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Longing for American food streamlines career paths for four alumni

A longing for meatloaf, macaroni and cheese, and the other American-style food they ate while attending Western Michigan University as Sunway University transfer students inspired four alumni to chart similar career paths to open a restaurant in Selangor, Malaysia—the Kalamazoo Cafe.

Tracy Lee, Alex Teo, Lawrence Choy, and Tisha Ng

April 2005 graduates Lawrence Choy (B.S. computer science), and his wife, Tisha Ng (B.A. in T.V. media production and Asian studies) own and operate the cafe with fellow alums Alex Teo (B.S. computer science, April 2006) and Tracy Lee (B.S. psychology, April 2005). They became close friends while studying in Kalamazoo and often talked about working together after graduation.

“We always had a passion for food and loved trying different cuisines,” Choy said. “It was a frequent occasion to have dinners at each other’s apartments while trying out new recipes, thus the similar dream to run a cafe. We hung out with each other a lot and went on food expeditions, picnicking in South Haven and road trips to Chicago or Grand Rapids. One day we had a conversation about working together after graduation, and running a cafe came up. On and off we talked about it, and once all of us had returned to Malaysia we decided to go ahead with our plans.”

Though none of the partners imagined their career would be in the food industry when they entered college, they are all now committed entrepreneurs and work in the cafe. Choy and Ng handle most of the financial and marketing work, while Teo and Lee are in charge of the kitchen. When the cafe is open and busy, it’s all hands on deck.

“Tracy mainly handles the fryer, Alex handles griddle dishes, I handle food cooked on the stove, and Tisha is in charge of plating before the food goes out to the customers,” Choy said. “Students work as part-time waiters and prepare drinks. When it’s not too busy, Tisha and I head out to the main dining room, taking orders or serving and chatting with the customers.”

Bronco memorabilia, Michigan license plates, area maps and numerous photos taken in Kalamazoo and other Michigan destinations decorate the walls of the cafe, and one wall features photos of other WMU alumni who have eaten there. Menu items are American-style
dishes customized to suit the local market and all four partners are enthusiastic about creating new offerings. Alex’s Beef Meatloaf, Tracy’s Pork Lasagna, Kalamazoo-style tender ribs, and the chili cheese nachos are some of the most popular dishes served, along with milkshakes, root beer floats and raspberry lemonade.

Choy said when the cafe opened the partners focused all their efforts on refining the menu based on customer comments before planning any major marketing campaigns. One important thing they learned is that their customers are accustomed to having lots of salty sauce or gravy on meat dishes. Many people who visited the cafe early on thought the American-style sauces and gravy initially used in dishes were too sweet.

“We believe this was a good move, as we made a lot of changes to our dishes and expanded our menu based on customer suggestions,” Choy said. “Once we were satisfied with the changes we made we began moving forward with marketing. We recently had an online promotion that was very successful and we are planning on a new promotion in the coming months.”

Teo said the cafe has given a common direction to their lives and that its success has encouraged the partners to consider opening Kalamazoo Cafes in other areas of Malaysia, with an eye on Taiwan and Australia for international expansion further down the road. Like most small business owners, Ng said the partners have learned that operating a restaurant involves a great deal of time and dedication, but that “it’s definitely worth it.”

One of the biggest side benefits of owning Kalamazoo Cafe, said Choy, is that working there offers many opportunities for the Bronco alumni to regularly boast about their alma mater.

“We are interested in promoting WMU to any customers who inquire about schooling there,” Choy said. “We had a ‘light bulb’ moment when a family came over to dine here a few weeks back and their son was about to transfer to WMU. They asked many questions about what WMU is like, how the classes were, what our experiences were like and so on. We could only tell them through our own experiences how wonderful it was to live and study in Kalamazoo—we loved our time there.”

Story by Nate Coe
American-style teaching covered in CELCIS graduate assistant training program

Teaching international graduate assistants presentation methods, protocols, and nuances of classroom instruction in the American university system is the mission of the International Graduate Assistant Training program that has been offered through WMU’s Career English Language Center for International Students since the late 1980s.

