



College of Education and Human Development

Western Michigan University

Hey Broncos. Whether you are staying home or pushing through work — the WMU Alumni Association and the College of Education and Human Development are here for you. We are in this together!

To keep spirits up, we've got some positive vibes coming your way. Follow the WMU Alumni Association on social media for new content, contests and more. Have an idea for something you'd like to see? Let us know on one of our social channels below!

Stay Tuned and Stay Healthy!

The Drive to Engage Children in the Community



When Trey Conner (physical education, '11) was approached about the opportunity to flip his education skills into community outreach that would help build a new Piston's minor league farm team in 2013, he felt it he couldn't turn it down. Six years later, he's worked his way up to Vice President of the Grand Rapids Drive and is still using those skills to help engage kids in the community today.

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New Zealand, New Perspective: Education Internship of a Lifetime



Every year, Broncos majoring in education have the opportunity to head to Auckland, New Zealand to complete a portion of their student teaching internship requirement. The experience gives pre-service teachers, like Nina Amicarelli, a senior majoring in elementary education, a chance to prepare for their own classroom while expanding their idea of what classrooms can look like.

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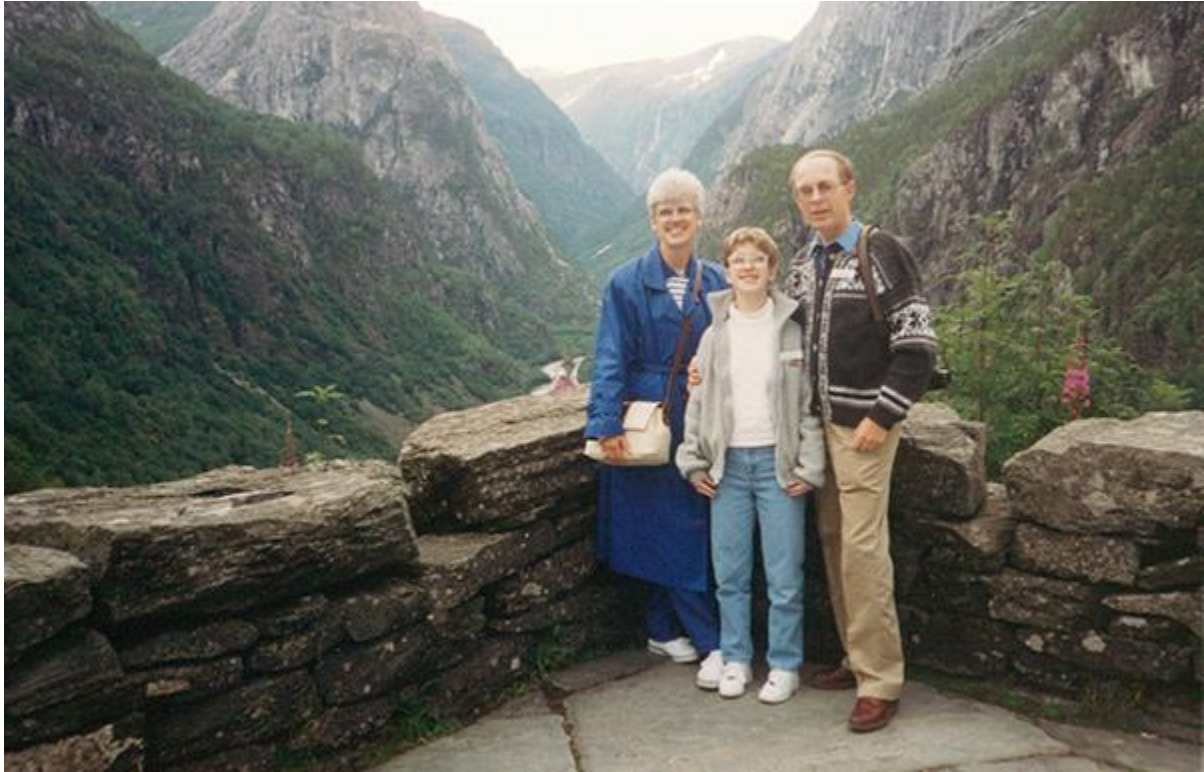
What do you think?



