



SAGINAW VALLEY  
STATE UNIVERSITY



**STAND OUT**

# **GLOBAL HORIZONS & OUTREACH**

*International Engagement History and Initiatives  
November 2025*



# CARDINALS **STAND** OUT

## GLOBAL HORIZONS & OUTREACH

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**STAND** OUT

# **GLOBAL HORIZONS & OUTREACH**

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## OVERVIEW OF GLOBAL SVSU

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# A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

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## **SVSU MISSION STATEMENT**

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*To transform lives through comprehensive, engaged education and experiences that prepare students for tomorrow's challenges and opportunities.*

Saginaw Valley State University has long been committed to global engagement, with a remarkable foundation built over many years.

Global Horizons & Outreach showcases the strong international relationships that faculty and staff have cultivated, the study-abroad opportunities that students have taken advantage of, and the campus culture that welcomes diverse global perspectives.

SVSU's international programs continue to flourish and expand. Students are studying abroad and coming back with amazing stories, while new partnerships are bringing fresh energy into our classrooms. We've also become a second home for international students, who add so much to campus life and help make our community more vibrant.

SVSU's commitment to global engagement runs deep. When the university formalized its international outreach commitment in the strategic plan, it acknowledged existing values and practices while expanding into new areas.

The initiatives featured in this publication reflect both longstanding programs and emerging opportunities that have arisen from ongoing conversations across campus. What they all share is the excitement that everyone at SVSU feels about connecting with the world beyond our campus.

Our foundation is strong, the momentum is building, and our community's appetite for international connection continues to grow. This publication both captures our history and highlights our bright future ahead.

**Dr. George Grant Jr**

*President*

*Saginaw Valley State University*

# OVERVIEW

*Dr. Lisa Krissoff Boehm, Provost and Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs,  
Dr. Dawn Hinton, Associate Provost, and  
Dr. Alice Yang, Director of the Office of International Programs and Senior International Officer*

Founded in 1963, Saginaw Valley State University has built a strong tradition of global engagement. Our first international partnership, established in 1981 with Shikoku University in Japan, remains active today through faculty exchanges. Since then, partnerships have expanded across Asia, Africa, Europe, South America, Australia and Canada.

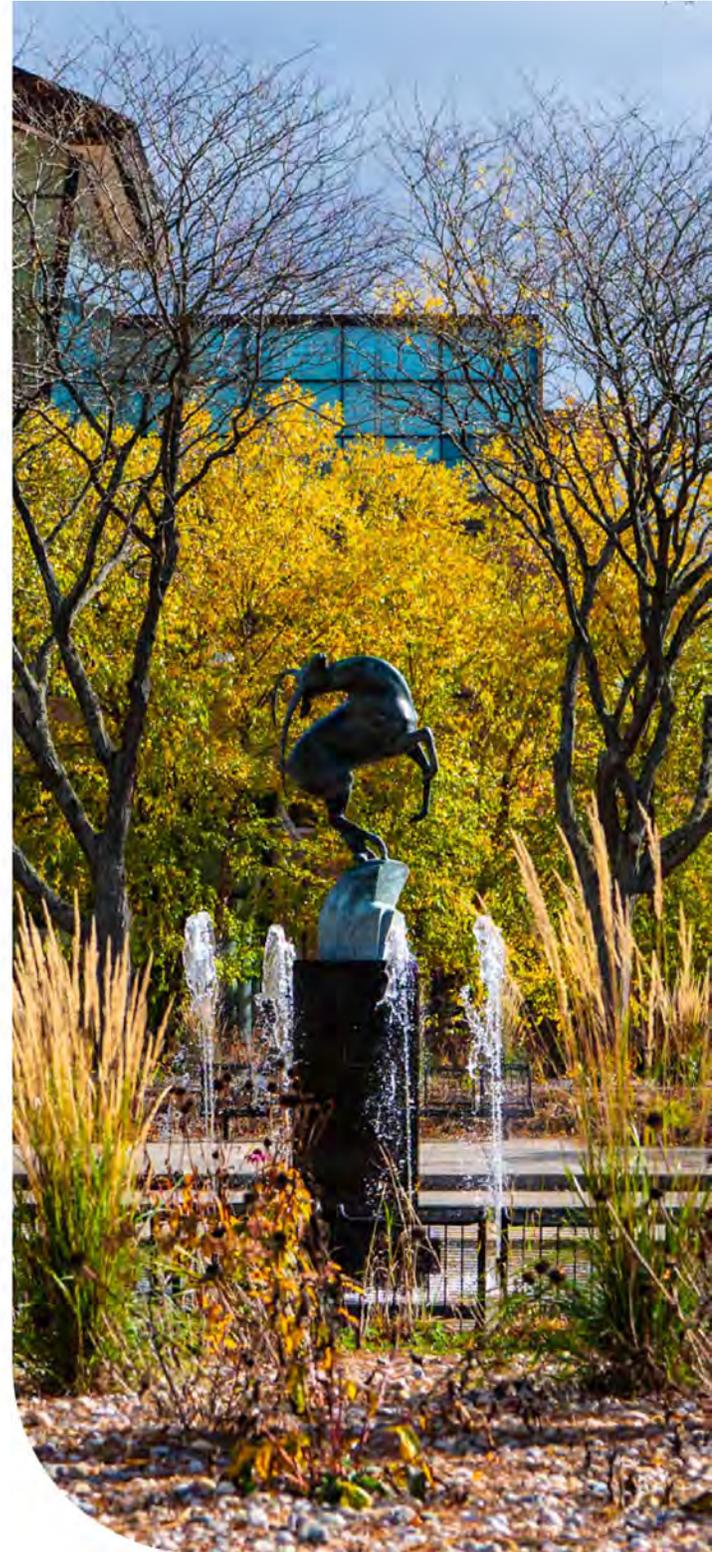
Through reflective stories of faculty, students and staff, our community continues to demonstrate the transformative power of global engagement. Faculty members have opened new horizons by leading study abroad programs that connect learning with lived experiences. The Programs of Distinction provide student leaders with globally focused courses enhancing their cultural competence and international connections. Currently, more than 300 international students from over 40 countries are enriching our campus with global perspectives, and international education staff have fostered connection and support across cultures. Together, they embody our shared commitment to a globally minded, interconnected community.

Looking ahead, the university is advancing a new phase of campus internationalization, guided by our five-year (2025-2030) strategic plan and informed by global trends in higher education.

## **Key initiatives include:**

- Establishing an Internationalization Advisory Council, International Student Services (ISS) Work Group and Study Abroad Advisory Committee
- Building an internationalization hub platform and a global alumni network
- Expanding global learning opportunities through online collaborations

These efforts will enhance international student services, increase international enrollment, diversify partnerships, embed global-learning outcomes into the curriculum and deepen institutional collaborations worldwide. Through these strategies, SVSU reaffirms its role as a campus where students and faculty engage meaningfully with global challenges — preparing graduates to thrive and lead in an interconnected world. ♦





**STAND** OUT

# **STUDENT SERVICES**

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# OVERVIEW OF THE OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

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# ABOUT THE OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS (OIP)

*Dr. Alice Yang, Director of the Office of International Programs, and  
Tina Demo, Administrative Secretary of the Office of International Programs*

The Office of International Programs (OIP) is composed of three units: International Student Services (ISS), International Partnerships and Study Abroad. Each of the three components plays an important role in global education and campus internationalization.

The ISS staff offers various services to approximately 300 international students from more than 40 countries. SVSU has created and maintained 20 international partnerships with higher-education institutions in Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, South America and Canada, including dual-degree programs, exchange programs and inbound short-term programs. SVSU students also have opportunities to study abroad around the world through faculty-led programs, exchange programs, direct enrollment programs, as well as study-abroad, global internship and teach-abroad programs offered by third-party providers.

The OIP works closely with international and American students, international partners and service providers to ensure access to essential resources — including immigration and academic advising, mental-health support, study abroad opportunities and guidance for short-term and partnership programs. Our team actively collaborates with faculty, staff and other departments to help students develop intercultural competencies for meaningful global and community engagement.

Whether students are navigating challenges, exploring study-abroad opportunities or seeking support through ISS, our office is here to help. We offer personalized in-person and virtual advising on topics such as course registration, F-1 and J-1 visa processes and legal status, curricular practical training (CPT)/optional practical training (OPT) applications, employment planning and study-abroad programs.

We also enrich the student experience through initiatives such as cultural immersion trips and activities, traditional festival celebrations, annual International Education Week, study-abroad fairs/events, the International Student Club (ISC), International Friends and Family Program, International Peer Program, monthly International Cardinal birthday parties, and a weekly shuttle service to local grocery stores and international markets. By fostering a culture of care and connection, we empower students to overcome obstacles, make informed decisions, thrive throughout their academic journeys and serve as cultural ambassadors for world peace. ♦



*Dr. Alice Yang and a student*



*OIP staff and student workers*



*International Food Festival*



Lunar New Year Celebration



Monthly Birthday Celebration



# SVSU STUDY ABROAD

Kal Spencer, Study Abroad Coordinator

SVSU offers a diverse range of study-abroad opportunities designed to meet students' academic goals, financial needs and personal interests. Programs vary in length, from full-semester and academic-year exchanges to short-term options as brief as one week. Comprehensive support is built into every program, including one-on-one advising, a required pre-departure orientation course, in-country support and a structured re-entry experience when students return.

Most SVSU students participate in faculty-led study-abroad programs — short-term, highly organized

trips led by SVSU faculty that combine academic coursework with international travel. These programs are especially popular among first-time travelers because all logistics are coordinated for the group. In summer 2025, SVSU nursing and socialwork students explored healthcare systems in Scotland and Tanzania as part of two separate faculty-led courses focused on global health.

Students looking for a longer or more independent experience may choose an exchange program with one of SVSU's international partner universities. These programs offer the option to study

abroad for a summer, semester or full academic year at a low cost, with tuition waived. In fall 2025, four SVSU students will attend Kansai Gaidai University in Japan — our most popular exchange site. Other standout options include a six-week general education program on the Italian coast in Sorrento, professional hospital shadowing in Europe through Atlantis, a study-abroad provider, and a semester-long Spanish immersion at the University of Salamanca. With options across disciplines and destinations, there's something for everyone in the SVSU study-abroad portfolio. ♦



*Through study abroad, I have gained confidence in my degree and the direction my life is taking."*

**- Kate Jackson**  
Studied in Australia 2025



Faculty-led trip to Tanzania

## SVSU STUDY ABROAD TRIPS DURING THE 2024-2025 ACADEMIC YEAR



### Red: Short-Term Abroad

London, England  
 Milan, Italy  
 Rome, Italy  
 Sorrento, Italy  
 Hikone, Japan  
 Madrid, Spain  
 Santiago, Spain

### Green: Semester Abroad

Gold Coast, Australia  
 Paros, Greece  
 Dublin, Ireland  
 Florence, Italy  
 Osaka, Japan  
 Puebla, Mexico  
 Amsterdam, Netherlands  
 Seoul, South Korea  
 Salamanca, Spain  
 Valencia, Spain

### Purple: Semester at Sea, 1 SVSU Student on Board

Bremerhaven, Germany  
 Tema, Ghana  
 Kochi, India  
 Mombasa, Kenya  
 Penang, Malaysia  
 Casablanca, Morocco  
 Cape Town, South Africa  
 A Coruña, Spain  
 Bangkok, Thailand  
 Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

### Blue: Faculty-Led Trips

Little Cayman, Cayman Islands  
 Nanchong, China  
 Prague, Czechia  
 Berlin, Germany  
 Accra, Ghana  
 Tokyo, Japan  
 Lisbon, Portugal  
 Edinburgh, Scotland  
 Arusha, Tanzania

# THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT SERVICES AT SVSU

Dr. Pat Shelley, International Student Advisor



Students, staff, and faculty on Mackinac Island

The International Student Services (ISS) unit of the Office of International Programs (OIP) gives support to our international students in a variety of ways, such as generating official acceptance documents. These are monitored every semester for every international student and updated as needed to confirm adequate class loads and, if applicable, any permitted off-campus employment.