The one-week, 12-hour training program that is offered each year the week before fall semester begins was developed by CELCIS Master Faculty Specialist Mary Lu Light to help international graduate assistants prepare to teach or work with undergraduate students at WMU.

Light said the program provides students an orientation to classroom communication dynamics, training in compensating for non-native American English pronunciation, and six opportunities to practice effective classroom presentation, after which participants receive feedback from their peers and experienced university instructors.

Such training was an emerging field in the late 1980s, when Light tasked herself with developing a program at WMU. Content and delivery was determined by researching programs at other universities, attending related conferences, networking with colleagues in national organizations doing similar work, and by conducting research in the field to learn best practices.

“I visited several WMU departments that enrolled large numbers of graduate students to interview their supervisors,” Light said. “I was interested in hearing the complaints and problems they encountered working with international GA’s and what the departments would like them to know before putting them in classrooms.”

Light presenting a certificate to Amila Bandara, a native of Sri Lanka and an IGA in the Physics Department

WMU's 2011 incoming international graduate assistants
Working collaboratively with WMU’s graduate college and with the support of the college’s dean at the time, Dr. Shirley Scott, Light also spent one fall semester visiting classrooms to evaluate graduate assistant teaching styles and methods.

“That helped me see the major problems, and also what was working, to assist me in developing the program,” she said. “It is WMU’s responsibility to provide this training to avoid putting under-prepared international teaching assistants in front of classrooms. I thought we should be training the TAs with as much care and concern as we train our football players. Many have never spent any time in the U.S. or been in an American university. They have to make language and cultural adjustments and most don’t know the protocols for American university classes.”

Amila Bandara presenting at a training session

Dr. Andrew Kline, an associate professor and graduate academic advisor in WMU’s College of Engineering and Applied Sciences, said his department enrolls four to five international teaching assistants each year, who attend the CELCIS-based training program, as well as TA training offered by WMU’s graduate college. He said both programs help the TA’s learn how to be effective teachers, as well as giving them insight on how to treat students in their classes.

“The CELCIS TA training provides a transitional orientation to the American university system and teaches incoming TA’s how WMU works,” Kline said. “It also gives them a chance to practice their language and presentation skills before they have to get up in front of a classroom.”

Ila Baker, a CELCIS master faculty specialist, has taught in the IGA program since 1991 and has taken over directorship of the program from Light. She said 39 international graduate assistants (list below) representing 21 countries, who were hired to teach in one of 23 WMU departments, participated in the training session hosted prior to the beginning of the 2011-2012 academic year.

“It’s a good investment for the graduate students we enroll who teach here for a year or two,” Baker said. “These TAs typically teach freshman and general education courses, so they are working with some of our most needy students. This training program improves the quality of instruction at WMU. Some departments require their TAs to sign up for the training and some international graduate students volunteer to participate to improve their presentation skills.”

The first day of the program participants give presentations that are videotaped. They receive feedback on that presentation and make additional presentations throughout the week. Baker said you can see a significant visual improvement in their delivery and enunciation by the time
they give a final presentation on the last day of the program.

Most participants come from the engineering, chemistry, paper science, math, economics, biology and geography departments. One of the benefits they receive is that they pay in-state tuition rates and are supported and represented by WMU’s Teaching Assistant Union. Grades are not issued, but a certificate is issued to those who complete the training.

“This is a wonderful professional development opportunity I look forward to every year,” Baker said. “It allows me to witness the emergence of great teaching skills among the TAs. Over the course of the week, the TAs get better—they get a lot better, which is very gratifying as a teacher. It is an important program that contributes to the quality of instruction at WMU and that serves the TAs well because they feel more comfortable and prepared walking into the classroom.”

