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Hey Broncos. Whether you are staying home or pushing through work — the WMU Alumni Association and the College of Arts and Sciences 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!

**Internships, faculty support help alumnus land job at ABC News**
On the forefront of news, alumnus J. Gabriel Ware says experiential learning opportunities during his time at WMU propelled him to career success at ABC News. The Detroit native's success is no accident. It's the result of years of hard work and focus, honing his craft and exploring all aspects of media as a student at WMU. "I had a lot of support from the WMU School of Communication. Professors Sue Ellen Christian, Dr. Richard Gershon, Dr. Richard Junger and Dr. Leigh Ford all helped me find opportunities—encouraging me and lifting me up," Ware says.

**WMU professor awarded for book that peels back the curtain on Fetzer's secret life**

Detroit Tigers owner. Media mogul. John Fetzer's legacy as a successful businessman is widely known. But another driving force played a huge part in Fetzer's life: metaphysical spirituality. From psychics and the paranormal to "energy medicine" and even UFOs, Fetzer studied it all. "It was part of his life that he kept really private," says Dr. Brian C. Wilson, professor of comparative religion at
Western Michigan University. The Historical Society of Michigan has awarded Wilson with its highest honor—the State History Award—for his book, "John E. Fetzer and the Quest for the New Age," which follows the businessman's journey from Seventh-day Adventism to a quest for global spiritual transformation.

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.
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.
Internships, faculty support help alumnus land job at ABC News

Contact: Erin Flynn
February 13, 2020

A post-graduation activity report reveals 94% of 2018-19 WMU graduates are actively employed or pursuing further education. Read more about the results here.

J. Gabriel Ware says internships and other experiential learning opportunities helped set him up for career success after graduation.

NEW YORK—Coronavirus concerns. Battening down for blizzards. A Hollywood heavyweight headed to trial. J. Gabriel Ware’s workdays are never dull. The Western Michigan University alumnus works on the assignment desk at ABC News, covering breaking news stories from across the country.
"It's kind of overwhelming at first because it's a big network. 'World News Tonight.' 'The View.' 'Good Morning America.' 'Nightline.' '20/20.' It's just so big," says Ware, who was hired at the network in 2019 after a successful internship.

The Detroit native’s success is no accident. It’s the result of years of hard work and focus, honing his craft and exploring all aspects of media as a student at WMU.

"I had a lot of support from the School of Communication. Professors Sue Ellen Christian, Dr. Richard Gershon, Dr. Richard Junger and Dr. Leigh Ford all helped me find opportunities—encouraging me and lifting me up," Ware says. "Dr. Ford would always say that I’d work at The New York Times one day. That actually made me shoot for The New York Times, and I did participate in the New York Times Student Journalism Institute program.

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Ware’s passion for journalism led him to the Western Herald, WMU’s student-run newspaper, and also opened the door to a number of experiential learning opportunities—something 93% of WMU graduates have on their resume when they cross the stage at commencement, according to a recent report.

"Working at the Western Herald helped me get an internship at Encore Magazine," says Ware, who also completed internships at WMUK radio and Yes! Magazine in Seattle. "When I was at Yes!, I was always in contact with Dr. Ford and professor Christian. They were always helping me with stories and helping me in general so I didn’t just disappear for six months."

As a Seita Scholar—a groundbreaking program at WMU that offers full tuition to foster youth—Ware had the financial stability to pursue his dream in full force.

"I was able to work unpaid internships in my field and get that journalism experience to take me to the next level," says Ware, adding that his Seita Scholars coach, program director Ronicka Hamilton met with him often and helped him find opportunities to advance his education and career aspirations.

Ware was also able to begin working on his master’s degree during his senior year with the accelerated graduate degree program. Now a two-time WMU graduate with bachelor’s and master’s degrees in communication, he is excited to be pursuing his passion. And, he encourages other students to take advantage of what his alma mater has to offer.

"If you're going into media, there are plenty of opportunities at Western to establish yourself," he says. "All of my experiences helped me get to where I am now."
WMU professor awarded for book that peels back the curtain on Fetzer's secret life

Contact: Erin Flynn
February 26, 2020

KALAMAZOO, Mich.—Detroit Tigers owner. Media mogul. John Fetzer’s legacy as a successful businessman is widely known. But another driving force played a huge part in Fetzer’s life: metaphysical spirituality. From psychics and the paranormal to "energy medicine" and even UFOs, Fetzer studied it all.