Did you graduate from WMU? We want to hear from you! You're invited to participate in a survey that will help us learn more about your experience as a WMU alumnus/a. How can we improve YOUR Alumni Association? Your voice, opinions, and ideas matter! The survey will close on March 29.

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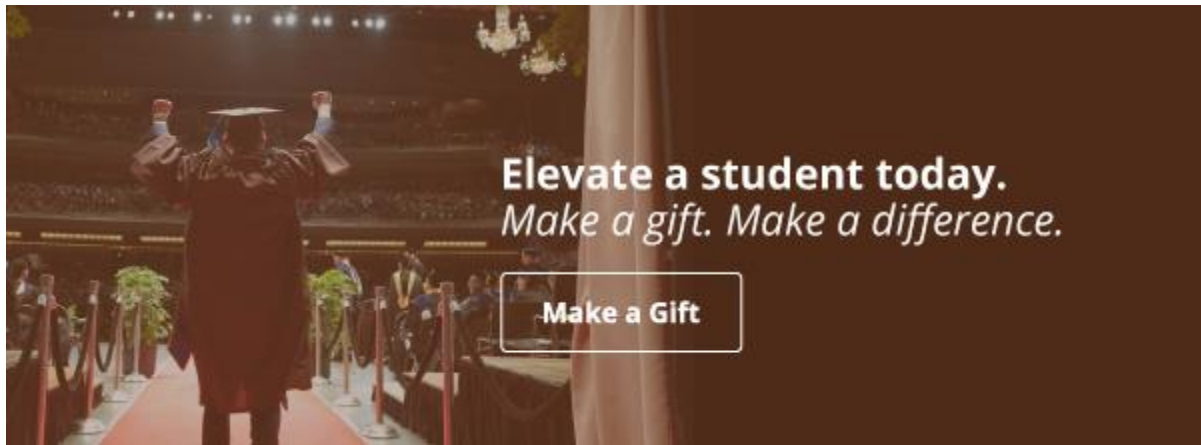
Giving Impact: Helping Students 'Take Off'



Students who study abroad receive more job offers and make higher starting salaries. Coupled with the fact that you get to see the world, it's not surprising that many students are eager to experience global travel as a part of their studies. Many rely on financial aid to make their trips become a reality, which is when scholarships like the Bruce W. Mesara Study Abroad Airfare Fund become game changers for students.

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- [Western Michigan University receives a \\$9.6M federal grant to advance renewable energy research](#)
- [WMU researcher says despite gender-based challenges, women entrepreneurs use grit, resilience to achieve profitable growth](#)



THE DRIVE TO ENGAGE CHILDREN IN THE COMMUNITY



When Trey Conner (physical education, '11) was approached about the opportunity to flip his education skills into community outreach that would help build a new Piston's minor league farm team in 2013, he felt it he couldn't turn it down. Six years later, he's worked his way up to Vice President of the Grand Rapids Drive and is still using those skills to help engage kids in the community today.

Conner was one of a few individuals who helped launch the team, the first and only minor league team in Michigan, and build it into the success it is today. He started out in ticket sales and community relations and now helps oversee all aspects of the business.

His favorite part is being able to create memories for people and help build the community. "We get to utilize basketball as a platform to help motivate others. Whether it's us going to the Boys and Girls club or going to school visits, being able to bring professional athletes, whether it's former or current NBA players, or even future NBA players, to be involved in the community is really the best part," shared Conner. The team frequently works with community organizations, makes school visits, and runs basketball camps.

