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Haenicke Institute

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Focus on Strengthening Education Around The World
Dear Friends,

In this fall issue of WMU International News, we highlight how our students, faculty and staff support the global engagement pillar of the University and impact the globe positively, in particular by addressing the educational needs of societies around the world.

One of our proudest recent accomplishments is the launching of the first-ever doctoral program to be offered in the Dominican Republic, which will prepare individuals to hold leadership and management roles in K-12 or higher education. WMU’s engagement with the D.R., which began in 2008, also includes collaborations between multiple colleges and departments across campus with institutions in the D.R.

You can also read about the Japanese Teachers Program, which for four years has brought Japanese teachers of English to campus for about six months to learn how we teach English in the United States—knowledge they put into practice once they return to their classrooms.

Another bright spot of WMU’s global engagement efforts is our success in attracting Fulbright Fellows to campus, including the four Fellows featured in this issue. Hailing from Senegal or Pakistan, these Fellows are all intent on improving their countries, be it by supporting the achievement of gender equity for girls seeking an education, helping to establish research universities, or developing policies that improve society as a whole.

And, don’t miss the story about Lorena Pena Jiminez, who, as an undergraduate at WMU, led a small research team that developed a process for turning banana industry waste into paper—a process that is now being used in the Dominican Republic, her home country.

I hope you enjoy these accounts of WMU’s global impact and the pride we take in forging positive change in Kalamazoo and around the world.

We appreciate your interest in Western Michigan University and the Haenicke Institute and we welcome your comments about WMU International News. Please write us at: wmu-international@wmich.edu

Wolfgang Schlör
Associate Provost
Diether H. Haenicke Institute for Global Education
WMU helps grow education in the Dominican Republic

Japanese teachers of English learn U.S. methods at WMU

For the girls: Senegalese Fulbright Fellow seeks gender equity in homeland schools

Senior research project helps Dominican Republic banana industry go green

Advancing education and development goal for three Pakistani doctoral candidates in political science
Western Michigan University President John M. Dunn says if you wear a shirt emblazoned with the University’s logo in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic, no explanations are necessary—people know what the “W” represents.

Since 2008, Dunn has traveled to the D.R. more than a dozen times, triggering a cascade of initiatives aimed at advancing the D.R.’s education system, supported by the faculty and administrators in several WMU colleges and departments. The cornerstone of WMU’s partnership is a merit-based scholarship established in 2008 by the D.R. government that has made it possible, to date, for nearly 400 D.R. students to study in Kalamazoo and earn a WMU degree.

Most recently, WMU launched the first doctoral program to be offered in the D.R. through a unique collaboration between the University and the D.R.’s Ministry of Education, Ministry of Higher Education and the Universidad Iberoamericana (UNIBE), in Santo Domingo.

The first cohort of students will begin in 2015. The program will be offered via a hybrid learning format through Extended University Programs and taught by WMU faculty in the Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Technology in the College of Education and Human Development. The program also includes a study abroad component, in which the students will travel to WMU in June each year for three weeks of intensive study.

“The goal of Western Michigan University is to do everything we can to help the Dominicans develop educational opportunities to improve the basic social fabric of their country,” Dunn said. “Our ultimate goal is to help them build a framework that is responsive to their needs. We are playing a significant role in helping the D.R. develop that infrastructure independently, and we are learning a lot from each other as we do it.”

Dan Guyette, dean of WMU’s College of Fine Arts, traveled to the D.R. for the first time in February 2014 with two faculty from his college. They held auditions for student musicians at the National Conservatory in Santo Domingo and visited other schools and museums. Guyette also experienced Bronco fever there, while traveling with Juan Tavares, director of WMU’s
40 principals from the D.R. visited WMU for one week in May 2014.

WMU is now working closely with the D.R.’s ministries of education and higher education on several initiatives in addition to the new Ph.D. program, including:

- An Educational Leadership Administrators Academy for 40 D.R. principals. The academy included two workshops in the D.R. led by WMU faculty, followed by a one-week, intensive workshop on WMU’s main campus in May 2014.