Along with the Academic Advisement Center, we help international students register for courses to meet degree requirements and federal regulations. These regulations include a minimum of 12 credits

per semester for undergraduate students and 9 credits for graduate-level students. Only one online class is permitted per term.

As needed, we assist our international students with personal advising and connect them with services, which may include counseling or medical referrals, insurance coverage, meeting financial responsibilities, resolving family and housing issues, and employment advising. These tasks necessitate our collaboration with other offices on and off campus, such as the housing office, campus financial services, career services, counseling and medical professionals, and our insurance

company. Specific to employment advising, we help students apply for Curricular Practical Training (CPT), off campus employment related to their major, and Optional Practical Training (OPT) or post-graduation employment related to their major. Transportation arrangements may be made for initial arrival airport pickups, grocery shopping, applying for a driver's license and opening bank accounts.

Among the most rewarding of our responsibilities is the coordination of extracurricular cultural and community-involvement activities. The International Student Club (ISC) brings interested students together weekly for presentations



2022 International Orientation

about their home countries, group games and announcements about other campus activities. The two main annual activities of the ISC are the International Food Festival in the fall and the Intercultural Night talent show during the winter term.

For the International Food Festival, international students collaborate with the dining services staff during International Education Week to prepare and serve recipes from their home countries. It is one of the best-attended and most enjoyed luncheon experiences at the on-campus dining hall, the Marketplace.

Other activities during International Education Week include cultural activity tables, study-abroad presentations, speakers and panels. Intercultural Night is a showcase of talent, such as dancing, singing, playing musical instruments, reading poetry and a fashion show performed by international and domestic students.

Other cultural experiences that our office facilitates include mid-autumn and Lunar New Year celebrations, marching in the homecoming parade and trips to, among other places, Detroit, Mackinac Island, Dow Gardens, Frankenmuth and the Japanese Teahouse. Through the Student Life Office and CT 100 classes, we also encourage our students to participate in community service projects, such as with the Mid-Michigan Children's Museum, Habitat for Humanity, animal shelters and the Children's Zoo.

Our International Friends Program and International Peer Program give students the opportunity to interact and have cross-cultural experiences with members of the community and with fellow students. This may involve just getting together to talk over coffee or a meal, a small trip or a typical family activity.

For new arrivals, our international orientation the week before

classes begin provides a welcome to SVSU and needed information regarding university offices and services, basic skills testing, class registration, maintaining international student status, cultural adjustment and general wellness and safety advice.

Our Office of International Programs is here to help international students maintain their legal status and ensure they have a positive, productive educational experience. Our advisors and school officials who assist with these immigration services are called Designated School Officials (DSOs) for F-1 full-time students and Alternate Responsible Officers (AROs) for J-1 visa guest students.

You are welcome to contact and visit the OIP with any questions or concerns about international students so that we can work together to make their experience at SVSU successful. ♦

# A LIFE DEDICATED TO STUDENTS AND SERVICE

## A MEMOIR FROM SVSU'S INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ADVISOR

Dr. Pat Shelley, International Student Advisor



Pat Shelley handing out a red envelope at the Lunar New Year Celebration

Sixty years ago, some of my best friends at Saginaw High School were exchange students from Germany, Finland, Japan, Greece and Uruguay. During the summer between my junior and senior years in high school, I was also an exchange student for seven weeks with a family of six children in Germany. Those experiences motivated me a couple of years afterwards to study abroad during my junior year of college at the Philipps Universität in Marburg an der Lahn, Germany, with a scholarship from Rotary International. During college, my roommate at Alma College was from Nigeria.

I believe that those early experiences prepared me to empathize with the many international students I have met during my 20 years at SVSU. Prior to coming to SVSU,

I spent 35 years in the Saginaw Public Schools, primarily as an elementary-school principal.

Here at the university, I have taught English as a foreign language, German, communication and theatre as an adjunct professor. Although my primary role has been that of an international student advisor, my experiential learning with the Pit and Balcony Theatre in Saginaw brought me the opportunity to teach theater as a practitioner involved in over 25 shows, with 24 of them musicals. The role that stands out most to me, coincidentally, was when I played the King of Siam in the Rogers and Hammerstein production of *The King and I*, long before I came to work in the Office of International Programs here at SVSU.

My work here at SVSU has been a joy. The International Student Club, the International Food Festival, and Intercultural Night have helped us to convey to the campus and community for over 20 years the best of what our international students bring to our university.

These students from over 50 different countries are equally benefited by their educational, career and social experiences in the U.S. We have helped hundreds of students with registering for classes, meeting insurance needs, determining employment eligibility, following visa requirements and empathizing with personal issues. One of the most rewarding aspects of being an advisor is the International Student Club, which meets once a week for recreation, country presentations, planning cultural events, volunteering for community service and just making friends with other students from the U.S. and around the world.

In my spare time, I have been involved with church, choral singing, Rotary Club, Scouting, playing guitar, camping, trying to acquire more foreign language skills and going for long walks.

My wife and I share five children, six grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. I find my inspiration in the people I meet everywhere: my family, my friends, my students, my coworkers and my community. I don't know where I found it, but my guiding philosophy, starting with my first year of teaching in 1970, has been, "They won't care how much you know until they know how much you care." ♦

# GLOBALIZATION THROUGH STUDENT SUPPORT

Hannah Turk-Lerash, International Student Advisor



Students playing a game at International Orientation

I never imagined when I accepted the role of international student advisor that I would directly contribute to the globalization of SVSU. During the past seven months in this role, I have been able to assist many students with selecting appropriate courses, navigating confusing immigration situations and supporting students through their personal issues.

To proactively address these issues, one initiative I developed is requiring new students to attend a first-semester appointment. This appointment not only supports retention efforts, but it also creates an opportunity to check in with students to better understand and assist in their cultural adjustment. The students who took advantage of this opportunity have been more actively engaged in creating a fulfilling experience, such as doing well in classes, registering for classes in upcoming semesters, gaining on-campus employment or joining student organizations.

Additionally, I have been diligently working on our international student orientation. International orientation is the first impression of SVSU for the incoming international students, and attending orientation is vital for students to find a welcoming community here. This orientation is designed around the students' needs, such as managing jet lag, course selections, immigration regulations and cultural adjustments. Placement testing, pre-registration and tuition payments have become a pre-arrival concern to help engage incoming students prior to their arrival at SVSU. Engaging students prior to their arrival will help them feel more comfortable with the significant transition of attending school in a foreign country.

I have also seen the impact our international orientation leaders have on our new students, so I have arranged additional training

Hannah and Pat are two of SVSU's international student advisors. Their efforts foster a friendly community for incoming and current international students.



Hannah Turk-Lerash

for them. This training will include additional resources for student leaders on intercultural communication, degree requirements and icebreakers, providing more confident leaders and students.

Lastly, I am constantly collaborating with other offices to provide seamless services for our international students. This collaboration provides a greater appreciation of how to best adapt processes across the offices to ensure both domestic and international students learn in an equitable and student-focused environment. Looking ahead, the offices at SVSU hope that by engaging students, they will contribute to the larger globalization of the SVSU campus as well as achieving great personal growth. ♦

# MY ROLE IN INTERNATIONAL RECRUITMENT AT SVSU

Abbey Swanson, International Admission Counselor



Abbey Swanson and a group of prospective and admitted students at a cafe in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam



Abbey Swanson and a group of students at Feria Educativa Internacional (FEI) fair in Arequipa, Peru

Serving as the international admission counselor for SVSU has been a truly rewarding and humbling experience. Working in this role allows me to interact with others from around the world while also empowering students to take their next steps confidently. I've had the privilege of traveling to five countries – Cambodia, Canada, Colombia, Peru and Vietnam – to attract talented students to SVSU. Each country, unique in terms of its own history, customs and culture, has provided me with an enriching experience both professionally and personally.

The most valuable experiences I have had while traveling have been talking with students during fairs because I learn each student's unique desires, dreams and situations. The students are at a

very exciting time in their lives, and I feel fortunate to take part in their decision-making process. Each trip has brought with it new insights and perspectives to be learned and shared across cultures. Engaging directly with the students and their families allowed me to share SVSU in a meaningful, face-to-face manner – something that virtual meetings can't always replicate.

Meeting our partner agents has been equally productive, with hopes to align strategies for recruitment and ensure that students receive adequate support and a seamless transition from agent to university. So far, having worked with agencies in Cambodia, Colombia and Vietnam, I have learned more about the student markets and how best to position the university in each

country. Agents serve a vital role in easing student stress and creating a pipeline of students to the institution. They are also key in establishing trust with the parents, while providing in-country networking and outreach events.

Going forward, the international admissions team plans to travel to the same five countries and to expand into markets in Taiwan, Thailand, Mexico, India, South Korea and Indonesia. It has been truly an honor to be part of SVSU's commitment to globalize its mission and expand access to quality education to students abroad. It is my hope to continue to bring talented students to our campus to learn, build new friendships and experience the Great Lakes Bay region. ♦

# SVSU INTERNATIONAL STUDENT DATA

## COUNTRY OF NATIONALITY FOR 2025-26 INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

<i>Albania</i>	<i>Netherlands</i>
<i>Argentina</i>	<i>New Zealand</i>
<i>Australia</i>	<i>Nigeria</i>
<i>Austria</i>	<i>Pakistan</i>
<i>Bangladesh</i>	<i>Peru</i>
<i>Brazil</i>	<i>Philippines</i>
<i>Bulgaria</i>	<i>Russia</i>
<i>Cameroon</i>	<i>Rwanda</i>
<i>Canada</i>	<i>Saudi Arabia</i>
<i>China</i>	<i>Sierra Leone</i>
<i>Dominican Republic</i>	<i>Slovenia</i>
<i>France</i>	<i>South Africa</i>
<i>Germany</i>	<i>Spain</i>
<i>Ghana</i>	<i>Sweden</i>
<i>Hungary</i>	<i>Taiwan</i>
<i>India</i>	<i>Tanzania</i>
<i>Ireland</i>	<i>Thailand</i>
<i>Japan</i>	<i>Turkey</i>
<i>Kenya</i>	<i>United Arab Emirates</i>
<i>Korea</i>	<i>Uganda</i>
<i>Kosovo</i>	<i>United Kingdom</i>
<i>Malaysia</i>	<i>Ukraine</i>
<i>Mexico</i>	<i>Vietnam</i>
<i>Moldova</i>	<i>Zimbabwe</i>
<i>Nepal</i>	

More Than 300  
International  
Students Come  
From More Than  
40 Countries



## INTERNATIONAL STUDENT GROWTH- FALL 2025

38% Growth in  
International  
Enrollment at SVSU

82% Increase in  
International  
Freshmen

# FINDING A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

## MY JOURNEY AS AN INTERNATIONAL STUDENT-ATHLETE AT SVSU

Benjamin Wainman, SVSU Alum



Benjamin Wainman swimming at a championship meet

When I first arrived at Saginaw Valley State University, I was a wide-eyed teenager from Australia, thousands of miles from home. I came to SVSU to pursue my education and continue my journey as a competitive swimmer. What I didn't realize then was that SVSU would become much more than a place to train and study; it would become a second home.

