

Brittany Gardner, Wins 2014-2015 Outstanding EXL Student Award

The Outstanding EXL Student Award is given annually to a student who holds a distinguished record of service in the Experiential Learning Scholars Program. Pursuing her degree in art education, Brittany Gardner took an EXL course to study art in Scandinavia. In addition to the artistic knowledge she gained through the class's many stops during the trip, Gardner was also given the opportunity to expand her skills as an educator. She wrote, "Traveling in Norway and Denmark as a part of the EXL program allowed me to work with students, teachers, administrators, artists, and families from two of the top ranking countries in education in the world. It was exhilarating to learn first-hand how the children are taught so that I could bring that information and experience back to the United States to improve my current job, as an after school care provider, my future classrooms, and schools." Upon returning to the United States, Brittany and her classmates featured their artwork inspired by Scandinavia in an on-campus exhibition named "Passport to Happiness." During this exhibit, Gardner showcased her photographs, videos, jewelry, and various items she collected during the trip. Dr. Debrah Sickler-Voigt, an MTSU art professor who accompanied the study abroad students, said of Gardner, "I strongly believe that due to her substantial personal investment in her EXL courses, Ms. Gardner is well-skilled in teaching English language learners, developing community art projects, advocating for the arts, establishing partnerships, and mentoring others," adding "She will be an excellent teacher who makes a positive difference in children's lives!" Though the study abroad course ended in the summer of 2014, Gardner has been invited to return and live with her host family in Denmark while she continues her education, stating "We have formed a strong bond and become more like a biological family, so they wish to help me succeed in making all my dreams come true. I have the EXL program to thank for introducing that relationship and opportunities."