- A 3+1 program for business majors already open for enrollment in which D.R. students take the first three years of instruction at Universidad Iberoamericana (UNIBE) and the fourth year at WMU to earn a bachelor’s degree. This program allows UNIBE students to pursue majors in accountancy, advertising and promotion, food and consumer goods packaging, integrated supply management, and sales and business marketing and to earn degrees from both UNIBE and WMU’s Haworth College of Business.

- A 2+2 program between WMU’s College of Engineering and Applied Sciences and the Instituto Tecnológico de Santo Domingo (INTEC) for mechanical engineering, aerospace engineering, and paper and chemical engineering. WMU’s Dr. Said Abubakr, chair and professor of the Department of Chemical and Paper Engineering, and Dr. Parviz Merati, chair and professor of the Department of Mechanical and Aeronautical Engineering, are working on this project, which will soon be open to enrollment.

- Relationships between the WMU College of Fine Arts and conservatories, art schools and museums in the D.R. to attract students to WMU.

- Development of an internship program for WMU students at UNIBE’s branch campus in Cap Cana.

- Assist with the opening and faculty development of Instituto Tecnológico Comunitario (ITESCO), the first community college in the D.R.

We ran into Broncos down there all the time,” Guyette said. “Many would come up and hug Juan—everyone knows him down there. It was wonderful to see the impact WMU has had on this beautiful country.”
The leadership academy was an outcome of meetings between faculty in WMU’s Department of Educational Leadership, Research and Technology and the D.R.’s Minister of Education Carlos Amarante Baret. Dr. Donna Talbot, chair of the department and leader of the Ph.D. development team, said Baret is focused on improving the country’s K-12 system and sought WMU’s help.

“The Minister began speaking with our department about how best to transition their system from half days of classes to a full day of school for K-12 students,” Talbot said. “The principals’ academy was designed to help administrators proceed to offer a full day of instruction for K-12 students. We signed on because we saw this as a way to prepare D.R. youth for higher education. A strong pipeline of students coming up the ranks fosters well-prepared applicants for college and the new Ph.D. program.”

Dr. Ming Li, dean of WMU’s College of Education and Human Development, welcomed the opportunity to engage with the D.R. in developing the Ph.D. program, the Educational Leadership Administrators Academy, and discussing other possible areas of collaboration.

“We have also talked about offering a program for their sports managers on sports marketing and sponsorship and sports management,” Li said. “Once the Ph.D. program is underway, we can start conversations about replicating similar programs in other parts of the world. This program provided an opportunity to truly test our faculty’s commitment, readiness and abilities to enhance the college’s global delivery capacity. We live in a global environment in which technology and education has become boundary-less. Global delivery capacity is essential for every institution.”

Talbot gained her first experience working with an educational system in another country when she served in the Peace Corp in the early 1980s—designing, planning and teaching math courses in a public school in Ghana.

“As a returned Peace Corp volunteer, helping a nation increase its own capacity is near to the values that brought me to the Peace Corp,” she said.

“I am thrilled that many of our college faculty have visited the D.R. to help us develop the Ph.D. program and the leadership academy. They suddenly realized on a “felt” level—not just from reading it in a book—the D.R. culture’s impact on its educational system. When our faculty start to work with D.R. students here, that will be so important. Participating forces them to think about educational systems other than the ways we deliver education in the U.S.,” Talbot said.
Guyette, who began his tenure as dean of the College of Fine Arts in August 2013, said he was attracted to WMU partly due to the internationalization of the University and the efforts underway to enhance that through the Haenicke Institute—the focus of WMU’s international offices. He first traveled to the D.R. in February 2014 with two music faculty, Dr. David Colson and Dr. Renata Knific, to hold student auditions and to observe master classes led by Maria Irene Blanco at the Conservatorio Nacional de Música, Santo Domingo.

“This group selected more students—three more in dance, a couple more in music and many student portfolios from the visual arts are being reviewed,” he said. “Our faculty came back with great excitement and enthusiasm about the vibrancy of the arts and the interest of the country in promoting its culture for others to see.”

President Dunn believes these D.R. students will add a “richness” to the University’s arts and music programs that will greatly benefit the college’s faculty and students. Making the students feel at home when they get to WMU is also something Dunn believes is essential for successful international partnerships.