SVSU gave me an opportunity to grow not only as an athlete but as a person. From the beginning, the support I received from the Office of International Programs, the coaching staff, my professors and the broader Cardinal community helped me feel welcomed and empowered. Adjusting to life in a new country is never easy, but being part of the swim team gave

me a sense of belonging and purpose. Every early-morning practice, every meet and every team-bonding activity reinforced the idea that I was part of something bigger than myself.

One of the most valuable aspects of being a student-athlete at SVSU was the emphasis placed on both academic and athletic excellence. I was challenged in the classroom while being pushed to reach new heights in the pool. The coaching staff understood the balance required to succeed in both areas and continually provided the mentorship and flexibility I needed to thrive. My professors were equally supportive, always willing to accommodate travel schedules and help me stay on top of my academic work. During my time

at SVSU, I was fortunate to serve as team captain and represent the university at multiple high-level championship meets. I was also able to set personal bests and school records and witness the growth of our team as a cohesive and competitive unit.

Being an international student-athlete came with its share of challenges, but the university's resources and encouragement helped me overcome them. Cultural adjustments, homesickness and complex visa situations were always supported at the Office of International Programs. Whether it was through international student meetups or advising support, I always felt like I had people in my corner.

SVSU gave me the chance to pursue a degree, travel across the country to compete and make lifelong friends from both the U.S. and all over the world. At SVSU, I learned discipline, time management, resilience and leadership, skills that are invaluable for a successful career.

Since graduating, I've returned to Australia to train full-time to prepare for the Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 2028, and I carry with me the lessons and values that SVSU instilled in me. I am proud to have been a Cardinal, and I am grateful for the opportunities, mentorship and support I received throughout my time there. SVSU helped me believe that no goal is too distant even if it's halfway around the world. ♦



Nimnan Wuyep with numerous trophies from his forensics competitions

## **BECOMING MORE THAN A VISITOR**

*Nimnan Wuyep, SVSU Alum*

From the moment I arrived at SVSU as an international student from Nigeria, I knew I wanted to be more than just a visitor. My journey here has been deeply shaped by opportunities to foster global understanding, celebrate diversity and create a campus where cultures don't just coexist but collaborate.

My most visible contribution was through leadership in the African Student Association (ASA). As president, I worked to revitalize ASA's presence on campus by organizing events that invited both African and non-African students into meaningful cultural exchanges. We collaborated with other student organizations and hosted panel discussions, dance workshops and storytelling nights that highlighted the richness of

the African continent beyond stereotypes. Our flagship event during Intercultural Night brought together over 500 students from different backgrounds. It wasn't just a celebration; it was an education.

Another space where I found myself acting as a cultural bridge was in speech and debate. Traveling with SVSU's forensics team to competitions across the country allowed me to engage in dialogue with students from every region and background. In each round, I shared stories shaped by my experiences as a Nigerian immigrant and, in return, I got to hear how others made sense of the world through their own lenses. Sometimes we debated politics, other times we performed poetry or prose, but every weekend was

a lesson in empathy. I enjoyed winning, but it was also about the quiet magic of realizing that even in disagreement, minds can meet.

Throughout my time at SVSU, I have witnessed how globalization is not limited to travel. It is about the relationships we build and the willingness to learn from one another. My goal was never just to be an international student. It was to help make SVSU a place where every student feels like a global citizen. I am most grateful to the professors, coaches, staff and faculty who made my experience a memorable one. I will carry their efforts with me into the world, and I hope to honor their impact by contributing to better things wherever I go. ♦

# CELEBRATING COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND CONNECTION

## THE AFRICAN STUDENTS ASSOCIATION'S ROLE IN GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT AT SVSU

*Ridweida Braimah and Esther Cariba  
Co-presidents of the African Students Association*



*Group photo of the members of ASA*



*Members of ASA at International Food Festival*

As leaders of the African Students Association (ASA) at SVSU, we have had the privilege of helping create a space where African students, as well as all students interested in African culture, can feel seen, heard, educated and celebrated. Our organization promotes cross-cultural understanding, unity and global awareness through a variety of vibrant programs and initiatives. ASA serves not only as a cultural home for African students but also as a bridge to the broader SVSU community.

One of our most rewarding experiences this year was participating in the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) presentations. We had the opportunity to educate community members, many of whom were older adults, on life in Ghana and Tanzania to prepare them for future travel with insights on culture, customs and everyday experiences. The engagement was meaningful, with participants asking thoughtful questions and expressing genuine curiosity. It reminded us that internationalization at SVSU

extends beyond students and includes the wider community.

ASA also proudly contributed to the International Food Festival, where we served popular African dishes, with a special focus this year on East African cuisine. It was an opportunity to highlight not only the richness of African food but also the stories, spices and traditions that accompany it. The festival allowed us to engage students, faculty and staff in an immersive cultural exchange through food – one of the most

universal and powerful ways to connect. We also collaborated with several registered student organizations, most recently the Multicultural Student Organization, to explore the cultural significance of African beading. Students participated in hands-on activities that brought traditional art to life. These moments of shared creativity deepened appreciation for the beauty and symbolism woven into African heritage. It was especially meaningful to share our culture with students who were eager to learn and to engage in reciprocal cultural exchange.

We have also welcomed guest speakers, such as Mr. Nana Kwame Akowuah, the lead accountant at Globadigm Consulting and an SVSU alum. As a former international student himself, his talk on financial literacy offered both practical advice and inspiration. These sessions created a platform where lived experiences were honored and celebrated and motivated our members and guests alike. Our participation in Intercultural Night, hosted by the Office of International Programs, was another highlight of the year. ASA contributed to the program through a vibrant fashion show, musical performances and traditional dance. Preparing for the event brought us closer together as a team and exposed us to other cultures in ways that fostered mutual learning and respect.

While our journey has been full of meaningful achievements, it has not been without challenges. One ongoing effort has been engaging students outside of our immediate community and encouraging participation from those who may be unfamiliar with African cultures or who hold misconceptions. We also recognize the importance of

representing the full diversity of the African continent and ensuring our events reflect more than just a few countries or regions. These challenges have pushed us to think creatively, collaborate intentionally and design experiences that are welcoming, inclusive and educational for all. As we continue to grow, we remain committed to breaking barriers and broadening our reach.

For many international students, coming to SVSU involves more than adapting to a new academic environment. It often means navigating unfamiliar spaces, overcoming language and cultural differences, and managing the uncertainty that comes with being far from home. Questions about belonging, identity, and visibility frequently linger beneath the surface. That is why ASA has become more than just a student organization. It is a place of safety, affirmation, and community. We have seen firsthand how much it means for students to walk into a room and feel understood without explanation; to laugh at the same jokes, to hear their language spoken, and to eat food that tastes like home. That sense of belonging is powerful, and we are proud to have created a space where others can find it.

None of this would have been possible without the incredible people who believed in us. We are grateful for the support of the SVSU community. Associate Provost Dr. Dawn Hinton, one of our advisors, met with us regularly and provided invaluable guidance. We are also deeply thankful for the mentorship of Professor Joseph C. Ofori-Dankwa, whose encouragement has been instrumental in our development. Our heartfelt thanks go to them, to our university partners, and to the Office of International Programs



*ASA member performing at Intercultural Night*

for giving us the platform and confidence to thrive.

We are proud to be shaping a community where global perspectives are not only welcomed but celebrated. ASA will continue working to ensure that SVSU becomes an even more inclusive and culturally connected campus for all. ♦



**STAND** OUT

# **FACULTY ENGAGEMENT**

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## GLOBAL LEARNING, TEACHING AND RESEARCHING

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# ADVANCING GLOBAL LEARNING THROUGH INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMS

*Dr. Byungil Ahn, Professor of History*



*Byungil Ahn with students on a study-abroad trip to Korea*

Since I joined SVSU in 2008, it has been a joy to be a part of SVSU's international programs and to contribute to global education in our Great Lakes Bay Region. Those programs including leading study-abroad trips to China and Korea, supervising the SVSU Korean club and organizing the Lunar New Year celebrations in Midland. Through these activities, I have witnessed the growth of students and experience my own personal and academic development.

Most memorably, Dr. David Nichols, SVSU professor of philosophy, and I took students to China to let them experience the daily lives of ordinary people in rural China in 2011. In addition to Beijing, Xian, Guangzhou, and Hong Kong, students went to a rural village, where I conducted my fieldwork and visited a kindergarten, a village clinic, an elementary school, and a village temple. We were also invited by

rural families to join them for lunch and eat what they usually eat. We also visited a local university and attended their English class. After class, students invited us to play a basketball game with them. The villagers and college students showed us their daily life and how they thought about their lives and the world. After hearing about the Chinese students' personal concerns and worries, my students told me how similar the people in China are to them, even though they live across the Pacific Ocean. They came to see the Chinese people not as foreign or exotic but as friends.

My goal for the study-abroad programs in Korea also evolved with similar themes as the students came to feel close to people who live in Korea. Students stayed overnight at a Buddhist temple and taught English to North Korean defectors for a week. They also visited sister universities in Korea

and developed friendships with students who planned to study abroad at SVSU.

Another fulfilling experience was supervising SVSU's Korean club. Many club members attended SVSU's study-abroad program and studied at our sister universities in Korea, which motivated me to set up an SVSU Korean exchange scholarship grant. This grant supports two students who participate in SVSU's study-abroad program in Korea every year. In fact, their experiences in Korea touched their lives so profoundly that some moved to Korea after their graduation to pursue graduate degrees, careers and even marriage. Those who settled in Korea became my lifelong friends. They continued to contact me — one invited me to their wedding and another sought advice about applying for a job.

I also educate the local community about East Asian society. For the past three years, I have participated in organizing the Lunar New Year celebration in Midland, which has welcomed more than 2,000 attendees.

My participation in the programs extends my academic interest and enriches my classes at SVSU. My involvement and experience in international programs taught me an important lesson: As the great Buddha taught us, you cannot help others without helping yourself at the same time because there are no borders or boundaries between yourself and others. ♦

# VISUALIZING PEACE A GRAPHIC DESIGN PROJECT

Michael Crawford, Adjunct Faculty of Art



SVSU students designing the pins in class

I have been exploring globally with student groups since 2006. Travel immersions, no matter their duration, affect the individual in a positive way. Many times, the traveler is not completely versed in language or nuances of different cultures. Such immersions cause the traveler to become more keenly aware of the use of color, shape and pattern to arrive at some level of understanding.

During my travels, I have witnessed several students return with a better sense of place and a more active desire to be involved in their community and their own governance. On a trip to Japan in 2019, our student group visited Nagasaki and toured the Atomic Bomb Museum there.

The approach to the museum was quite sobering. We learned that the large flat field we were walking through had once been a thriving neighborhood that was completely leveled by an atomic blast. Once stepping down inside the museum, we saw displays of the horror and destruction caused by the war on Japan from the U.S. We also saw several thousand paper cranes and artwork that had been sent in by children from all over the world in support of peace.