In March, which is reading month, the team kicks off a four week reading program with the Grand Rapids Public Schools. Each week corresponds to one of the four quarters in a basketball game and students win prizes for completing 20 minutes of reading outside the classroom for five days each week. The prizes might be tickets or Drive gear and the students get to attend a game where they are recognized. For Conner, being able to help motivate kids to get the academic benefits of those extra 20 minutes of reading each day is what it's all about.

The classroom management and lesson planning skills Conner learned as a teacher help him stay organized and he cites communication as the most important skill that helps him lead effectively. For those still working on their degrees, he advises them to proactively look for different experiences like volunteer opportunities and internships to help gain experience that can help you get your first job. "And once you get an opportunity, make the most of it. You might start out in an entry level position, but someday you could end up in a top management level position."

One thing is certain, with the right amount of drive, Broncos can achieve whatever they put their minds to!

NEW ZEALAND, NEW PERSPECTIVE: EDUCATION INTERNSHIP OF A LIFETIME



Every year, Broncos majoring in education have the opportunity to head to Auckland, New Zealand to complete a portion of their student teaching internship requirement. The experience gives pre-service teachers, like Nina Amicarelli, a senior majoring in elementary education, a chance to prepare for their own classroom while expanding their idea of what classrooms can look like.

Auckland is the most populated city in New Zealand and is known as the most diverse and cosmopolitan city in the country. Placed in schools around the metro area, students observe details of organization and management specific to their class and school and gain understanding as to how teachers in New Zealand get to know children, establish routines, and determine individual needs. While there, the future educators attend and take part in professional team meetings and whole staff curriculum development meetings, develop the use of long and short term planning systems that facilitate extended periods of classroom teaching control, and teach the total class program for at least five consecutive days. Students participating in the program also spend eight weeks student teaching in a Michigan school.

Amicarelli has learned a lot about differentiating lessons from the teachers she's working with. She likes the way the teachers are able to create their own lessons that both align to standards and individualize the curriculum for each student. She also appreciates the emphasis New Zealand teachers put on non-academic skills, like student independence, and strongly recommends the experience to others.

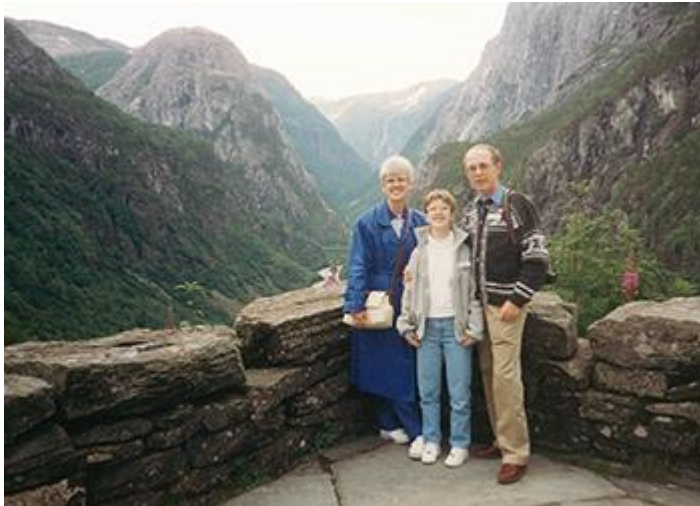
"Being placed in a different culture has given me a new perspective and experiencing a new education system has allowed me to gain a better understanding of how I want my classroom to

look and how I want to teach. Seeing how children from a different country learn and value their own independence is truly inspiring.”

The program is available during either the spring or summer II term. For more information about the program, please visit the Teaching Internship in New Zealand webpage.

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GIVING IMPACT: HELPING STUDENTS ‘TAKE OFF’



The Mesara Family on vacation.

Students who study abroad receive more job offers and make higher starting salaries. Coupled with the fact that you get to see the world, it’s not surprising that many students are eager to experience global travel as a part of their studies.

But while most students would like to take this opportunity, many are hesitant to take on more debt, says Dr. Lee Penyak director of study abroad at WMU, which is unit of the Diether H. Haenicke Institute for Global Education.