2011 IGA training participants

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<td>Wan Wei</td>
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<td>Yi-Chin Huang</td>
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<td>Shenfeng Chen</td>
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<td>Manunal Islam</td>
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Visiting Scholars

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<td>Anne-Marie Rancourt</td>
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<td>Natalia Tishchenko</td>
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Fifty years later: Tragic loss of Japanese alumna continues to give life to WMU's strongest exchange program

When Yukiko Murakami, a Keio University student who studied abroad at Western Michigan University in 1962, lost her life in a tragic bus accident in Ohio, an overwhelming response from people in Kalamazoo and Japan resulted in the establishment of an exchange program and scholarship that has made it possible for United States and Japanese students to study abroad.

A commemorative service at WMU on July 14, 2011 marked the 50th anniversary of Murakami’s death and recognized how the scholarship established in her name has aided many U.S. and Japanese students in realizing their dream to study abroad—39 WMU students and 50 Keio students have received awards since the scholarship’s inception. The service took place at the site of a memorial plaque in Murakami’s honor that was installed August 17, 2004 near Wood Hall, and was followed by a private on-campus reception in The Oaklands.

WMU Study Abroad Director Dr. Jane Blyth Warren said the Murakami scholarship honors and perpetuates the enthusiasm and energy that Murakami exhibited while she was a student at WMU by providing financial support for student exchanges between WMU and Keio University.

“Careers have developed and lifelong friendships have formed as a result of this scholarship,” said Warren. “These experiences ripple to touch and impact the lives of so many more than only the scholarship recipients. Yukiko Murakami’s influence carries on today in the experiences of the students who have benefitted from the scholarship and the infinite relationships that have developed over the past fifty years.”

The memorial service attracted more than 50 people, including Murakami’s younger sister, Michiko Yamamoto, who traveled with her husband from Japan to attend the tribute. Three siblings from Murakami’s Kalamazoo host family also attended the service—Sue Troff, Mary Boughton and Greg Boughton.
Yamamoto well remembers the time her sister was abroad, which she shared in a statement printed in the memorial service booklet.

“The postcards my sister sent from America every two to three days painted a picture of just how warmly she was welcomed and cared for where she was staying and how thankful and blessed she felt,” said Yamamoto, in the statement. “Those feelings of my sister became the seed, and the feelings of the people of Kalamazoo who took her into their hearts became the soil. Thanks to the well-meaning intentions of all of you, that seed has grown into a splendid tree. Although it is the 50th anniversary of her passing, I think it is more appropriate to call it the 50th birthday of a new beginning.”

As part of the service honoring her sister, Yamamoto presented a donation to the family of Rodger Swan, a WMU alumnus and recipient of the Murakami scholarship, who passed away from a sudden illness while teaching English in Japan in January 2010. Her donation was for the Rodger Swan Memorial Fund for Japanese Studies, which was created to honor Swan’s eagerness to foster a love for Japan in others by increasing support for WMU students to study in Japan.

The relationship between WMU and Keio University began in 1960, when Dr. Samuel Clark, a WMU professor of political science, visited Japan as a Fulbright scholar and lectured at Keio, as well as Rikkyo University, for one year. Before returning to Kalamazoo, Dr. Takamura, president of Keio University, asked him to assist in starting a partnership between the two universities. WMU approved the partnership and arranged for a summer program to receive Keio students. Clark, Dr. Robert Palmatier, retired WMU professor of linguistics and former chair of the Linguistics Department, and Rev. Minoru Mochizuki were responsible for the program.

Murakami was one of 66 students from Japan's Keio University, one of the country's most prestigious universities, who traveled in 1962 to Kalamazoo with three faculty members for a six-week summer session of language study, lectures on American society and culture and social activities. She was recognized as the most active student among the study abroad group from Keio University.

After she completed her course of study at WMU, Murakami traveled by bus to Washington, D.C., and Philadelphia with friends. The accident that took her life occurred August 17 on their return
trip to Kalamazoo, when the bus crashed into a truck on the Ohio Turnpike. Murakami was the only passenger to die in the accident.