In addition, I noticed waves of Japanese elementary-school children in uniforms and wearing backpacks, several of which were adorned with dangling trinkets from very small bells to plush bears.

The Peace Project came from this initial interaction. In this project, SVSU graphic design students craft designs that interpret peace through the three lenses of government, people and nature. Hundreds of designs have been conceived, peer reviewed, and rendered by hand or digitally with a limited amount of buttons made each semester of the final designs. These pin-backed buttons are sent off annually to the Atomic Bomb Museum for the elementary students to choose from. Japanese elementary students are required to visit a museum annually in either Nagasaki or Hiroshima to never forget what happened to their ancestors. The Peace Project hopes to offer a small gift of peace to someone we will likely never meet, and it is also a personal reflection to always choose peace. ♦



Peace pins on display in Japan

# DEPARTMENT OF NURSING AND INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE

UNIQUE INSIGHTS FOR NURSING STUDENTS AND FACULTY MEMBERS

*Dr. Sally Decker, Professor Emeritus of Nursing*



*SVSU faculty with Jinan University faculty for a 30 year partnership celebration*

Offering opportunities for students and faculty to gain new perspectives through knowledge exchange and interactions with international colleagues is an important role of educational facilities. These opportunities for the students and faculty in the Department of Nursing have included faculty-led study-abroad opportunities, international faculty research projects and presentations, Chinese scholars in residence and Fulbright experiences.

I have had the opportunity to work with students in study-abroad experiences since 2003. Students and I have learned at the Nightingale Archives in London, Ballarat University in Australia, the Center for Disease in Nepal, and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland. We have also enjoyed 32 years of working with Chinese scholars at SVSU.

As a result of the interactions faculty members have had, students have been able to experience unique insights into healthcare and culture that would not have been available in other study-abroad experiences. Following the faculty exchange with Ballarat University in Australia, students were offered the unique opportunity to join in classes and social activities with Australian nursing students and faculty members. As a result

of my Fulbright experience in Ireland, students were able to experience places at the Royal College, such as the anatomy lab, that would not have otherwise been available. They were able to listen to presentations directly from the teaching faculty in Ireland. Other faculty members in the Department of Nursing have also had similar opportunities to craft unique study experiences for students due to their international relationships. ♦



*Group of faculty members who have led study-abroad programs*

# TANZANIA NURSING STUDY ABROAD

MAY 2025

*Dr. Judith Cox, Associate Professor of Nursing, and  
Dr. Robert Kelch, Adjunct Instructor of Nursing*

With the increasing diversity in the United States, it is important for nursing students, as well as all healthcare professionals, to understand the beliefs, values and practices of patients and families from different cultures and nationalities. One way to enhance cross-cultural understanding is through study-abroad programs. The Department of Nursing, within the College of Health and Human Services at SVSU, typically offers two or three international study-abroad trips of one to two weeks' duration every year for bachelor of science in nursing (BSN) students. One such trip was a two-week journey to northern Tanzania in May 2025.

An American of Tanzanian ancestry who lives and works in Arusha coordinated all the in-country classes, tours, housing, meals and transportation. Tours and in-depth visits were conducted with a variety of hospitals, clinics, hospice services and nursing schools in northern Tanzania, which focused on healthcare and the nurses' roles. They conversed with Tanzanian nursing students, allowing for insight on the differences between American and Tanzanian nursing education.

Local healthcare professionals taught the students about the Tanzanian healthcare system and other healthcare topics, homeopathic medicine, herbal medicine, and Maasai tribal health issues. Students also worked with the Empowered Girls programs, an after-school club for Maasai girls at several boarding schools



*Study abroad group photo taken in Tanzania*

that teaches self-esteem, women's health, and the importance of education and provides job skills and career education to the otherwise marginalized girls. Nursing students taught basic first-aid skills and enjoyed answering questions at the schools we visited. Students also enjoyed safari excursions and the local area during their free time away from learning.

After the trip, the students reflected on the positive experience that the trip brought to them. Between engaging discussions, learning about Tanzanian healthcare, and visiting the local area, students reflected on a deeper appreciation of diversity. Many students expressed how the warmth, resilience, and sense of community they witnessed challenged their previous assumptions about happiness and material wealth. They were particularly moved by the Tanzanian people's ability to find joy in simplicity and connection,

despite their limited resources. This prompted students to critically reflect on their own lifestyles, which are often marked by busyness and consumption, and inspired a desire to make meaningful changes.

Because of this study abroad experience, the students now understand new perspectives of global healthcare. They learned how traveling abroad allows for personal growth, as some noted a commitment to living more intentionally and embracing cultural humility and fostering a mindset grounded in gratitude and respect for different ways of life. Study-abroad experiences provide an enriched and potentially life-impacting opportunity that cannot be gained in a traditional classroom or laboratory. ♦

# SVSU'S SERVICE AND IMPACT IN NEPAL

*Dr. Rene Hernandez, Associate Professor of Health Sciences*

In May 2015, shortly after devastating earthquakes struck Nepal, a team of SVSU healthcare providers traveled to the region with the mission of offering urgent medical assistance and support. Their efforts not only addressed immediate healthcare needs but also demonstrated the compassion and dedication of our university community in times of crisis.

Building on this impactful experience, in 2018, a group of undergraduate and graduate students from SVSU embarked on a study-abroad trip back to Nepal. During this visit, they collaborated with a small village in the Himalayas to develop a culturally sensitive evacuation plan. Understanding that effective strategies must be rooted in the community's unique needs and perspectives, the students conducted interviews with village residents. This grassroots approach ensured that their evacuation plan was tailored specifically to the local context, thereby fostering trust and collaboration between the villagers and the students.

The culmination of their efforts was a comprehensive evacuation plan that was published and shared with the village to enhance preparedness for potential future disasters. Furthermore, the students had the opportunity to present their research and the details of their project at the Student Global Leadership Conference held in London, England, the following year. This platform allowed them to share insights and engage with other global leaders, which amplified the impact of their work and the lessons learned from the community in Nepal.

These initiatives reflect SVSU's dedication to service, learning, and global citizenship. We are proud of the significant contributions our healthcare provider team and student body have made to the village in Nepal, and we look forward to continuing our mission of fostering global understanding and improving lives through education and community engagement. ♦



*Rene Hernandez and acquaintance in Nepal*



*Students on a Faculty-led Trip to Nepal*

# FACULTY-LED TRIPS TO NEPAL

*Dr. Beth Roe, Professor of Nursing*



*Group photo of students and Nepali children*



*Group photo of students with native Nepalis*

In May 2013 and again in 2015, nursing students participated in faculty-led, study-abroad trips to Nepal with nursing professors Marcia Shannon, Sally Decker and Beth Roe. While in Nepal, along with learning about healthcare in a variety of settings, including hospitals, community clinics, schools, colleges and mental-health facilities, students and faculty were able to help the Nepalese people through health practices.

Prior to the visit, students received topics from healthcare providers in Nepal and subsequently developed evidence-based presentations that they delivered to Nepalese audiences. The topics included information on best practices to prevent surgical-site and urinary-tract infections along with information regarding nursing and nursing education in the U.S.

After a three-day trek in the Himalayan mountains, we visited a school in rural Nepal, where SVSU students and faculty interacted with Nepalese school children. While there, we delivered lessons to the children on hand washing and other health-related topics. In addition, the SVSU students brought small gifts and letters from school children in the U.S. In turn, with the assistance of the students, the Nepalese children wrote letters back to the children in the U.S.

Along with professional visits to healthcare sites, these trips also included sightseeing to temples, monasteries, villages, gardens and traditional healing areas. Treks were also made up into the Himalayas, where the students got a glimpse of Mount Everest. Students were able to learn about healthcare and culture in Nepal and create a meaningful connection by providing healthcare expertise to the Nepalese people. ♦

# LEVERAGING INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE TO CREATE STUDY ABROAD

Dr. Andrea Frederick, Professor of Nursing



Students at the poverty simulation located in Scotland

The seed for an interdisciplinary SVSU College of Health and Human Services-organized study abroad to Geneva, Switzerland, was a trip years in the making. Comparative study of global healthcare systems was a major component of my doctoral program. That included a trip to Geneva. With that experience in mind, I created a comprehensive study abroad for SVSU students that included the United Nations, the International Red Cross/Red Crescent IFRC, and the World Health Organization. It also included extracurricular exploration of the old city and the countryside of Switzerland and France around Lake Geneva. Only one of the students was an experienced international traveler. Others claimed international travel only as far as Canada. Some had never left our local region of Michigan.

The guide at the IFRC succinctly summarized our experience. She

said that bringing these young people from the United States to see their world in a broader context was what was important. Our inexperienced students from a regional public university in Michigan saw their place in a much bigger world. Afterward, one student shared that she had discovered new confidence and passion for helping others through an expanded world view.

A Fulbright Scholar award to Edinburgh Napier University (ENU) in Edinburgh, Scotland, was the genesis for SVSU study abroad three years later. Colleagues at ENU were intrigued by the interprofessional healthcare mega simulation for over 100 students developed at SVSU and demonstrated at ENU. They wanted to build their new relationship with SVSU. An interprofessional SVSU College of Health and Human Services study-abroad trip was organized to take place during the annual ENU

Interprofessional Learning (IPL) week. SVSU students partnered with ENU students for the SVSU interprofessional simulation as modified for ENU educational objectives and Scottish culture. Beyond the academics, the group toured Edinburgh and Stirling castles, saw Glencoe Valley and cruised Loch Ness, and visited Rosslyn Chapel.

These concise descriptions of study abroad trips belie the amount of detailed thought and planning required to make them successful: impactful yet affordable, educational, and fun. In that sense, each study abroad appears to stand alone. As students leverage one international experience into the next, they are building lasting relationships with colleagues and friends around the world. ♦

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*I think that I now understand how hard it is for people in poverty to support themselves. I think that the system is mostly to blame. I think that I will be less judgmental towards poor people and people on benefits.”*

- Student comment on the poverty simulation

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# COMPLEMENTARY AND ALTERNATIVE MEDICINE USAGE ACROSS NATIONS

Marcia Shannon, Professor Emeritus of Nursing



Students assisting a community assessment program in Indonesia

Some students have used the study-abroad experience to plunge into professional writing and presentations. SVSU nursing student Jessica is one such student. She joined in on two study abroad trips with faculty member Marcia Shannon — one to Nepal, also with Professor Elizabeth Roe, and the other to Indonesia. While studying in both places, she became interested in complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) practices.

In Nepal, she learned about Ayurvedic medicine practices that include, but are not limited to, herbal remedies, nutritional alterations, massage, yoga, and exercise to promote health. She also learned about “healing bowls” that use vibrations and sound to heal the mind and spirit. Nepal also incorporates spiritualism into daily life. For instance, many

Buddhists visit holy sites daily to complete the Kora, a spiritual walk and meditation around a mound-shaped structure that has relics inside that represent Buddha. They spin prayer wheels as they walk to send prayers to the sky. Jessica spoke with many health practitioners and even experienced some of the medical treatments in Nepal.

In Indonesia, she learned about acupuncture — piercing of the body in specific places to heal specific ailments by using the body’s own life force. Acupuncture is used for many chronic diseases. Jessica, and the other students, visited many different healers in Indonesia including shamans, therapeutic touch practitioners, and bone setters. People often view these practitioners as being safer and less expensive than Western medicine. They also believe that these healers can deal with bad/

evil spirits and emotional issues better than traditional doctors.

