomplishments include being selected for the Hamel Center Research Experience and Apprenticeship Program (REAP) the summer before her second year and receiving a Hamel Center International Research Opportunities Program (IROP) Fellowship to research the history and justice of indigenous peoples in Taiwan next summer. Crystal has consistently found ways to take her academic studies and interests outside of the formal classroom setting by participating in programs within the United States and abroad. Her extraordinary persistence and curiosity have provided her with not only rich academic but also extracurricular experiences.

Crystal has continued to follow her interests by seeking out relevant experiences outside of the classroom. She serves as the current president (and former treasurer) of the UNH Model United Nations and a representative on the UNH History Department Undergraduate Committee. She is also committed to her community. Crystal has served as a teaching intern in a local district and currently serves as a substitute teacher in another district while attending UNH. She has volunteered with the Chinese Club at the Oyster River Middle School and also at a high school in her hometown during the summer. Through her involvement, Crystal has created friendships and partnerships with people who share similar values and passions. She loves being surrounded by “people who are objectively awesome” and who ‘nerd out’ over global politics.

Through her academics, Model UN, Leadership camp, and volunteering, Crystal has become a change agent here at UNH and beyond.

To this point in her life, Crystal has embraced and conquered change. Her laid back approach and ability to laugh at herself have guided her. Crystal advises her fellow UNH students to take risks and asks questions. Her successes have been shaped by her ability to reach out to her parents, teachers, and mentors for guidance. While Crystal’s future is not yet determined she says she sees herself in Boston or New Hampshire in either public policy, government, or non-profit work. She hopes to be as happy as she can while following her own personal path – a path of meaningful work, giving back, and finding connections with people and the community.