“If you listen carefully and respond genuinely—and we certainly have with the students who initially came to us to earn a degree—you build a solid, trusting relationship,” said Dunn, referring to the nearly 400 D.R. students who have earned a WMU diploma. “The people we work with in the D.R. now know they can count us to also deliver in other ways. Our faculty and staff are very helpful to our international students, doing things like making sure they have a warm winter coat to wear.”

“One of the prime reasons students and their families like WMU is that we offer a truly American educational experience,” Dunn said. There is something about this University and the Kalamazoo community that is inherently welcoming, warm and supportive. We do that to the nth degree here. We are committed to making people feel included and respected.”

Guyette also met with the D.R.’s Minister of Culture, Jose Antonio Rodriguez who was interested in helping WMU connect with other areas of the arts. The minister set up a meeting for the next day so Guyette could meet a few of his vice ministers and other leaders of the arts. “When I got to the meeting, there were 32 people in the room,” he said. “I told them about WMU, what we were hoping to do and received many contacts.”

The interest and enthusiasm Guyette sensed in that meeting was so encouraging he arranged to send a larger contingent right away to identify other areas of interest and collaboration. The delegation included: Patricia Villalobos Echeverria, professor of art; Christina Chin, assistant professor of art; Don Desmett, founding director of exhibitions for WMU’s Richmond Center for Visual Arts; David Curwen, associate professor of dance; Martha Councell-Vargas, assistant professor of music; and Emily Duguay, theater arts manager.
For the fourth consecutive year, Western Michigan University will host a group of Japanese teachers of English for a six-month, intensive program designed to improve their understanding of the English language, engage them in new teaching methods, and broaden their understanding of American culture.

Funded by the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Japan-United States Teacher Exchange program brings experienced teachers to one of seven United States’ universities selected by a competitive bidding process. WMU was invited to submit a proposal by Kuninori Matsuda, former consul general of the Japan consulate in Detroit, Mich., who has helped over the last decade to forge close ties between the consulate and the University.

Launched by WMU’s College of Education and Human Development and the Haenicke Institute for Global Education, the program’s first cohort of 10 teachers included Hitoshi Kubo, who had worked as a junior high school teacher in Japan for 16 years. In addition to advancing his English language teaching skills, Kubo said participating in the program at WMU gave him a much greater understanding of the American public education system.

“The most impressive thing for me was learning to develop lesson plans by backward design,” Kubo said. “The teacher first sets clear goals for the entire unit, then sets a goal for what will be covered in each class to make progress in small steps. That makes our classes more attractive and easy to understand. One of the first things I learned about the education system in the United States is that the teachers usually have their own classrooms and students move from classroom to classroom for various subjects. In Japan, students are divided into homeroom-groups called gakkyu, each of which has about 30 students. Each gakkyu has its own classroom, and it is the teachers who move from classroom to classroom. I was one of the homeroom teachers for 7th graders, so I was teaching English to all the 7th graders.”

The founding director of the program is Dr. Jane Blyth, WMU director of study abroad and global program development in WMU’s Haenicke Institute for Global Education and an affiliate professor in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Educational Studies. Her experience teaching Japanese and English as a Second Language, as well as teaching in Japan, helped her draft a WMU program proposal that would be competitive in a pool of applicants that included Rutgers University and the University of Texas.
The cohorts of 10-14 Japanese teachers arrive in early August and receive intensive English instruction for the first month,” Blyth said. “During this time, the teachers are also becoming familiar with WMU’s campus and the Kalamazoo area. Within a few days, they move in with Kalamazoo host families, which helps the teachers gain additional language support and learn more about culture in the United States. In addition to their course work, they conduct observations in area schools and also in WMU’s English as a Second Language program—CELCIS—classes. Their cultural education is enhanced through a wide variety of trips and events to attend performances, art exhibits, sporting events, and to visit points of interest in Michigan and the Midwest. Over their breaks, they travel to other popular U.S. destinations, such as Washington D. C. and Florida.”