Jessica decided to use her newfound knowledge to write a paper for the Global Science and Technology Forum’s Second Annual Worldwide Nursing Conference in Singapore. Healthcare professionals from about a dozen nations, including the U.S., attended the conference and shared their papers. Jessica submitted a paper, titled “Complementary and Alternative Medicine Usage Across Nations,” in which she discusses how a chronic disease can be treated differently across the U.S., Nepal, and Indonesia. Her paper was selected for the award “Best Student Paper” at the conference, and she was invited to publish her paper in the peer-reviewed journal published by the sponsoring institution. ♦

# **SOFAS OR STUDY ABROAD?**

## **STUDENT INSIGHTS**

*Marcia Shannon, Professor Emeritus of Nursing*

Recently, one of my sisters said to me, “I don’t understand why you waste so much money on travel. Your kids can’t inherit your memories, and your students could take a class much cheaper.” This comment provoked many thoughts – not all of them friendly. How do you explain all the riches that the world has to offer to someone who has never traveled? For my entire life, I have not only traveled personally but I have also taken groups of nursing and healthcare students to many destinations, including Jinan University in Guangzhou, China.

In the nursing department, and in the courses I teach, such as mental health nursing, the value of international travel for students is clear. Time spent on travel and study in another country and environment has the potential to have a significant impact on student learning both personally and professionally. Students return as changed individuals and better nurses because of their experience. They add so much richness to class discussions back on campus that they themselves can positively affect the cultural competence of their peers. In nursing, it is recognized that we can’t truly care for a person unless we understand and respect their culture and views of health.

Research shows that international healthcare educational experiences can not only increase students’ cognitive knowledge but

also encourage personal growth, help students become more aware and accepting of other cultures, and aid students’ understanding of how context influences healthcare outcomes. For students, studying abroad allows for broader worldviews and a better understanding of themselves.

### **SELF-CONFIDENCE**

Students report that their self-confidence grows when they have to learn to use public transportation, negotiate for a better price from a street vendor or converse with people without knowing their language.

### **DIFFERENCES**

While students learned that China was a different place to work, live and eat, they also learned that there are as many similarities among people and cultures from different countries as there are differences. Many students are surprised to learn that the family, not the individual, is often the smallest unit discussed in China. An individual’s concerns are subordinate to the needs of the family or community.

Our Chinese hosts discussed their support of the “one child rule” established in 1979 to limit population growth so the country could prosper. Despite what families wanted in terms of number of children, they complied and had only one. One student

reacted to this by stating, “The U.S. is all about me, me and me. We can maybe learn from other nations to broaden our perspectives and even our caring.”

### **COMMUNICATION**

Students were encouraged to go out on their own. The first time they went to a restaurant and ordered their own food, they found several of the orders incorrect. They came up with a coping technique. They appointed one spokesperson each meal to order, told servers right away that they did not speak Chinese, slowed their rate of speech and utilized a phrase book. It worked!

### **HOME**

We were invited to many homes to meet families and share wonderful meals and discussion. In many cases, we met extended family also. The family dynamic in China is often different than the U.S. Very often, parents live with children, especially after the birth of a child. We learned to make Jowza (tea) the right way and to try many different kinds of tasty food. Most of us brought home recipes to share some of the foods with family and friends.

### **ALTERNATIVE AND COMPLEMENTARY MEDICINE**

We learned that there are viable options to Western medicine. Diagnosis in China is sometimes

different than in America and may also involve acupuncture. We were able to speak with many patients and actually see them progress. We all became more open to studying and accepting other types of treatments besides Western medicine that patients believe in and that often work.

## CONCLUSION

Studying in another country is challenging, but it can also introduce students and faculty to opportunities and challenges that can't be created in the classroom at home. International experiences can have a long-term impact on students that is meaningful far after the semester ends.

Students grow in their self-confidence about their abilities. Students also challenge their current thinking about their chosen profession when confronted with new ideas from other places. My students reported being more open to differing ideas about what constitutes health and healthcare because of study abroad.

As students share their experiences and learning with contacts outside the university, the students' insights impact the broader community. I hope this motivates you to get off the sofa and experience all the learning opportunities the world has to offer. ♦



*Students studying abroad in Indonesia*

# PERSONAL REFLECTIONS ON STUDY ABROAD AND FACULTY EXCHANGE

Dr. David Berry, Professor of Kinesiology



David Berry

Drawing from my own academic and professional journey, I have had the privilege of leading three interprofessional study abroad programs in Guangzhou, China, one athletic training-specific service-learning trip to Puerto Rico, and several interprofessional collaboration meetings in Hong Kong, St. Lucia, South Africa, Australia and Saudi Arabia for the American Red Cross and the American Heart Association. Most recently (SP/SU 2025), I spent a semester teaching intercultural education at Shikoku University in Tokushima, Japan.

The interprofessional trips to Guangzhou facilitated collaboration among athletic training students, nursing students, occupational therapy graduate students and exercise science majors. Our first trip in 2013 offered lessons about healthcare education in China. Although we intended to observe athletic training in action, we discovered that the term held a different meaning for them. Instead, we saw physical education classes and observed students participating in gender-segregated instruction, which sparked rich conversations during our daily debriefs.

The Puerto Rico trip combined athletic-training instruction with service learning. Students explored the differences in athletic-training education between Puerto Rico and the mainland United States, observed healthcare delivery in winter-league baseball, and participated in strength and conditioning practices.

The most memorable and transformative aspect of the experience was our service project: preparing a Christian mission camp for the upcoming season. Students refurbished and painted a gazebo, each contributing a personal artistic symbol that represented their identity and the meaning of the experience.

The interprofessional collaboration meetings in Hong Kong, St. Lucia, South Africa, Australia and Saudi Arabia, on behalf of the American Red Cross and American Heart Association, were a direct result of my service to the university and the profession. The workshop broadened my understanding of global first aid priorities, highlighted the urgent need for data and research, and underscored the potential of technology-driven education. Engaging with international colleagues offered valuable insights into culturally diverse approaches to first aid and helping behaviors, thereby reinforcing the importance of collaboration and innovation in advancing global emergency care education.

Teaching intercultural education at Shikoku University allowed me to engage Japanese students in exploring global perspectives through health, sport and communication topics. I delivered lessons that compared American and Japanese cultural practices, including athletic training, CPR instruction and community service. This experience enhanced my ability to adapt content for English-language learners, foster meaningful cross-cultural dialogue, and promote global citizenship and mutual respect in an academic setting. ♦

## THE IMPACT OF INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERING, SERVICE LEARNING, AND STUDY-ABROAD PROGRAMS

*Dr. David Berry, Professor of Kinesiology*



*Students building a gazebo in Puerto Rico*

International volunteerism, service-learning programs, and study abroad opportunities have had a profound impact on students, faculty, and clinicians at SVSU. For participants, especially those who travel abroad, these unique experiences make a significant contribution to cultural competence, self-awareness, and professional development. Research indicates that such experiences foster collaboration, effective communication, clinical skills, adaptability, compassion, confidence, and overall personal growth. Academic sources further posit that service-learning abroad prepares students to deliver culturally competent care, thereby increasing their value to future employers.

Academic sources emphasized that while cultural competence is a crucial aspect of professional preparation programs, effectively

integrating it remains a persistent challenge. In their 2018 publication "Increasing Cultural Competence: Implementation of Study Away/ Abroad in an Athletic Training Program," the authors outlined the obstacles to incorporating international experiences within traditional cohort-based athletic training curricula. They provide strategic guidance for faculty who wish to integrate study abroad components, particularly in programs where global competence and diversity are important goals. As healthcare educational programs continue to evolve and embrace interprofessional experiences, incorporating international didactic and clinical experiences should be seen as both an ideal opportunity and a necessity for enhancing students' professional education. ♦



Students from Shenyang Aerospace University on the Rifle River in Michigan

## RIVER OF RETURN

Phillip Hanson, Lecturer of Art

Sometimes we recognize the moments that reshape our lives only after they've passed. While I was growing up, my world was bounded less by geography than by provincial attitudes and undereducated parents. Travel wasn't on the radar. I chose to study art because it allowed me to glimpse something just beyond the edges of my experience, to explore curiosities I couldn't fully grasp.

My curiosity drove me to excel, and it eventually caught the attention of my undergraduate mentor. One afternoon, he invited me out to the parking lot, and

without small talk or explanation, he simply said, "Phillip, I'm going to send you to England on an exchange." The moment carried unexpected gravity, like he had quietly opened a hidden door. I trusted him, so I said yes.

England opened more than a small door for me. Living in an urban environment and attending a real art school, I learned quickly to adapt to unfamiliar spaces. I discovered I could cross cultural and emotional boundaries and find meaning on the other side. The experience of heightened awareness and successfully

navigating the unknown cultivated a hunger for new experiences.

A year after, I returned from England, several friends invited me to join a philosophy class that was traveling to China. It felt like a natural progression of the journey England had begun, another chance to venture outward. In Shanghai, our hosts received us with extraordinary generosity. Sixteen students sat before a banquet abundant enough for 40. Dish after dish arrived, each one an offering of care from people who owed us nothing. I had never experienced such kind treatment, not at

home, not anywhere. It was disorienting to feel so cherished in the most foreign place I had ever been. It challenged the quiet assumption that belonging was tied to familiarity and that trust should be rationed carefully.

Years later, those experiences abroad inspired me to participate in international programs at SVSU. I coordinated summer art camps with Shenyang Aerospace University, collaborated with Changchun Normal University, and participated in several exchanges with Tokushima, Japan, Saginaw's sister city.

In each exchange, I attempted to design experiences to reflect the generosity I had received in Shanghai. I arranged settings thoughtfully, invited visiting students into my home, and sought to create moments of sincere welcome. One such moment came sharply into focus on the Rifle River in the summer of 2017.

I had organized a canoeing trip for students visiting from Shenyang Aerospace University, a distinctly Michigan pastime meant to surround them with natural beauty. Before setting off, I repeatedly reminded everyone not to bring anything onto the river they weren't willing to lose.

At first, the students zigzagged downstream, bumping into rocks and branches. Rivers, like new cultural experiences, often demand patience and attention. Guiding from the back of the group, I watched them gradually find their rhythm and adapt.

From around a bend just out of sight, I heard a sudden splash and commotion. When I rounded the curve, a student in our group and her canoeing partner stood soaked and shaken on the riverbank with



*Students from Shenyang Aerospace University on the Rifle River in Michigan*

four other students. Alarmed by a snake, the student had stood abruptly and overturned her canoe, losing two phones, a charger, keys, over a thousand dollars in cash, and her passport into the current. She had not heeded my warnings.

Seeing her anxiety, I felt compassion rather than frustration. Without hesitation, I stepped into the river and began diving beneath the surface. I searched carefully for her items, and one by one, her belongings emerged: passport, phones, money. Only a small wallet with a school ID and a dormitory key remained lost.

Later, I learned the student had cried quietly on the riverbank, not from embarrassment, but because my response had been gentle, patient and without judgment. Just a few days ago I received an email from Cyan, who is now studying in Australia. She explained that even now, years later, that afternoon remains one of the most significant moments of her life.

Reading her message brought the pattern that had unfolded across the years into clear view. Long ago, strangers had welcomed me with unbelievable generosity when I had little to offer in return. That hospitality shaped my perception and inspired me to extend care and kindness in moments like the one

on the Rifle River. Human kindness moves steadily downstream. Each act of generosity gives rise to another.