Friends and family in Japan and in the Kalamazoo community quickly proposed a campaign to raise funds to honor Murakami. WMU used those donations to establish a scholarship in her honor—the Yukiko Murakami Memorial Fund. The first award was made in 1963, and currently allows one student from WMU and a student from Keio University to study abroad with full funding each fall and spring semester at the partner university.

“Though this scholarship lasted 10 years, WMU had no choice but to end it in 1974 because the fund ran out of money,” said Dr. Michitoshi Soga, WMU emeritus professor of Physics and the inspiration behind the University’s Michitoshi Soga Japan Center. “When WMU President Dr. James Miller learned the fund was out of money, he immediately decided to provide financial support for continuation of the scholarship for Keio students and informed Keio University of his plan. Keio University agreed to establish a scholarship for one WMU student on the same condition. This exchange program has continued for more than 40 years and is the longest-running exchange program for both universities.”

Over time, WMU extended its relationships with Japanese universities by the grace of Keio University, said Soga. As their numbers grew, WMU alumni in Japan from Keio, Rikkyo, Ritsumeikan universities and others came together to form a mutual friendship group, Kalamazoo-kai, to raise funds and to host reunions and gatherings for visitors from WMU. The group now has almost 600 members.

Eiji Oshima is the current president of the Kalamazoo-kai and a recipient of the Murakami scholarship for the 1969-70 academic year. Fond memories of the time he spent studying in Kalamazoo inspired him to become very involved in Kalamazoo-kai. He said the generosity of the people he lived with and met in Kalamazoo and other parts of Michigan set the foundation for a relationship that “spans two generations and is very deep.”

“The Kalamazoo-kai has been very active in a number of fields, such as fund raising for the Soga Japan Center and hosting gatherings for Dr. and Mrs. Soga and WMU faculty and students when they visit Japan,” Oshima said. “It is my hope that the Kalamazoo-kai will carry on the will of Yukiko Murakami and serve to further strengthen grassroots exchange between Japan and the U.S.”

Each academic year, WMU welcomes about 40 Japanese students and about 20 WMU students travel to Japan to study abroad. The University offers academic-year, semester-long and short-term study abroad programs through seven Japanese universities, and has international partnerships or agreements of academic cooperation with an additional seven
universities and institutions. A minor degree program in Japanese is available through the University’s Department of Foreign Languages; a Japanese major is planned for launch in fall 2012. The campus and Southwest Michigan communities benefit from several events hosted annually by the Soga Japan Center, including conferences, lectures, musical and dramatic performances, and other cultural events which increase knowledge of Japanese history, culture, business, science and technology.

A recent grant award will further advance Japanese studies at WMU—a $140,000 grant from the Japan Foundation's Institutional Project Support Program was recently received by WMU, which will be used to fund a regional outreach coordinator position for the Japan Studies Program, as well as a faculty position in Premodern Japanese Culture and two workshops each year.

Click on the following links for more information about WMU’s Japanese exchange programs and the Murakami ceremony:

Murakami Memorial booklet
Ceremony video
WMU Japan Study Abroad Programs
Michitoshi Soga Japan Center
Japanese language and literature capture attention of WMU researcher

Dr. Jeffrey Angles likes to describe himself as the accidental professor because, unlike many people he knows who planned to become teachers when they completed their educations, he was more focused on the immediate goal of studying Japanese literature and translating. In the process of reading so much, he says that he found himself with a Ph.D. almost before he knew it.

It was a study abroad experience in Japan as a 15-year-old that eventually directed him to a career path that landed Angles at WMU as an associate professor of Japanese literature, language and translation studies in 2004. He now also serves as director of the University’s Japanese language program and the Michitoshi Soga Japan Center.