During the fall semester, the teachers enroll in ED 5020 Curriculum Workshop: TEFL Methodology, co-taught by Blyth and Dr. Paul Vellom, associate professor and former chair of the Department of Teaching, Learning and Educational Studies. This course broadens the Japanese teachers’ theoretical and practical
bases for English language teaching. They also enroll in a CELCIS course designed to support the academic reading and writing aspects of their work under the direction of Robert Dlouhy, WMU master faculty specialist.

Course work is enhanced through a unique collaboration arranged with Kalamazoo Public Schools, in which the Japanese teachers visit KPS classrooms to observe and conduct action research. “Working with the KPS mentor teachers allows the Japanese teachers to forge strong bonds with a mentor and helps them get to know our public education system,” Blyth said.

This community component also gives the KPS teachers and students the chance to learn about Japanese language and culture from the Japanese teachers. Amy Pachay-Kish, an ESL/bilingual teacher at Woods Lake Elementary School in Kalamazoo, Mich., has served as a mentor to Japanese teachers since the program was launched in 2010. She has hosted two teachers each year, who visit her classroom twice weekly to observe and interact with her students.

“I was interested in participating because I knew the experience would benefit my students, as well, and expand their knowledge of the world, particularly of Japan,” Pachay-Kish said. “Because I teach ESL and reading to students from various countries in K-5, I thought it would be interesting to learn how teachers in Japan go about teaching English. I also thought it would provide an opportunity for introspection as I explained things to the Japanese teachers and answered their questions—for me to consider why we do things the way we do them in the U.S. The first year I had such a wonderful time working with Aki and Yumi that I was happy to be involved in the program again. I enjoyed offering my classroom as a welcoming place for the Japanese teachers, and my students gained an interest in learning about Japanese culture and language.”

Vellom, whose research interests are teacher development and science education, was recruited by Blyth and said he quickly became intrigued by how the goals of the teachers’ program aligned with the goals of WMU’s teacher education program.

“These people were selected by their government because they were recognized as good teachers,” Vellom said. “Each of them came to work on their own understanding of what it means to teach English. That was very interesting to me because of the cultural differences between our countries. As each group has arrived, it has been very interesting to watch the culture shock they go through. We see their eyes open to a broader range of teaching techniques and theoretical backgrounds. The Japanese teachers take what we present and make materials that will work in their classrooms. They are working on their curriculum in concert with learning about new teaching techniques and the theories behind them.”

Vellom said many of the Japanese teachers have noted that one strength of the program is the link made between theory and practice that enables them to leave WMU feeling empowered to make changes in their own classrooms, their schools, and across their prefectures. In May 2013, Vellom conducted a follow-up observational study on his first trip to Japan, visiting...
the classrooms of nine teachers from the 2011 and 2012 cohorts teaching in various communities. He found that most teachers had been able to successfully integrate what they had learned at WMU into their highly structured curricula. They were able to use the guiding principles that they had developed to inform their decision-making in planning and executing instructional events. This illustrates the strong impact of their studies at WMU and their rich, engaging experiences with American culture.

Three years later, Kubo, who now serves on the Tochigi Prefecture Board of Education, fondly recalls the presentation each of the teachers gave on campus at the conclusion of the program and how most of the host families attended to celebrate their student’s success, as well as to send them off when it came time to return to Japan.

“All of our host families were really wonderful, and their network was amazing,” Kubo said. “When it was time to leave Kalamazoo, all the host families came to the airport and saw us off with tears. We were really happy to meet such wonderful people in Kalamazoo. We’ll never forget this wonderful experience.”

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- Hitoshi Kubo

Teaching at Woods Lake Elementary, Akiko Yamagishi (left) and Yutaro Nishida (right)
Babou Ndiaye, of Senegal, became keenly aware of the cultural divide in his country regarding the education of girls while growing up close to a cousin, Mariama Ndiaye.

“When we were children, Mariama didn’t have the same mentality toward getting an education that I did, even though we were in the same grade and class,” said Ndiaye, who came to WMU in fall 2013 to study in the College of Education and Human Development. “The reason was not because she wasn’t capable; it was cultural influences that led her to drop out in middle school. Our grandmother kept telling her that she needed to learn how to become a good wife. When I later became a teacher, I noticed that female students were facing a lot of challenges and that they had a high dropout rate compared to the boys.”