"It was part of his life that he kept really private," says Dr. Brian C. Wilson, professor of comparative religion at Western Michigan University. "Southwest Michigan is a pretty conservative place. He was afraid if people found out about his spiritual interests, he’d lose his audience, he might lose advertisers, or it might even put his (broadcasting) licenses in jeopardy. So, he was very quiet about it."

The Historical Society of Michigan has awarded Wilson with its highest honor—the State History Award—for his book, "John E. Fetzer and the Quest for the New Age," which follows the businessman's journey from Seventh-day Adventism to a quest for global spiritual transformation. It's Wilson's second such award, also winning in 2015 for his religious study of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg, the Battle Creek Sanitarium director who essentially invented breakfast cereal.

"As a professor of comparative religion with a focus on New Religious Movements, I’m fascinated with how people construct their worldviews—especially people who are not professional theologians or religious specialists. Kellogg and Fetzer fit the bill perfectly," says Wilson.

"Everyone knew about Kellogg’s Corn Flakes and the Battle Creek Sanitarium, but few knew about the novel religious worldview that led to these things; and many knew about the Fetzer Broadcasting System and Fetzer’s ownership of the Detroit Tigers, but only his
closest friends knew about the spiritual journey that ran in parallel to (and informed) his business pursuits. I think many readers of my books have found these added dimensions to these two well-known figures intriguing and exciting.

THE PROJECT

Wilson was able to get an intimate look at Fetzer's life through the Fetzer Memorial Trust, an arm of the Fetzer Institute, which originally commissioned him to write the introduction to an anthology. That led to a sabbatical and book project.

"In the basement of the Fetzer Institute are his archives, and he basically saved everything from his childhood on. So, it's incredibly rich—there's just tons of stuff," Wilson says. "I got to mine that for a year and write a book, so it was just a fantastic experience."

During the course of that year, Wilson was able to read letters Fetzer wrote when he was a young boy, see pamphlets he'd collected speaking out against Seventh-day Adventism, and read through the research he'd cultivated.

"I could go through and look at the progression of how he started putting these things together. He accepted some things, rejected others and over the decades created his own spiritual world view," says Wilson. "One of the reasons he got into metaphysical spirituality is because he wanted a spiritual path that was kind of harmonious with his engineering, technological and scientific interests."

In the 1970s, his financial and spiritual interests intersected with a number of research projects he funded, ranging from parapsychology to spiritual healing and alternative medicine.

"He was very interested in biofeedback—this idea that if you hook up ... autonomic functions in the body to a machine that can reproduce the pulses or rhythms in sound, then you can hear that and through meditation and concentration you could begin to control it," says Wilson. "He funded a kind of exploratory program here at Western ... that became part of the basis for the holistic health program."
Wilson says his deep dive into Fetzer's life gave him a fascinating look at how the businessman's spiritual curiosity and journey mirrored the development of metaphysical spirituality in the United States during the 20th century.

"Fetzer developed an idea he called 'freedom of the spirit,' by which he meant that every individual has the right and duty to explore the path suited for them, regardless of social and other pressures," he says. "This he did for his entire life, and even at a very advanced age, he continued exploring and experimenting with new ideas and practices—an unquenchable zest for life that I find inspirational."

WHAT'S NEXT?

Wilson’s research record earned him the WMU Distinguished Faculty Scholar Award—the University's highest academic honor for faculty—in 2019, and he doesn't have to travel far to find inspiration for future work.

"It turns out the Midwest was the epicenter for this kind of change away from an exclusively Christian focus to much more freedom of spiritual focus," says Wilson, who is considering a project centering on famous women’s suffragist and Unitarian minister Caroline Bartlett Crane of Kalamazoo.

"She was a big part of the progressive movement. (Crane) was known as 'America's Housekeeper' and would go to large urban areas to do surveys and reports on living conditions, slum conditions, hygiene conditions and sanitation conditions, all in order to improve life in urban areas. She was quite well known in the day."

He’s also working on a project with a wider scope, tracing a famed cross-country journey by Ralph Waldo Emerson late in his life that culminated in a meeting with John Muir in California that became the touchstone for American environmentalism.
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.