“As a teacher, I would be very bored if I was teaching this stuff and thought it wasn’t making a difference or that I wasn’t connecting with students,” Angles said. “I realize very few students are going to go on and specialize in Japanese literature—it’s not my goal to make scholars of Japanese literature. My goal is to show people that there’s this big world out there so intimately connected—full of business, cultural and historical connections. People don’t always realize that understanding the connections between our lives and those of other people makes everyone’s lives richer. When I see students responding to that knowledge, I love it.”

In addition to courses about Japanese cultural history and literature, he also often teaches Japanese 1000. “Students see my face and they realize a non-native speaker can do it,” he said. “It’s my belief that in the first semester or two students decide if they will be a Japanese major or minor, so I think it’s important to be enthusiastic and show how much fun it can be.”

Japanese literature has become the focus of Angles’ research, and he has earned international recognition in that field. In just the last year, he has received invitations to give special lectures at several universities in the U.S., Japan, Australia, and Germany, and he has participated in conferences in England and Estonia. Areas of interest include the history of translation and translation theory in Japan, expressions of romance, sexuality, and desire—especially same-sex desire—in Japanese literature, and the development of modern and contemporary Japanese poetry.
In 2009, Angles received the Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission Prize for the Translation of Japanese Literature, and in 2011, he received the Landon Translation Award from the American Academy of Poets. Both of these prizes were for his translation “Forest of Eyes: Selected Poems of Tada Chimako.” Another book of translations, “Killing Kanoko: Selected Poems of Hiromi Itō,” published in 2009 by Action Books, was a finalist in the poetry category of the Best Translated Book Award offered by Three Percent. During the 2009-2010 academic year, he served as a visiting professor to conduct a major research project on the cultural history of translation in Japan by invitation of the International Research Center for Japanese Studies in Kyoto.

Angles has won grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the PEN American Center for his translation of the memoirs of the contemporary poet Mutsuo Takahashi. In 2008, he was invited to the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. to serve as the curator for the literary events in the Japan: Culture+Hyperculture Festival. He has also been interviewed on NPR’s “All Things Considered” about the short story collection “Japan: A Traveler’s Literary Companion,” which he co-edited with J. Thomas Rimer.

Angles' translation of Takahashi’s “Twelve Views for the Distance,” is due out in 2012 from University of Minnesota Press. Angles describes the book as a coming-of-age memoir in which the author recalls the Japanese empire, living through World War II, the extreme poverty created by the war, and the post-war years as the country began to get back on its feet.

It's a story of a boy who grew up in poor rural southwest Japan very far away from any big cities,” said Angles of the book he first read in 1995. “He describes all sorts of major events through the eyes of a child. For some time, Takahashi lived near the seashore, where the allies had heavily mined the sea. He recalls hearing explosions, running to the shore to watch ships burn and sink, then swimming out to salvage the fish killed by the explosions. The war, which of course was a very ugly thing, was incredibly weird and exciting from a kid’s point of view. It's a beautifully written memoir full of surprising and interesting moments like that.”

Translations involve a strange kind of torturous love, says Angles. He said it takes a long time to do one well because the translator needs to produce the translation with the same aesthetic impression as the original manuscript. That is not always easy, especially when languages are as radically different as Japanese and English. Translating Takahashi’s memoir was a six-year project Angles started in 2005 and completed in many, tiny increments of a half hour or more of uninterrupted time.

“I sat in a room with my dictionaries, the Internet, Microsoft Word and my computer,” he said. “This particular translation was especially challenging because Takahashi grew up in rural southern Japan, speaking a dialect of Japanese that’s very unlike the standard Japanese most
people speak. He’s bi-dialectic. When he was at home, he would speak in a really heavy dialect that outsiders can’t understand very well, and the book represents that speech phonetically. I decided that if I translate it into the English of southern Ohio or West Virginia, which is a dialect I know and can speak, it would sound really weird to readers from California or England. What I decided to do for the passages in dialect was to render them in a colloquial language with lots of contractions, but not with so much slang that it begins to sounds like it’s from one particular place. I didn’t want it to sound too absurdly tied to one particular place. It was incredibly difficult to get the right tone.”

