

Campus Celeb: Rachel Leng

By Anna Papp

Posted Oct 15 2014 - 12:00am

Meet Rachel Leng!

Rachel, a second year graduate student at GSAS, is an inspiring role model for all Harvard girls. Rachel was born in Singapore, but grew up in Shanghai, China. She double majored in Public Policy Studies and East Asian Studies with a minor in Economics at Duke University. She wrote two senior honors theses and graduated with highest honors in both of her majors. At Harvard, she is a second year graduate student in the Regional Studies, East Asia department concentrating in modern Chinese studies.

You, like us, must think it's hard to be more impressive than that. But Rachel's list of accomplishments doesn't stop here. She was also the runner up in the Miss Singapore World 2013 Beauty Pageant and the winner of the Miss Singapore Beauty with a Purpose title. China Hands Magazine also named her as one of the 25-Under-25 students and professionals working to promote mutual understanding between China and the United States.

Her Campus Harvard asked Rachel about her experience in beauty pageants, her suggestions for a balanced lifestyle, and her most important beauty tips for the fall and winter!



What is it like to be both a Miss Singapore beauty titleholder and a Harvard student? Has your beauty pageant background shaped your academic experience on a university campus?

The beauty, media, and entertainment industry had always intrigued me, and it was an important experience for me to have participated in the Miss Singapore competition. The pageant also helped me get a broader perspective as a result of being immersed in an environment that was extremely different from a university/school campus and gave me the opportunity to meet people from all walks of life. This perspective has certainly affected my ability to be well rounded and flexible when speaking with different groups of people. I am also pretty shy by nature, and so being in the pageant really helped me gain confidence in public speaking skills. Ultimately, the driving motivation behind my actions is just the broad desire to learn new things about the world and meet new people – whether through the media industry, or through academic scholarship.

How do you lead a balanced lifestyle while dealing with the competitive atmosphere of Harvard? What beauty and general tips do you have for us stressed-out students?

For a quick skin boost, I really like Estee Lauder's 2-in-1 cleaner/mask products. They're great when you're short on time (or money) for a full facial, or even a regular 20 minute mask session. These tubes last a long time, and feel great after washing your face or getting out of the shower. I'm sure there are many other similar products out there, for quick 3-5 minute masks, and they're generally pretty low-cost way to give your skin a moisture/purifying boost. Used regularly over time, there really is a visible effect on the skin.

(Example of cleanser: <http://www.esteelauder.com/product/681/25952/Product-Catalog/Skincare/Perfectly-Clean/Multi-Action-Creme-CleanserMoisture-Mask>).

I get asked a lot about how I stay in shape even when leading an exceedingly hectic lifestyle. For me, I think exercise is a psychological commitment to being healthy. I turn exercise into

something I do to relax, or when I have free time, and so it is an activity I look forward to rather than a chore. I also prioritize the need to take breaks and take care of your body to refresh. I realize that it is difficult for many to develop this mindset, and so the advice I usually give to people is even on days that they are feeling lazy, just commit to changing into a gym outfit. Sometimes, changing into gym clothes may not really lead to any exercise at all, but more often than not, it usually does motivate people to do something, even if only for a few minutes. The key is to really just incorporate daily activity into one's lifestyle.

As for food, my view is that how you eat is more important than what you are actually eating. I'm a big fan of the concept of eating small portions throughout the day. I love my sweets, so I actually eat dessert almost *every day*, but given the fact that desserts in the US often come in large portions and are sugar loaded, I try to be conscientious of how much I am actually eating and when I am eating.

Nonetheless, coming to the United States from overseas, I was really surprised by the sheer amount of processed foods people eat on a regular basis. So, substituting these for low calorie and healthier versions is the first thing that comes to mind for a quick diet change. For example, switching up soda for water, or drinking only black coffee or tea, really make a difference in the long run when calories (and more importantly, health issues) are adding up. Coffee and tea are also great metabolism boosters!

What are your favorite fall beauty tricks and looks?

I love Fall colors and layers! So my Fall outfits usually consist of dresses with sweaters and various colored scarves, along with boots or stockings and flats. Boots and leather jackets are also a personal favorite of mine. I've currently on the lookout for a new pair of knee-high boots, and hope to find one soon!

Winter is coming. What are the best and worst things you can do for your skin in the cold New England weather? And what are the most common topics in skincare and general well-being that your peers ask about? What advice do you give them?

People always ask me about how to improve their skin – either for dryness or breakouts - or about haircare. These problems are generally exacerbated with weather changes. Whenever people ask me about my own beauty regime, I repeatedly emphasize the importance of moisturizing and conditioning. If you don't want to splurge on expensive branded moisturizers, I find that plain moisturizers for sensitive skin such as Cereve work really well, especially in the wintertime. For hair, I would also say that people should condition as much as possible, and use an intense moisturizing conditioner to combat the dry weather in New England. Dry shampoo also works wonders for people who want their hair clean but may not want to shampoo everyday for fear of drying hair out. Leave-in conditioner is great to combat frizzy hair and split ends, and I would highly recommend daily use of some form of leave-in conditioning. I realize that these products can get expensive, but just pick up a bottle of Argan or Moroccan oil – they aren't generally that pricey (if unbranded – which still works as well) and last a very long time.

For clear pores, it is common knowledge in the beauty industry that toner or astringent is really important for this. I've noticed that a lot of my peers don't really use toner, so I usually recommend my friends to incorporate toner into their daily regime, especially if they are having problems with breakouts or evenness of skin tone.

I really believe in the benefits of having a good night crème. Your skin works overnight to repair damage sustained during the day with fatigue, sun damage, and any other pollutants, so giving it a boost with a nourishing night crème in addition to a regular moisturizer is important. The common perception that a comprehensive skincare regime should only be for older women is a myth – the younger you start, the better you can preserve the youth of your skin.

You may not see the results immediately, but trust me, your skin will thank you for it in the years to come.

A Harvard girl woke up late and is in a rush to class. What is your one essential morning beauty tip for her?

People underestimate the importance of drinking water and having something to eat within one hour of waking up. The body has been fasting overnight while asleep, and needs to be recharged. Drinking a good amount of water (I try to drink at least one full glass immediately upon waking up) does wonders to help clear up your skin and just generally keep you hydrated. Moreover, eating *something* within one hour of waking up has a significant impact on jumpstarting your metabolism for the rest of the day. So, grabbing water and a snack would be at the top of my list for staying healthy.

For makeup, everybody has a different preference for what her most essential makeup item is (whether eyeliner, lipstick, or mascara, etc). I have to say that the one most important product to use before leaving for the day is to use some sort of SPF moisturizer to protect the skin. Personally, I like using BB or CC creams, as they not only provide skin protection but also provide coverage to even out skin tone irregularities and conceal those dark circles.

Thank you Rachel!