Direct experiences abroad taught me that empathy and hospitality flow naturally when we interact face to face. These exchanges quietly dismantle fear, one interaction at a time.

My vision for SVSU's international programs is shaped by this belief. I hope every student can someday experience hospitality both as a guest abroad and as a host at home. These exchanges help us build connections resilient enough to transcend misunderstanding and fear and lead us to the goal of world peace. ♦

# STUDY-ABROAD MEMOIR

*J. Blake Johnson, Professor of Art*

My international journey began as an exchange student at ArtCenter College of Design Europe in Switzerland. It was there that I realized that every culture offers its own wisdom. Switzerland taught me the importance of slowing down to enjoy life. Businesses, banks, and grocery stores would close down for lunch, but the restaurants would fill with people taking the time to eat with friends. This local custom taught me the importance of balancing work and leisure.

In 2013, I traveled to Tokushima, Japan, as an exchange professor at Shikoku University. I taught classes about American culture, graphic design history and English. While in Japan, I saw firsthand the deep respect for elders and the collective commitment to caring for the environment. I learned how small individual actions can benefit the larger community.

In 2016, I served as a visiting professor at Shenyang Aerospace University in China, teaching user experience (UX) and graphic design. I was joined by four SVSU students who assisted in the classroom and learned about local customs and culture. After teaching, I traveled with my son to several cities across China. Our journey included overnight train rides and domestic flights that allowed us to experience firsthand the diversity of China's history, geography, and culture. These travels reinforced the importance of adaptability and openness in truly understanding another country.

While abroad, I learned the importance of being a good representative of SVSU and the United States. I found that meaningful cross-cultural relationships are built not through debate but through respect and general curiosity. I have continued to seek out opportunities to learn from other cultures. Most recently, in 2024, I gave faculty presentations in Argentina, and in 2025, I took a group of SVSU students to Tokyo on a faculty-led study-abroad trip. I believe students gain unique insights from studying abroad that cannot be replicated in a local classroom. This is why I fully support SVSU's efforts to create these opportunities. It is fundamental to developing students' understanding of the world and their ability to work, adapt, and thrive graciously in a global society.



*J. Blake Johnson in China 2016*



*J. Blake Johnson in China 2016*

# FULBRIGHT SCHOLAR PROGRAM IN JEDDAH, SAUDI ARABIA

Dr. Michelle Claypool, Clinical Instructor



Michelle pictured with her class

I arrived in Jeddah as a Fulbright specialist, and for six weeks, I delved into the rich tapestry of Saudi culture, learning its customs firsthand, forging genuine connections, and collecting moments that seemed to unfold only once in a lifetime.

At Fakeeh College for Medical Sciences, my journey took on an added purpose. There, I played an integral role in launching Saudi Arabia's very first academic advising certification program. The Student Academic Advising Certification Program (SAACP) became a remarkable conduit for knowledge sharing and collaboration. Over the span of the program, academic staff engaged in a carefully curated six-week curriculum that began with an

exploration of foundational advising theories and advanced toward the practical, data-driven strategies required to boost student engagement.

My experience in Jeddah was not confined solely to the academic realm. I was privileged to attend an exclusive reception at the United States Embassy for the induction of the new consulate general, a diplomatic event that unfolded with an air of celebration and significance. As a VIP, I was able to walk the red carpet and meet the general before the festivities began; I wandered through the historic streets of Al Balad, a UNESCO World Heritage site; I marveled at the Islamic Arts Biennale 2025, an exhibit that brought to life the myriad ways in

which faith can be experienced and expressed through art. A particularly memorable adventure was a female-only desert safari organized by Fakeeh College, where the thrill of sand-dune rides in a Jeep, the glow of a fireworks show, and the pleasantness of a desert barbecue mingled under a starlit sky.

I remain deeply grateful to the U.S. government, the Saudi government, Fakeeh College for Medical Sciences and SVSU for this extraordinary opportunity. My time in Jeddah not only enriched my professional endeavors but also deepened my personal appreciation for cross-cultural exchange and the transformative power of education. ♦

# MY LIFE-CHANGING EXPERIENCE AS A FULBRIGHT SCHOLAR

Dr. Jennifer Ward, Assistant Professor of Teacher Education



Jennifer Ward alongside Moroccan educators on a panel discussion

I have wanted to be a teacher since second grade. I'm not sure what sparked my love of travel and cultural immersion, but together, these interests led me to pursue a degree in international and multicultural education. That path has opened a world (pun intended) of opportunities for me, two of which I will share here. In 2022, I was invited by the University of Ioannina in Greece to serve as a Fulbright Specialist guest lecturer on special education and inclusion. Although this experience took place before I joined SVSU, it was the starting point for an ongoing collaboration with the host university that continues

today through research projects and publications. More recently, in April 2025, I served as a Fulbright Specialist at Cadi Ayyad University in Marrakech, Morocco. While there, I led workshops on inclusive education and participated in a panel focused on advancing equity through inclusive practices.

My experience in Morocco was a powerful reminder of why this work matters so deeply — and why I remain committed to advocating for inclusive practices on a global scale, not just for students with disabilities, but for all learners. The final activity I participated in during my time

in Marrakech was as a panelist alongside Moroccan educators for a discussion on inclusion. It was scheduled on a Friday afternoon, and, to my surprise, the lecture hall was packed — standing room only, with most attendees being undergraduate students. I quietly asked the moderator if attendance was required or tied to a grade. Her answer floored me: every single student was there voluntarily. I was genuinely moved. Eventually we had to cut off their questions and end the event after two hours. One question from a young man has stayed with me ever since: "Is inclusion even possible?"



*No matter where we come from, we're united by a shared hope for a better, more inclusive future for everyone."*

**-Jennifer Ward**

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*Jennifer Ward with one of her classes in Morocco*

I felt myself become emotional as I formulated my response. The first thing I shared with the group was the question I had just asked the moderator and my disbelief that they were all there by choice. That fact alone was a powerful testament to their commitment to creating change and advancing inclusion in their country as future educators. My message to them was one of hope because in voluntarily attending this panel and engaging in the dialogue, they were already doing the work. They were asking questions, challenging the norm, and choosing to be part of the solution.

In July of 2025, I attended a conference in Kenya, hosted by the Council for Exceptional Children's Division for International Special Education and Services, where I currently serve as president. The theme of the conference is grounded in the Swahili concept of harambee — meaning "all pull together" or "let's unite." This work is challenging, exhausting,

and often feels never-ending but, when we pull together, real change becomes possible. As I spoke with the students in Marrakech, I saw the excitement and curiosity in their eager faces, but at the same time I saw the uncertainty and weight and responsibility of trying to build more inclusive practices in a society that, like so many others, is still working toward emphasizing human rights, equity and belonging. My remarks to them were the reminders that inclusion is not just best practice — it's a matter of human dignity. It isn't a destination but a mindset and an ongoing practice in which we must continually ask, "Who is left out and what can I do to change that?"

My experiences as a Fulbright Specialist have been truly life changing. They've reminded me how deeply connected we are as people and how working toward a shared goal, such as building more inclusive communities, can bring us together across cultures, languages and beliefs. What I've

learned is that no matter where we come from, we're united by a shared hope for a better, more inclusive future for everyone. Globalization in education plays a key role in this work by opening doors for collaboration, empathy and the exchange of ideas that keep us moving forward. This is what gives me hope and keeps me going in this work, and it's that hope that I continue to share with colleagues, students, families and educators around the globe. ♦

# FROM THE NETHERLANDS TO SAGINAW: A FULBRIGHT COLLABORATION ON STUDENT LONELINESS

*Dr. Youssef Azghari, Fulbright Visiting Scholar, and  
Dr. Rosina Hassoun, SVSU Professor of Sociology*



*Youssef Azghari and Rosina Hassoun and students*

## WELCOMING A FULBRIGHT SCHOLAR TO SVSU

In fall 2024, the SVSU sociology department had the honor of welcoming Dr. Youssef Azghari as a Fulbright Visiting Scholar. Dr. Azghari is a lecturer and senior researcher at Avans University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands and is known for his work on intercultural communication and cultural diversity. Dr. Rosina Hassoun, medical anthropologist, had the privilege of serving as his faculty mentor during his time at SVSU.

Hosting a Fulbright scholar is always an exciting opportunity, but this visit became much more: a catalyst for international collaboration, student-engaged research and meaningful cultural exchange. Dr. Azghari brought a dynamic presence to campus — participating in lectures, student events, and faculty discussions that sparked wide-ranging conversations about identity, belonging and the university

experience. Dr. Hassoun played multiple roles, that of host as department chair, faculty mentor and research partner.

## EXPLORING LONELINESS THROUGH STUDENT-LED WRESEARCH

Early in Dr. Azghari's stay, we began discussing a shared concern: the increasing sense of loneliness among college students, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on Dr. Azghari's expertise and past research on migration and identity and my own background in medical anthropology and public health, we designed a small participatory research project to explore this issue within our own SVSU community.

Rather than taking a traditional research approach, we invited six SVSU students to join the project as citizen scientists. Their task was to codesign and conduct a pilot survey on student loneliness by focusing on lived experiences

rather than just numbers.

The students helped as coinvestigators to shape the questions, administer the surveys, and contribute to the interpretation of the results.

Our study on loneliness and student success highlighted the complexities of student engagement and recommended fostering an inclusive environment in the U.S. and the Netherlands to enhance college experiences and improve academic and social outcomes. These results echoed with Dutch studies on first-generation and minoritized students' challenges while acculturating.

## A GLIMPSE INTO THE FINDINGS

While the sample size was modest, the results were striking. Many students reported feelings of isolation — especially during transitions, such as their first year on campus. Others described the difficulty of forming meaningful

connections in a digital age despite being constantly “connected” online.

Importantly, students highlighted spaces and people that helped reduce loneliness: supportive faculty, campus events, and involvement in clubs or study groups. Some of the students felt that there was a need for more communication about these events on campus and for more opportunities to connect with other students. These insights underscored the need for continued efforts to build community and foster a sense of belonging at SVSU.

## LOOKING FORWARD

Although this project was designed as a short-term pilot, its impact is ongoing. We are currently preparing a manuscript based on our findings for publication, and we hope to expand the research in future semesters with broader participation. More importantly, the seeds of collaboration and student engagement planted during Dr. Azghari’s Fulbright stay continue to grow and thrive.

We are grateful to the Office of International Programs, the sociology department and the Fulbright Commission in the Netherlands for making this exchange possible. As our world becomes increasingly interconnected, building these bridges — one scholar, one student, one project at a time — feels more essential than ever.

## DR. HASSOUN’S PERSPECTIVE ON MENTORSHIP AND MUTUAL LEARNING

Mentoring Dr. Azghari was both a professional and personal joy. While I guided him through SVSU’s institutional culture and supported his academic outreach,

I also gained insight into the Dutch higher education system, the structure of applied universities, and the perspective of the Fulbright experience.

Our collaboration reminded me that international partnerships are not just about guest lectures or research outputs — they are about the relationships that form through shared purpose and mutual curiosity. Dr. Azghari’s presence encouraged faculty and students alike to “think more globally and act more locally.”