Angles said translating and researching literature offers a way to learn about a culture from the inside—to hear what people are saying about their country, its history and their experiences. “Literature is one of the most important artifacts of cultural history,” he said.

Much has been written about Japanese prose, but Angles said there has been relatively little translation of and research conducted on Japanese poetry—a genre that is so popular that almost all newspapers, from the local to the national level, feature a poetry column.

“My interest in Japanese poetry has emerged in recent years,” he said. “Through the course of my research I realized that poetry is the least studied genre of writing in Japan. I thought that was very bizarre because people in Japan read a lot of poetry. It’s an important way that they engage in self-expression.”

He’s also interested in the expressions of ideology in the modernist Japanese literature of the 1920s and 1930s, when Japan had attained status as a “modern society” and had become as powerful as some European nations.

“Japan had turned into an adult nation and was wondering: what are we doing? Who are we? It was an incredibly interesting time,” he said. “People were thinking about all sorts of things—what kind of nation they wanted to become, how they wanted to live, what emphasis they should place on human rights, what role women should play in society. They were rethinking everything about their society. Literature from that period is so interesting and provocative; it gives you tons to talk about.”

Another key research interest for Angles is the representation of same-sex desire in Japanese literature, which was prompted in his college years when there was an ever-increasing amount of scholarly interest in studying the history of how people think about relationships between members of the same sex.

“At the time, there was a lot of fiction about same-sex desire, but no broad-ranging studies,” he said. “When I asked my advisor to point me to some reference materials about both same-sex friendships and erotic relationships, he said there weren’t any available. I set out to write one.”

Angles earned his Ph.D. in 2004 with a dissertation about representations of male homoeroticism in the literature of Kaita Murayama and the popular writer Ranpo Edogawa. This

From the relatively flat topography of his boyhood home in Columbus, Ohio, Angles traveled for the first time to mountainous Japan when he was 15 as a high school foreign exchange student. He lived for three months in the small, southwestern Japanese city of Shimonoseki in Yamaguchi Prefecture.

“I traveled to rural southwest Japan…I'd been to the ocean twice, but I was sent to a small port town with lots of fisherman, and I stayed there where the mountains practically rise out of the sea—it was incredibly dramatic and beautiful," he said. “The landscape was amazing. As I fell in love with my surroundings, I knew without a doubt that I wanted to be successful at reading and writing Japanese. I knew I had to come back.”

He found every reason to travel back to Japan, including working as an intern at a car parts company and a coordinator for international relations in a local government office. Upon his return to the U.S., he was hired by another Japanese company, which helped Angles realize that working in the business world was not exactly what he wanted to do.

“I thought about going to work with the State Department, but decided against it," he said. “So, I decided on a whim to attend graduate school and I was accepted at Ohio State with a full fellowship. That was the same place where I had earned my bachelor’s degree in Japanese and international studies.”

He completed a master’s degree in Japanese literature in 1997 and his Ph.D. in 2004. In September 2011, Angles was named director of WMU’s Michitoshi Soga Japan Center, a community resource as well as a venue for coalescing research and scholarly activity at WMU that focuses on Japanese language and culture.

He was also co-author of a recent grant application to the Japan Foundation’s Institutional Project Support Program with colleague, Dr. Stephen Covell, professor of comparative religion, which netted a $140,000 award to enhance Japanese studies at WMU. The University was one of just eight institutions nationwide selected to receive a share of the nearly $2 million awarded by the foundation for its 2011-12 award cycle. The grant will help fund a regional outreach coordinator position for the Japan Studies Program, as well as a faculty position in premodern Japanese culture and two workshops each year. Those initiatives already receive major support from the university's Diether H. Haenicke Institute for Global Education and College of Arts and Sciences.