That disparity, initially observed as a child, was part of what inspired Ndiaye to prepare for a career in education. Before he earned his bachelor’s degree at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, Ndiaye served as an elementary school teacher in Sedhiou for nine years. After graduation, he accepted a short-term teaching position at a high school, and then became a teacher supervisor for the Bambey district. He said that job provided a great opportunity to look closely at the gender equity issue in Senegal’s schools and the overall quality of instruction, as well as to better understand the challenges that lie ahead in Senegal.

“First, we need to educate teachers on the quality of the curriculum and what changes can be made to improve it,” he said. “We also need to help teachers be more aware of gender-related challenges and be more gender sensitive. We live in a very male-dominant society that believes men should be more highly educated than women, which leads to the lack of quality in education for the girls.”

Ndiaye is the recipient of a Fulbright Fellow award, which provides funding for him to attend WMU for two years to earn a master’s degree in socio-cultural studies of education. The Fulbright Program is the flagship international educational exchange program sponsored by the United States government, designed to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries. And, his family is making a big sacrifice to...
help Ndiaye achieve his goal of growing educational opportunities for girls in his country—his wife, Aida Ba, and their four children, (ages 4 to 12 years old) will remain in Senegal while he is studying abroad.

Dr. Michelle Metro-Roland is the University’s Fulbright advisor and director of faculty and global program development in the Haenicke Institute for Global Education. She has worked with Ndiaye since his first day on campus and she believes he will have a positive impact on the education system in his home country.

“He’s very intellectually curious, and he has already been recognized in the college with a Rising Star award for his academic work,” Metro-Roland said. “I have been impressed with his commitment to gender issues, in particular his interest in extending opportunities for the education of girls. We don’t have all the answers in the U.S., and may not hit the mark all the way, but we are at least trying to get there.”

One big difference Ndiaye noted immediately upon beginning classes last fall is that there are more women in the classroom at WMU than there would be in a middle school in Senegal. This has encouraged him to push his vision further, meaning his educational journey will not come to a conclusion at WMU. Ndiaye also plans to earn a Ph.D. and become a professor at his alma mater. He believes this will increase his ability to work successfully with the Ministry of Education to change policies that impede the advancement of gender equity in the classroom and on campus.

“We have to look within each school at the teachers’ attitudes, the content of the classes and the knowledge students learn,” Ndiaye said. “Because cultural beliefs are so strong, we must help people understand that we should all be treated equally, especially when it comes to getting an education.”

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-Babou Ndiaye
Senior research project helps Dominican Republic banana industry
When your country helps you pay for your college education, what could be better than paying back that generosity by developing a process that turns a common waste product into paper?

That’s exactly what Lorena Pena Jimenez of, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, did by leading a three-member undergraduate team in developing a process that turns waste from banana processing into paper. She was honored for her work during the 2014 Institute of Engineers Great Lakes conference with a second-place award for a research paper she submitted.

Pena, and fellow seniors, Austin Sievers and Fainelys Encarnacion, worked under the direction of Dr. Azim Houshvar, a professor in WMU’S Department of Industrial and Manufacturing Engineering.

“This new process will help the D.R. accomplish three things: reduce waste, recycle waste, and create jobs,” Pena said. “The process we developed is not harmful to the environment. We tried to supply people with jobs by using manpower instead of machine power.”

The idea to recycle banana waste came to Pena early in her junior year. She knew it was possible to produce paper from tree waste and that some attempts had been made by others before her to develop a process to make paper from banana tree waste. Prior attempts had proven to be too costly to be worthwhile.

She talked the idea over with Sievers, Encarnacion, and Dr. Houshvar, who helped them develop a research plan and to identify all the resources necessary to complete the project. Houshvar has been Pena’s mentor for the four years she studied at WMU, meeting with her at least once a week.

“Lorena was the engine behind the team,” Houshvar said. “She took charge and assigned responsibilities to the team members. She is a perfect example of a success story—an international student who got involved in a project in her home country and used that to give recognition to the Industrial and Entrepreneurial Engineering program at WMU.

Pena said Encarnacion, who is also from the D.R., shared her passion for the project and worked diligently on a variety of tasks, while Sievers was in charge of conducting the economic analysis. Once the project was completed, the group submitted it to Banlino, a non-profit organization in the D.R. that helps small-scale banana farmers sell and ship their fruit to the U.S. Banlino has adopted the process for use in its manufacturing plant.