Many rely on financial aid to make their trips become a reality, which is when scholarships like the Bruce W. Mesara Study Abroad Airfare Fund become game changers for students.

“Studying abroad is a wonderful experience, that comes with a rather large upfront cost for a college student,” said Dennis Schneider (B.S.’18, Industrial and Entrepreneurial Engineering),

who studied abroad in the Netherlands for a semester in 2017-18. Today, he works as an analyst in supply and logistics for Whirlpool Corporation.

“Through proper planning, hard work, and determination, I was able to secure and save proper funding for the trip by receiving several scholarships. The Mesara Airfare Scholarship was able to help cover an expense that would have been difficult to cover that is critical to the trip.”

While the total cost to study abroad is a barrier for many, airfare is a sizable chunk of the price tag. Students will also have to budget for passport and visa fees, in some cases credit hours, room and board, and local transportation among other costs. The Mesara Scholarship, which has benefited nearly 100 students over the course of its four-year existence, awards students \$1000 to help cover the cost of airfare.

Dr. Bruce Mesara and his wife Carolyn, for whom the scholarship is named, didn't attend WMU but felt strong ties to the Kalamazoo Community, where they spent much of their lives. The Mesara Family Foundation was originally conceived by Dr. Mesara in 1990 as a means to carry on his philanthropic efforts beyond his lifetime. In 2014, the Mesara Family Foundation was re-envisioned by his two children, Amy and Douglas, and received 501(c)(3) status in 2015.

“They sought out organizations to support that impacted their lives and the lives of their children, friends, and family members. When Doug learned about the challenges that students studying abroad face, he and Carolyn felt a scholarship would be an ideal combination of local support and Bruce's passion for travel,” said Dr. Jane Blyth, who serves as the director of operations for the foundation, and is also the former director of study abroad and executive director of the Haenicke Institute at WMU.

“I saw again and again that paying airfare was one of the barriers to study abroad for many students,” Jane said. “Through discussions of funding possibilities for the foundation, we came up with the idea of funding student airfare for study abroad, hoping to reduce at least one of the barriers for some students.”

In the post World War II years, Bruce's family traveled around America where he learned that personal experiences are just as important as education. After he finished medical school and was discharged from the Army, Bruce and Carolyn continued to travel both domestically and internationally. Bruce felt it was important the family went somewhere together at least once a year. He wanted his children to personally see and experience as much of America and the world as possible. As Doug was searching for colleges, one of Bruce's recommendations was finding a school with opportunities for study overseas. Doug was able to study abroad in Belgium and had the chance to learn firsthand the benefits of study abroad, Doug explained.

Bruce was on to something. In addition to helping students excel academically and succeed professionally, graduation rates for students who study abroad are 20% higher, with impact even stronger for minority or low-income students—including higher GPAs.

“Having this experience is crucial to understanding how to put yourself in the shoes of others when working for a corporation, making business decisions or in engineering to design products for individuals that live different lifestyles,” Dennis said. “In today's globalized workforce, this is important now more than ever to be effective and successful.”

The benefits of studying abroad don't just stop there. WMU Study Abroad reports that students who make the trip show gains in employability, tolerance, self-awareness, humility, complex thinking, flexibility, resiliency, creativity, and confidence.

“Studying abroad for a full semester in the Netherlands was an incredible experience that helped me grow outside of my comfort zone,” Dennis said. “Fully immersing myself in another culture in a location far from home forced me to learn how to modify behaviors and patterns that I was accustomed to living in the United States. It helped me to fully understand what is meant by the term cultural norms and how they impact daily interactions and behaviors.”

Students at WMU can choose from over 90 study abroad programs offered in countries all over the world. To learn more about Studying Abroad at WMU, including fast facts and to view student blog posts, visit wmich.edu/studyabroad.

Learn more about the Mesara Family Foundation at mesarafamilyfoundation.org/.

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