Story by Nate Coe

Jeffrey Angles ジェフリー・アングルス webpage
Engineering college draws Kenyan to Kalamazoo

From the campus of Egerton University, about 70 miles north of Nairobi, Kenya, Denis Mursoi learned of a unique twinning program opportunity that would enable him to begin a degree program at home, then complete the final two years in America. He is now enrolled in a bachelor’s degree program in industrial and entrepreneurial engineering from Western Michigan University.

In his two years of study at Egerton, Mursoi took mainly pre-engineering classes before transferring to WMU in fall 2010 for his junior and senior years. He plans to graduate in December 2012 and hopes to secure an internship in industrial manufacturing with a Kalamazoo-area company, before pursuing a master’s degree in engineering management.

Mursoi’s academic success at Egerton made him eligible to receive a WMU Presidential Scholarship award of $4,000 annually to help him cover tuition and housing. With his minor in mathematics completed, he is focused on courses related to his major and takes four to five classes each semester. He said WMU’s College of Engineering and Applied Sciences offers a facility and faculty that is “years ahead of what is available in other countries.”

“WMU engineering faculty are engaged in everything that is happening in the world today in regards to engineering and manufacturing,” said Mursoi, a native of Kericho, Kenya. “Anyone who works around them are up to date on what is going on in the field. As an engineering student, technology is key to our success and the labs are very well-equipped.”

One class Mursoi particularly enjoys is taught by Dr. Bob White and is focused on the business side of the manufacturing and engineering fields. He said the class offers students a hands-on way to consider how to successfully run a business through interesting assignments.

“Dr. White’s approach is unique in that we have to read the Wall Street Journal every week and discuss practical issues of running a business,” Mursoi said. “He also gives us hands-on projects every two weeks that help us understand the impact of financial decisions when running a business. Recently, we had to investigate 401K plans and determine how to forecast retirement income. Dr. White helps us understand the importance of revenue in relation to the products engineers develop for a company.”
Mursoi said studying at WMU has widely broadened his global perspective and that he experienced a smooth transition to campus life in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

“Getting involved at Western at the beginning was not difficult for me because I lived on campus in the dorms when I arrived,” he said. “It was easy to stay informed about and easily get to campus activities. I have also attended some Bronco football games with my roommate, Jared Buck, who introduced me to American football. Before I arrived in Kalamazoo, I expected it to be a small, lifeless little town. I am glad that I was wrong about that—the area around campus is not only lively, but is also quite reasonably priced for a college town.”

Another way Mursoi embraced WMU campus life was getting involved right away in the numerous fun and recreational activities planned to expose international students to American culture that are hosted by the International Programming Office at the Diether H. Haenicke Institute for Global Education. His enthusiastic participation in international activities helped him land a position in May 2011 at the Haenicke Institute as a special projects intern. “The opportunity to make new friends that this job has given me is quite amazing,” he said. “It does not surprise me nowadays when I am downtown and somebody honks their car horn to say ‘Hi!’”

Despite being well adjusted to life in Kalamazoo, Mursoi misses Kenya, especially its beautiful weather. He looks forward to returning to his homeland after completing a master’s degree to establish the company of his dreams.

“It is 75 to 85 degrees (Fahrenheit) almost every day in Kenya, which is something I really miss when winter comes around,” he said. “We have great beaches, amazing national game parks and a very friendly culture. I am encouraging my new friends at WMU to visit Kenya to witness one of the most spectacular events on earth—the Wild Beast Migration, which takes place every August and is often referred to as the 8th Wonder of the World.”
International volunteerism leads to global studies major

WMU senior Stephanie Iovan with children at a Tanzanian orphanage

My interest in learning about people and places overseas began in high school, when I was introduced to the organization, Invisible Children. The organization’s compassion and dedication to saving the lives of children forced to become soldiers not only sparked my interest in learning more about Africa, but the rest of the world as well. I made a commitment to travel and learn as much as I could about foreign people, places and cultures, which resulted in my exposure to significant life-changing experiences that have contributed greatly to my education and given direction to my career path.