## DR. AZGHARI’S REFLECTIONS

Winning the Fulbright Award in April 2024 opened a world of new experiences for me and my family. We lived in Michigan for three months and enjoyed the hospitality of so many people. My son attended Midland High School. I enjoyed doing participatory research on loneliness with my mentor Rosina and six SVSU students. It was also my pleasure to lecture on intercultural communication and relations, challenges in dealing with cultural diversity, and intercultural communication skills. I made new friends through the OIP of SVSU. My impressions and new experiences, which included working with students and colleagues at SVSU, were of great value. Moreover, I was part of a big historic event. I witnessed the U.S. presidential election that was in full swing at that time.

As a Fulbright visiting scholar at SVSU, I was very impressed by the great diversity of the U.S. — from very liberal to ultra-conservative. In terms of migration backgrounds, Americans come from all over the world. Whatever their background, they are proud of who they are and most are optimistic by nature. My experience

as a Fulbright visiting scholar gave me the unique opportunity to share my knowledge, insights, and impressions with people who have never had the chance to go outside the U.S. and sometimes not even outside their home state, and people from other countries who do not know the U.S. at all. Despite my short stay in America, I fell in love with this huge, diverse, beautiful and sometimes crazy country. Even though I by no means agree with everything that happens in the U.S. and still see what could be improved, there are many good things that we can learn from Americans.

The full experience made me realize again that, beyond the differences between Europeans and Americans, we have so much in common. To see that, we must get rid of one-sided perceptions and have an open mind to learn from each other. This learning must be rooted in lived experiences and knowledge. Only then will we gain a richer view of each other, pursue the same universal values, such as freedom, and make meaningful contacts and new friends. I will always cherish what I learned during my visit to the U.S.. Also, I will never forget the different cultures that have shaped my identity, from my birthplace in Morocco and my home country, the Netherlands, to where my friends live in the U.S. and other parts of the world. Just as Americans are proud of their flag, I am proud to be who I am and glad to be inspired every day by wonderful people outside my comfort zone. ♦

# FULBRIGHT SCHOLAR AND SPECIALIST AWARD RECIPIENTS

## FULBRIGHT SCHOLARS AND SPECIALISTS, WHEN AND WHERE THEY TRAVELED, AND THEIR FIELD OF INTEREST

### ART ANDREWS

Norway 1982-1983  
Research in Chemistry

### GARY THOMPSON

Poland 1987-1988  
Lecture in American Literature

Poland 1982-1984  
Lecture in American Literature

### AL MENARD

Turkey 1991-1992  
Lecture and Research in Physics

### JANICE WOLFF

Sweden 1999  
Lecture and Research  
in Rhetoric/Composition

### SCOTT YOUNGSTEDT

Morocco and Tunisia 2001  
Research in Anthropology

### KAREN KRAUSE

Mexico 2001  
Research in Sociology

### SARA BETH KEOUGH

Ghana 2017-2018  
Lecture and Research in Geography

### PAUL MUNN

Turkey 2001-2002  
Lecture in American Literature

### THOMAS McMANUS

Finland 2001-2002  
Lecture and Research in Education

### SALLY DECKER

Ireland 2018-2019  
Teaching and Research in Nursing

### ANDREA FREDERICK

United Kingdom 2022  
Teaching and Research in Nursing

### JUDY KERMAN

Dominican Republic 2002  
Lecture and Research  
in American Literature

### NATALIA KNOBLOCK

Bogota 2022-2023  
Teaching in English

### JOHN LESKO

Oman 2007-2009  
Lecture in TEFL/Applied Linguistics

### MICHELLE CLAYPOOL

Saudi Arabia 2025  
Launching of Academic  
Advising Certification Program

### HONG PARK

Korea 2002-2003  
Lecture and Research in Economics

### JENNIFER WARD

Morocco 2025  
Workshop in Exclusive Education

# SVSU VISITING SCHOLARS AT SHIKOKU UNIVERSITY IN TOKUSHIMA, JAPAN

## THE NAMES OF VISITING SCHOLARS AND THE YEAR THEY VISITED

JOHN KEZIERSKI 1983

NORMAN STERCHELE 1986

TERRY ISHIHARA 1987

BASIL CLARK 1988

LU COCHEN 1991

MERLYN MONDOL 1992

TAI-CHI LEE 1993

SACHIKO CLAUS 1994

PAUL MUNN 1995

MORTEZA MAEZIARANI 1997

CARLOS RAMET 1999

MASON WANG 2000

PAUL MUNN 2001

MIKE MOSHER 2002

THOMAS McMANUS 2004

VINCE SAMMARCO 2005

VENESSA HERD 2008

ROB DREW 2009

SHAUN BANGERT 2010

BLAKE JOHNSON 2013

BRADLEY HERZOG 2014

WARREN FINCHER 2015

SCOTT YOUNGSTEDT 2016

SARA BETH KEOUGH 2016

VENESSA HERD 2017

MATTHEW VANNETTE 2019

IL-HYUNG CHO 2023

PHILLIP HANSON 2024

DAVID BERRY 2025



**STAND** OUT

# **CULTURAL EXPANSION**

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## GLOBAL PROGRAMS AND CONNECTIONS

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# INTERNATIONAL STUDIES AT SVSU

Dr. Diana Trebing, Professor of Communication



Riley Romer in South Korea

The international studies major is the perfect choice for students to gain unique perspectives and deepen their understanding of cultures and countries all around the world. International studies students often take a double major with the hopes of taking positions in government, the corporate world or non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Many program graduates enter graduate school, accept English as a second language (ESL) teaching assignments, or work in international student advising at universities.

The objective of this interdisciplinary major is to provide students with an understanding of the world through language, history, business, economics, political science, literature, sociology, geography and study abroad. Students must select one of three emphases: Asian studies, European studies or Latin American studies. Courses are

taken from various departments within the College of Arts and Behavioral Sciences and the College of Business, and a minor is also required.

Program graduates must spend four semesters studying a foreign language, and many choose to minor in the language of their choice. Additionally, students are highly encouraged to participate in a study-abroad experience. Approximately 70% of current international studies majors and recent graduates have completed at least one semester abroad.

International studies students represent the SVSU community around the world and bring their global perspective back to campus. Along the way, they gain a versatility that makes them invaluable contributors wherever they go, from the classroom to the boardroom and beyond. ♦



*Majoring in international studies allowed me the opportunity to study abroad and expand my real-world knowledge. The major encouraged me to see new perspectives and experiences, while studying in South Korea only confirmed my passion and desire to make a positive impact. Abroad, I discovered who I was and who I wanted to be going forward. A small part of me will always be in Korea surrounded by my new friends, and the beauty of Seoul will always stay in my heart."*

**- Riley Romer**

*International Studies Major  
Class of 2026*



# THE DEPARTMENT OF MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

*Dr. Monika Dix, Professor of Modern Foreign Languages*

The Department of Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) at SVSU is a gateway to a globally connected world that fosters intercultural understanding and communications. Our curriculum consists of American Sign Language, French, German, Japanese and Spanish, which offer students the skills to engage with diverse cultures and contribute to global initiatives. Our students engage in language-club activities on and off campus, are members of national honors societies, such as Alpha Mu Gamma and Sigma Delta Pi, participate in study abroad, receive language scholarships, and gain multilingual and multicultural work experiences through internships and fieldwork. Language learning inherently involves cultural immersion and promotes empathy and breaking down barriers to communication.

Cardinals who major in a foreign language work in all kinds of fields — education, government, and business as well as the fine arts and

sciences and even technology and translation. And with SVSU's 95-percent job placement rate, students can feel confident in the degrees they earn as a Cardinal.

SVSU connects students with many organizations invested in language, culture and international travel. Students discover opportunities to meet native speakers, practice using a foreign language, attend campus-wide multicultural events, and travel to participate in foreign cultures. SVSU also hosts a number of campus events, such as Foreign Language Day and the French Film Series. In addition, SVSU partners with the Japanese Cultural Center and Teahouse to promote understanding of Japanese language and culture both for students and for the Great Lakes Bay region. ♦

## BENEFITS OF A MODERN FOREIGN-LANGUAGE DEGREE

### Fostering Intercultural Competence:

Learning a foreign language goes beyond memorizing vocabulary and grammar. It involves understanding the cultural context of the language, including its history, customs and values.

### Enhancing Communication Skills:

Foreign-language skills are essential for effective communication in an increasingly interconnected world, whether in international business, diplomacy or humanitarian work.

### Facilitating Global Collaboration:

Foreign-language proficiency is a valuable asset for individuals seeking to contribute to global initiatives.

### Addressing Global Challenges:

Many global challenges, such as climate change, poverty and disease, require international cooperation to address effectively. Foreign-language skills are crucial for understanding these complex issues from diverse perspectives and for facilitating effective communication among stakeholders.

### Promoting Global Citizenship:

Foreign-language education fosters a sense of global citizenship by promoting intercultural understanding and encouraging active participation in global affairs.



*MFL student, Audrey Weiss, studying abroad in Chile 2025*

# GERSTACKER FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM

John L. Kaczynski, Vice President of Governmental and Community Affairs



Gerstacker Class of 2025

The Gerstacker Fellowship Program exemplifies international engagement through impactful cultural and educational exchanges, thereby significantly influencing participants' professional development and leadership capabilities. For almost 20 years, the program has facilitated transformative experiences for educators and fostered global perspectives that participants apply in their daily professional roles. Many fellows have ascended to key leadership positions, including building administrators and district superintendents, thanks to insights and competencies gained from these global experiences.

Throughout the years, the Gerstacker Fellowship Program has offered comprehensive international experiences across various countries including China, Finland, Germany, Japan, Poland and Taiwan. Each location provides unique educational insights and fostered cross-cultural collaboration. During the trips, participants of the fellowship experienced dynamic educational settings and explored distinct teaching strategies, administrative practices and curriculum designs tailored to cultural contexts. These visits enriched fellows' understanding of global educational diversity and enabled them to incorporate international best practices into their educational leadership journeys.

For example, in Finland, participants observed educational methodologies deeply rooted in cultural values and state-regulated leadership structures. Fellows visited schools, such as Aseman Koulu and Puolimatkan Koulu, where they gained insight into Finland's student-centered, culturally aligned curriculum and state-driven education management. This experience allowed participants to reflect on educational governance and community involvement.

The program also features many historical and cultural excursions, such as visits to the Great Wall of China, Dazu Rock Carvings, Nuremberg's Palace of Justice, the Hiroshima Peace Memorial,



Gerstacker Class of 2025 in Germany

Maruyama Park in Kyoto, and the Dachau concentration camp. These historical and cultural excursions provide profound historical perspectives and significantly contribute to fellows' holistic educational approach. Engaging directly with these powerful sites of historical significance fosters deep reflection, empathy and a comprehensive understanding of global issues. The emotional and intellectual impact of such experiences enriches fellows' capacity to lead with sensitivity, critical awareness and an appreciation for diverse narratives and histories.

The Gerstacker Fellows have also visited other SVSU partner universities while on their global

travels. These visits included trips to Shikoku University in Tokushima, Shanghai Normal University, and Hochschule Ansbach. This fellowship program has also helped develop other partnerships, including our newest partnership with the University of Wurzburg.

Central to the Gerstacker Fellowship is the program's capstone project. The project is typically a public presentation from the cohort, which is a pivotal and transformational component designed to synthesize international learning into actionable leadership practices. During their travels, participants engage deeply with international educational models and translate these insights into strategic

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*The emotional and intellectual impact of such experiences enriches fellows' capacity to lead with sensitivity, critical awareness, and an appreciation for diverse narratives and histories.”*

**- John Kaczynski**

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improvements within their own practices. This capstone initiative has proven to be transformative by equipping fellows with innovative tools and global perspectives crucial for effective leadership.