Pena graduated with her bachelor’s degree on April 26, 2014 and is now enrolled in WMU’S master’s degree program in engineering processes.

Pena describes the process:

“We used the basic processes to make paper—shred the tree (in this case the pseudo-stem and stalk), clean the fiber to take out the lignin, pulp a mix of materials along with the fiber to give the paper the desired properties, mold the sheets, and then dry them. We substituted chemicals with other products that could be re-inserted into the land, and used machines from other industries (i.e. an autoclave) to perform the processes, with the objective of reducing the initial investment. This process creates more jobs and reduces the use of electricity in the D.R., where the electricity rate is one of the most expensive in the world.”
A fourth-grade education would have been the limit for Abida Bano, who was born in Pakistan’s District Mardan of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, if she and her family had not moved to another part of the country where females were free to seek an education.

She holds two master’s degrees in political science from the University of Peshawar, and she is working on a Ph.D. in that field at Western Michigan University thanks to a Fulbright Fellow award. She began her studies in fall 2012 and plans to graduate in fall 2017.

Bano is a member of the Yousafzai tribe, one of the largest Pashtun tribes settled in northwestern parts of Pakistan and some eastern parts of Afghanistan. Pashtuns, in general, have very strict restrictions, particularly regarding the education and mobility of girls. Because her hometown lacked an all-girls school, she had no options there to continue her education past the fourth grade. Her father, Mulki Bahadur, who was working as a government servant in Kamra cantt, decided to move his family to Kamra cantt to allow his daughter to continue her education.

“My father was keen to have me become an educated lad,” Bano said. “My mother, Bibi Zakia, always supported the idea of women becoming educated and pursuing a career because it is empowering, which is interesting because my mother is not a formally educated person. She has never been to school, but carries a clear vision for women empowerment in her own particular way. My presence here would have never been possible without my mother and father’s support.”

“I can see that many more girls in my family will now be able to get an education at the highest level.”
-Abida Bano

“Pakistan is a multi-cultural society, hence Punjab is different than the Pashtun region regarding girls’ education and mobility,” Bano continued. “Although my parents were interested in our education irrespective of gender, going against the culture is not always easy and I had the fear that societal pressure may shatter my dream of higher education at some point. Hence, as a strategy, I used to work very hard to earn good grades so that no one could find a sufficient reason to object on my education. My good academic standing was a strong reason I was able to go to college through the master’s degree, which my parents financed. Now all my siblings are well educated and have successful careers.”
Before coming to WMU, Bano was teaching at the University of Peshawar, where she will return after she has earned her Ph.D. She is especially interested in human rights and women’s rights and she believes her work at WMU will better enable her to play a productive role in the development of society.

“I am still in a continuous struggle with the societal perception of ‘educated woman’, which is not always taken as positive,” she said. “I believe I am the first one among men and women of my family for generations who is pursuing a Ph.D. degree and doing it in the United States. I am at the beginning of a new culture in my family and native village. I can see that many more girls in my family will now be able to get an education at the highest level.”

Bano received a guarantee of five years of funding from the Fulbright program and she is very pleased that the program chose WMU as the place she will earn her Ph.D. She said all of the professors she has met in the Department of Political Science have been accessible and helpful, particularly Dr. Jim Butterfield, the graduate director, and Dr. John Clark, chair of the department.

“Asma Afzal

Asma Afzal of Lahore, Pakistan has high hopes to help her country establish its first research-level university for the social sciences once she completes a doctoral degree in political science at Western Michigan University.

Afzal acknowledges that this is a fairly lofty goal for someone who grew up in a society in which education for women is not encouraged. Though her parents have always been very focused on making sure Afzal and her brothers received a good education through college, most of her female relatives have held jobs even though they did not pursue an education beyond high school.

“Looking back, I grew up in a household where getting education was considered very important,” said Afzal, a self-proclaimed big city girl. “My father read a lot, and I was first among my friends to learn to read. And he is a chemical engineer who loves politics. Instead of telling me fables when I was a little girl, he told me political stories which triggered my interest in politics. In Pakistan social sciences are not as highly valued as natural sciences. People study social sciences as a second choice. For me that was not the case I consciously opted to study political science.”

