

Nicholls graduate student visits multiple countries

By Erica Falgout Contributing Writer

When Dalton Blanchard was 12, he made a map of destinations to visit before he died. Ten years later he has traveled around the United States, been on multiple cruises all over the Caribbean, and crossed the Atlantic into Europe three times, allowing him to mark off 15 of the original 20 destinations on his map.

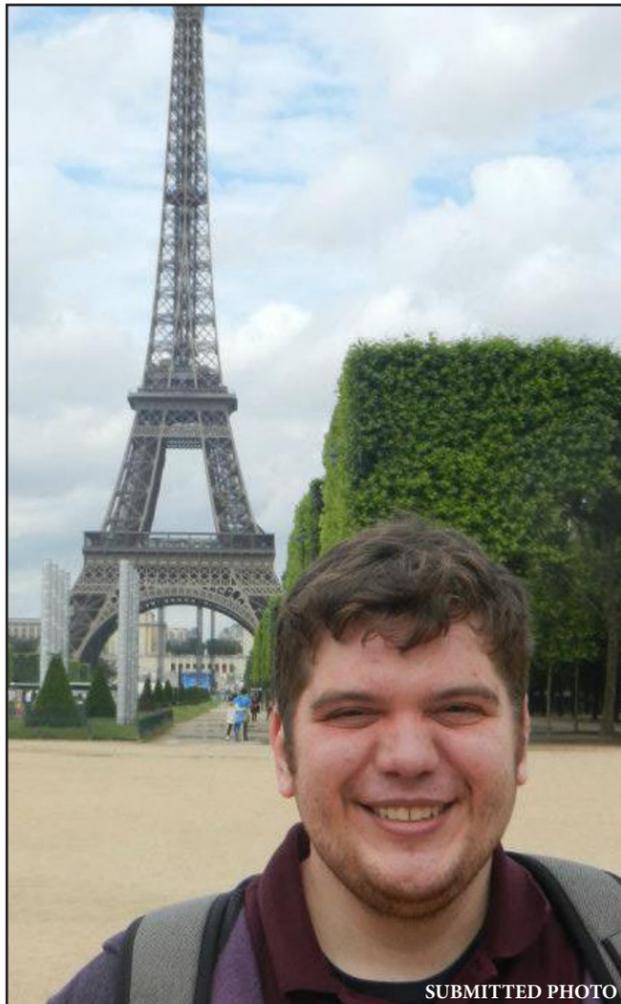
He visited most of the destinations during his years as an undergraduate at Nicholls State University, but his traveling started as a child. “When I was younger, my family lived modestly. We didn’t have an extravagant house or expensive vehicles. Instead, once a year, we took a family summer vacation.” Blanchard’s earliest traveling memories go back to climbing Alpine paths and seeing waterfalls and bears in the Smokey Mountains. “It was all so different than boring old Louisiana life,” Blanchard recalled, “I guess that’s what first gave me that insatiable need to travel.” On those family vacations, he visited states, including Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas and Texas, traveled to northern cities Chicago, Illinois and Columbus, Ohio, and made multiple trips to the Florida panhandle and Walt Disney World vacations in Orlando, Fla.

His mother started booking cruises after traveling throughout the United States, which took him outside of the country for the first time during his sophomore and senior years of

high school. “Cruises are the easiest vacation known to man. You literally drive to the ship, hop on and relax until you have to get off,” Blanchard said. He has been on three cruises, all 7-day Caribbean cruises, where he traveled to Key West, Florida, Jamaica, Grand Cayman, Cozumel, Belize and Isla Roatan.

Blanchard took a different approach to traveling when he started at Nicholls, one that involved more planning than the easy cruises he was used to booking. “It had always been a dream to trek to Europe once I was in college, so when I saw the flyers in Peltier Hall for Study Abroad my sophomore year, I knew I had to go.” Blanchard signed up and when summer approached in 2010, he travelled with the Art Department to Rome, Florence, Milan, Assisi, Venice, Southern France and countries Switzerland and Germany. He said he experienced his first culture shock on his first night in Rome

when he and a couple of students decided to stop for pizza at Piazza Navona during a tour of the city. When the waiter came to the table, he ordered a pizza and a Coke. “I had only been on the continent a few hours and my naive little mind just assumed that



Blanchard poses in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France this summer.

everyone spoke English. The waiter didn’t understand a word I said, and that’s when I learned the most useful tool a traveler has, their pointer finger,” Blanchard said.

His second trip to Europe was a year later when the Nicholls Honor Program traveled to England. “This trip was probably one of my favorites because it involved actually residing in the dorms of a university in Plymouth, England for about a month.” Blanchard said. The group studied British Art History, taught by Rachel Stevens, assistant professor of art at the University. Blanchard said he grew fond of Plymouth and all it had to offer. He took tours of London, Stonehenge and Bath and experienced the nightlife and foods. “One of our group’s favorite places in Plymouth was the Hoe, which was a grassy knoll that overlooked the English Channel,” he said.

Blanchard traveled with the Honors Program again during the Christmas break of 2011, this time south of the border to Costa Rica. The trip took the group around the entire country, looking at the various ecosystems, wildlife and culture. “This trip was perhaps one of my most memorable, mainly because it took me out of my element. I’m so use to touring castles and museums, but during this trip our tours involved trekking through forests, looking for snakes and insects,”

Blanchard said. One of his favorite memories from Costa Rica was in Tortugeuro while riding a tour boat and seeing an enormous crocodile jump out of the water.

The trip to Costa Rica was his last with the program at Nicholls, but that did not stop him from returning to Europe for a third time in the summer of 2012. Blanchard planned the trip



Blanchard with friends Neal and Brent Bollinger visit Buckingham Palace in London, England while backpacking through Europe this summer.

with his best friend, Neal Bollinger, and Neal’s brother, Brent Bollinger, and the three backpacked across Western Europe, traveling to seven countries during a 34-day expedition. They traveled to Dublin, London, Brussels, Paris, Florence, Rome, Barcelona and the Swiss Alps. “In my opinion, there is nothing more beautiful in the entire world than the Swiss Alps,” Blanchard said of his favorite stop during the trip. He said he experienced more culture shock when backpacking because his living arrangements were so different

than the ones on his first two trips to Europe. “Everything is so different when you’re used of staying in nice hotels with English-speaking guides and then you stay at a hostel in a foreign country,” Blanchard said, “It was scary the first few nights. The hostels are like dirty apartments where all the tenants share a single bathroom.”

With every trip, whether it included clean hotels or dirty hostels, Blanchard continued to learn new things and change as a person. His perspective of the world has changed from focusing on his hometown of Bayou Blue to realizing he can be anywhere in the world with a little luck and determination. “The world is so beautiful. It has so many sights and places that are just awe-inspiring. What I’ve learned

most of all is that there is no place quite as beautiful as home.”

Blanchard says he will continue to learn from his travels and even though he does not have his next big trip planned, he still has five places left on his map of destinations. He hopes to travel to Japan, Brazil, Russia and South Africa in his future, but for now his focus is on the interior of Alaska. “It’s always been one of my dreams to see the Northern Lights, and Alaska seems like the best place to do so.” Blanchard said.