Majoring in Global and International Studies at Western Michigan University has been extremely beneficial. Declaring this major, combined with a social work minor, has allowed me to take intellectually stimulating classes and has greatly deepened my awareness of our complex world. I am focusing on sociology and Africa—two topics for which I have great interest—as well as taking courses on Russian history and United States government.

Along with the wide range of classes offered by the multidisciplinary Global and International Studies program, I have had incredible opportunities to travel. In May of 2010, I left Kalamazoo and ventured to Arusha, Tanzania for three weeks. There, I volunteered at Cradle of Love orphanage, caring for underprivileged or abandoned infants and toddlers. Though my title was volunteer, I felt more like a mother to the children in the orphanage. Cradle of Love opened my eyes to a whole new world of poverty, struggle, and beauty.
My most memorable experience in Tanzania was at a hotel pool just around the corner from my volunteer house. Joined by a few other volunteers, we took a small group of neighborhood kids to the pool for a day. After only an hour of games and swimming, the kids fiercely debated in Swahili whether or not that was the best day of their lives. That alone was one of the most rewarding experiences I have ever had.

My exploration of Tanzania included a four-day safari. I will never forget witnessing lions, giraffes and elephants freely roaming the Serengeti. Needless to say, the three weeks I spent in Africa dramatically changed my life and strengthened my desire to travel and study the world.

In January of 2011, I embarked on another adventure to Israel for a study abroad experience. During my seven months in Jerusalem, one of the holiest places on Earth, I was exposed to devout Jews, Muslims, and Christians, and the most right winged Israelis and Arabs. I gained an entirely new perspective on the Israeli-Arab conflict and discovered conflicts I was unaware of that resided within the religious community. Also, I was able to meet my Israeli relatives and gain a cohesive sense of identity from the connections we made.

The classes I took at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem expanded my global knowledge and also greatly increased my Hebrew skills. Although many Israelis spoke English, knowing Hebrew was definitely a useful tool. Shopping in the local markets and speaking only Hebrew was a thrilling experience and gave me the chance to feel like a part of the community.

One course I took at Hebrew University, Archaeology of Jerusalem, was structured differently than anything I had taken at WMU. We took field trips nearly every day. Walking on the stone streets of The Old City of Jerusalem was like walking through history. My favorite expedition was exploring areas below the streets.
of Jerusalem and walking along remains of the original Western Wall dating back more than 2,000 years ago.

Israel has a very unique quality, one I had never seen before. The northern part of the country is very green, covered by grasslands and trees, and the southern part offers a completely different landscape— miles and miles of beautiful desert and blue sky. Hiking and exploring in the Negev desert, where we were frequently accompanied by Bedouin settlers, offered one of the most peaceful moments I’ve ever experienced. The time I spent living in Israel affected my life in the best way possible. I am forever grateful for the knowledge I gained and the life-long friendships I made, both of which have contributed significantly to my personal growth.

Connecting with members of my extended family in Israel encouraged me to learn even more about my past. From Israel, I took a short trip to Eastern Europe with my family in hopes of retracing our roots. We began by touring the beautiful architecture of Budapest and eventually made our way to Ukraine. Going from the beautiful Westernized world of Israel to the underdeveloped small towns of Ukraine was difficult. We spent days exploring the streets where my grandparents grew up and walked through the designated “Ghetto” my grandmother lived in before deportation to Auschwitz. The experience was one I’ll remember the rest of my life.

This semester, I had the good fortune to land an internship working on outreach for the Global and International Studies program. Working in the Haenicke Institute for Global Education is helping me develop valuable professional skills and has given me the opportunity to work closely with accomplished professors and administrators. My enthusiasm for the GIS program and traveling greatly aids me in my work recruiting students for the program and encouraging them to study abroad.

As I evaluate my post-graduation plans, I am excited to consider the many life-changing experiences ahead of me. A year from now I hope to be teaching English in India. The list of places I want to travel to grows longer every day, and I can’t wait to embark on my next adventure.