“Had it not been for all the friendly and helpful people at WMU, it would be a challenge to live this far from family,” she said. “I like Kalamazoo because of its natural beauty and the awesome seasons of spring and fall. I am thankful to the United States for contributing to my personal development so generously.”
Despite the challenges, Afzal has already earned two master's degrees in political science from Government College University, where she has worked as an instructor since 2004. In 2009, Afzal became a member of the university's faculty, a position that would not have been open to her just a few years earlier, because it was a male-only college until 2002.

“The split is now 60 percent women to 40 percent men,” Afzal said. “Ten years ago, the only opportunities for women were to become a teacher, nurse, or doctor. Now women are studying to become engineers and in many other fields. My generation is the pioneering generation. We are opening doors for the girls to come even though some people in my country are still uncomfortable being around women who have opinions and careers. We are very aware of our responsibilities to the younger women coming up.”

With the support of a Fulbright Fellow award, Afzal arrived at WMU in fall of 2013 to begin work on a Ph.D. so she will be eligible to be named a full professor at GCU.

“The Pakistan government is trying to improve quality of education throughout the country, so they are encouraging people to get a Ph.D,” she said. “A Ph.D. from the United States is widely valued in Pakistan. Some of my colleagues back at home also received their Ph.D.s in the U.S and are now conducting research and writing. I wanted to do that, too. We are very weak in research in Pakistan. Our professors used to be more like civil servants. In this new system my country is developing, professors will have to conduct research.”

The focus of Afzal’s dissertation thus far is the status and identities of ethnic and religious minority groups in Pakistan, particularly the Baluchistan ethnic minority. She is currently writing research papers on related topics to identify the specific area for her dissertation. She also plans to develop curriculum while earning her Ph.D. that will allow her students to learn through a comparative approach. Afzal is working closely with two WMU professors of political science, Dr. Jim Butterfield, who also serves as her academic advisor, and Dr. Mahendra Lawoti.

With a Ph.D. in hand, Afzal said she will be better prepared to help her country develop a research-level institution in social sciences so women and men will have more opportunities to investigate and advance their findings and share them with the rest of the world. This will be challenging in regards to the women because she said discrimination is still on the rise in Pakistan and schools for girls are still being bombed.

Women’s right to vote is another issue Afzal has focused on to help them achieve greater equity in society. In northern Pakistan, women still cannot cast votes in political elections. Afzal has worked at women’s polling stations in other areas of the country where women are allowed to vote, where she has often observed men telling their wives that they need to vote for a particular party.

“Many Pakistani women are more empowered now,” she says, “However, we don’t have much say when it comes to the main decisions about life, like owning property, marriage, and voting. When it comes to these decisions, the situation within each family can be very different from one house to next.”

Many of Afzal’s students come from Northern Pakistan and have experienced a great deal of trauma, but they are very interested in gaining an education and having a career despite the challenges they have faced. She said this means that her role requires a larger commitment than simply signing on to teach.
When Beenish Kulsoom’s plans to work for a multinational corporation after finishing an MBA degree in 2002 didn’t pan out, she was advised by her father to work for a humanitarian organization. She accepted a position with Pakistan’s Red Crescent Society, a branch of the Red Cross—a decision that drastically changed the shape of her future and put her on a path to Western Michigan University’s Department of Political Science.

Kulsoom, of Lahore, Pakistan, came to WMU in fall 2011 as a Fulbright Fellow to work on a doctoral degree in political science. Unlike many women in Pakistan, Kulsoom grew up in a family in which girls and women were not limited in their abilities to earn an education.

“After I earned an MBA, I tried to get a job in a multinational corporation, but it was very competitive and I didn’t get hired,” Kulsoom said. “I started working for the Red Crescent in 2002, and from that moment on my interest in working in the private sector changed. I found that I liked it better working in a humanitarian organization. I worked all over Pakistan providing disaster relief.”

-Beenish Kulsoom

Margaret von Steinen contributed to these stories.
We welcome your inquiries!

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