The legacy of the Gerstacker Fellowship Program continues to be evident through its alumni, who serve as influential educational leaders dedicated to fostering international understanding and implementing globally informed educational practices. The ongoing commitment to these cross-cultural initiatives ensures lasting impacts on local education systems and the broader community. ♦

# **BUILDING GLOBAL CONNECTIONS**

## **HOW SVSU-OLLI TRANSFORMS LIVES THROUGH EDUCATIONAL TRAVEL**

*Susan Brasseur, Executive Director of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, and Shelley Wegner, Associate Director of the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute*



OLLI group in Greece 2024

When the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) program at SVSU was established in 2001, few could have predicted the profound impact it would have on fostering global understanding within the university community. What began as an innovative educational initiative has evolved into something far more significant: a bridge between generations, cultures and communities that exemplifies the transformative power of lifelong learning.

The geographic reach of SVSU-Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) speaks to its magnetic appeal. Members travel from as far as Ann Arbor to Tawas and from Mt. Pleasant to Michigan's Thumb region, drawn by the program's unique blend of intellectual stimulation and community connection. This diverse membership base has successfully brought an under-represented population to campus, including individuals who might never have otherwise stepped foot on university grounds but now proudly consider SVSU part of their learning community. Among the membership are more than 125 SVSU alumni and numerous university retirees who cherish the opportunity to return to their academic home.

But perhaps the most remarkable aspect of SVSU-OLLI lies in its commitment to global education through travel. Since 2001, the program has orchestrated more



*OLLI group in the Canadian Maritimes 2024*

than 60 multiple-day international trips, taking members to over 40 countries across six continents. These aren't casual vacation excursions; they are carefully crafted educational experiences supported by comprehensive preparation courses covering regional languages, cultural traditions, geography and practical travel skills.

The preparation extends beyond logistics to deep cultural immersion. Book discussions, language classes and workshops on regional traditions ensure that OLLI travelers arrive at their destinations not as tourists but as informed cultural ambassadors ready to engage meaningfully with the places and people they encounter. This educational foundation transforms travel from mere sightseeing into profound personal and intellectual growth.

The impact of these experiences reverberates throughout the SVSU campus long after travelers return home. The intergenerational connections fostered between OLLI members and traditional students create a unique dynamic where wisdom meets enthusiasm, experience guides curiosity, and shared passions transcend age barriers. When OLLI members share their international experiences with younger students, they provide living testimonials to the value of lifelong learning and global citizenship.

The collaborative spirit fostered by OLLI travel experiences brings together members, faculty, staff and traditional students in meaningful partnerships. These relationships enhance upcoming travel experiences through shared planning and preparation, while post-travel discussions

create opportunities for cross-generational learning that enriches the entire university community. It's about real people with shared passions discovering the potential for new friendships that transcend traditional academic boundaries.

In an era when global understanding has never been more crucial, SVSU-OLLI demonstrates that education knows no age limits and that the pursuit of knowledge can be a lifelong adventure. Through its comprehensive approach to educational travel, the program has created a model for how universities can foster global citizenship while building bridges between diverse populations. ♦

# THE VITITO GLOBAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM

*Dr. Joseph C. Ofori-Dankwa, Harvey Randall Wickes Endowed Professor of Management and Marketing*



*Group photo of 2025 Vitito Leadership cohort*



*2025 Vitito Leadership cohort walking in Ghana*

The Vitito Global Leadership Institute is one of SVSU's most distinguished programs. Each year, a cohort of the Vitito Fellows travels abroad. In March of 2025, 10 Fellows from Cohort 12 of the Vitito Global Leadership program visited Ghana. Three SVSU faculty, Dr. Joseph Ofori-Dankwa, Dr. Micah DelVecchio and Dr. Judith Cox, led this visit.

In addition to taking part in a youth leadership conference, the Vitito Fellows got to see the Akwasidaie Festival of the Ashanti people of Ghana. This is a large Durbar of the Ashanti people hosted by the King of the Ashantis.



*A student wearing a traditional Ghanaian garment*

The Vitito Fellows also visited the slave castle in Cape Coast, visited the Royal Seed Orphanage to see social entrepreneurship and leadership in action, and participated in a highly interactive leadership workshop that emphasized the multi-dimensionality and complexity of leadership (national, regional, community, ecumenical, and individual levels) and the need to consider a highly situationist, action-oriented approach.

The major highlight of this trip was the Vitito Global Leadership Conference that was held at the Ghana Institute of Management

and Public Administration (GIMPA). The Scott L. Carmona College of Business collaborated with the Business School of GIMPA to organize this youth leadership conference. The Vitito Fellows, three leading Youth Leadership programs in Ghana: The President J.K. Kufuor Foundation Fellows, The Beacons of Excellence Fellows, The Young African Leadership Institute (YALI) instituted by the United States Department of State, and students with strong leadership capabilities from GIMPA and the University of Professional Studies, participated in this youth leadership conference.

The Vitito Global Youth Leadership Conference focused on artificial intelligence and its implications for leadership, national development within the context of globalization. Students gained a better, greater appreciation of AI's positive and potentially dysfunctional aspects. They also got to interact with their peers, have detailed presentations and discussions, and learn about different perspectives of leadership from their Ghanaian peers. The conference was featured in the Ghana news, enhancing SVSU's reputation. ♦

# ROBERTS-GILBERTSON FELLOWSHIP LAUNCHES LEADERS INTO THE WORLD

*Dr. Julie Foss, Professor of Modern Foreign Languages*

The Roberts-Gilbertson Fellowship is entering its 27th year of fulfilling the promise of this leadership initiative. Over the course of each academic year, a cohort of approximately 10 students develops leadership skills, intercultural competence, and global awareness through deep engagement in weekly seminars, interactions with community leaders, and a community-service project.

The program culminates with an international trip designed to help them further develop these skills and competencies. Recent destinations have included Taiwan and Japan, where the fellows have immersed themselves in different cultures and developed relationships with students, faculty and leaders of several of SVSU's East Asian partner universities.

The program counts nearly 300 alumni who have continued the work they began in the program by taking on leadership challenges locally, nationally and internationally in a variety of fields.

The Roberts-Gilbertson Fellowship is open to high-achieving students in their third year and beyond who are pursuing any academic major and who are interested in developing as leaders and global citizens. ♦



*Everything begins with an idea. The idea [that began the Roberts-Gilbertson Fellowship] was this: How to give motivation, confidence, and perspective to a select group of students who had demonstrated not just academic talent but a commitment to serve, to lead, to make things happen, and an unwillingness to be mere spectators to the problems and the possibilities around and before them."*

**- Dr. Eric Gilbertson**  
Roberts-Gilbertson Fellowship Cofounder and  
SVSU President Emeritus



2024-2025 Roberts-Gilbertson Fellowship cohort

*"I am so overwhelmed by the absolute quality and breadth of things I have been able to experience during this trip. I plan to pay this experience forward by encouraging everyone I can to aim higher by sharing the importance of global competency and by advocating for all those I meet with diverse cultural backgrounds."*

*-Colin Diehl, 26th Class of Roberts-Gilbertson Fellows*

*"Out of the many experiences I have had throughout college, I can confidently say that being in the program is the best part of my college experience. There were many things that stretched me in the program. I have learned so much, and having this eye-opening trip experience has motivated me to do so much more."*

*- Ashley Hoffman, 25th Class of Roberts-Gilbertson Fellows*

# HARMONY IN DIVERSITY

## A BRIEF REFLECTION ON THE 2025 CHINA SUMMER PROGRAM

Dr. Alice Yang, Director of the Office of International Programs



Welcome Orientation for the China Summer Program at CWNNU

Having just returned safely from the beautiful land of Sichuan, the “Land of Abundance,” my thoughts are still steeped in the friendly ties of the people of Nanchong, Deyang, Guanghan, Dujiangyan, Chengdu and Chongqing. This year, I had the honor of leading a delegation of American university students with Professor of history Byungil Ahn in the “Harmony in Diversity” Chinese Bridge Program hosted by China West Normal University in Nanchong, Sichuan Province. It was the first time for the SVSU students to attend a “Chinese Bridge” program in China.

Through carefully designed courses in Chinese language, traditional culture, art, music, painting, dance, martial arts and local history, as well as various immersive cultural and tourism activities, the students experienced the sincere and warm hospitality of the Chinese people, interacted with Chinese university students, deepened their understanding of Chinese history and contemporary society, and became ambassadors

of Sino-U.S. friendship and world peace. The program, which also received strong support from the Sichuan Provincial People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries and local friendship associations at all levels, fostered a shared appreciation of Bashu culture among Chinese and American youth.

Breathtaking views included the ancient and still-standing Dujiangyan irrigation system, the Sanxingdui ruins, the research base of Giant Panda Breeding, Jianchuan Museum, the Chengdu Universiade (World University Sports Games) venue, Wuhou shrine, Langzhong ancient city/ Zhang Fei temple/Gongyuan (imperial examination hall), Nanchong museum, the stunning nightscape cruise of the Jialing River, urban Chengdu/Chongqing, and Sichuan’s diverse cuisine and catering services — a truly memorable experience! After the program concluded, the participants expressed heartfelt gratitude and admiration.

Andrew Beachy, a participant of this program said, “Words cannot begin to express the gratitude I have for the people of China and the work of SIFA to show us their country, their culture, and their tremendous hospitality. I can only hope that this learning experience and fostering friendship will continue in the coming years, creating prosperity and equality for our respective peoples. The road to a fair and equitable world is a long and arduous one, but with the lessons taken from China’s history, I believe a better future is possible. Thank you again for everything.”

Among the students were two Chinese adoptees who set foot on Chinese soil for the first time in over 20 years. They were also deeply moved by the warmth and kindness of the Chinese people and fell in love with their birthplace. For the participants, this was an unforgettable trip. They brought back the friendship of the Chinese people and a hope and confidence in world peace. ♦

# GLOBAL HERITAGE AND ECONOMIC VITALITY

## SVSU AT THE BEIJING WORLD HERITAGE EXPERIENCE

Phillip Hanson, Lecturer of Art, and  
Collin Glenn, International Partnership Coordinator



The delegation's arrival in Beijing



The delegation at the Summer Palace

In September 2025, a 16-member delegation from Saginaw Valley State University joined peers from universities including the University of Chicago, University of Cambridge, DePaul University, New York University, University of Tulsa, University of Tennessee, Tufts University, St. Peter's University, American University, and St. Cloud State University for the Beijing World Heritage Experience Tour. More than 100 international students participated, with the event marking both the UNESCO inscription of Beijing's Central Axis and the 40th anniversary of China's entry into the World Heritage Convention. The Global Heritage Forum itself was held at the Beijing Grand Hotel — a

brehtaking venue that paired classical Chinese design with modern elegance.

The SVSU group traveled on September 22, 23 and 29, with the core program running from September 24 to 28. During this time, students explored Beijing's cultural landmarks such as the Forbidden City, Summer Palace, Great Wall, Temple of Heaven and the 798 Arts District, and participated in the World Cultural Forum. They also visited Tsinghua University's X-lab, an interdisciplinary space where students and researchers develop entrepreneurial projects that connect innovation with economic development and artificial intelligence applications. Forum speakers included United Nations representatives, architects, city planners, and business leaders who highlighted how cultural heritage functions as both a global responsibility and an economic driver through tourism, urban vitality and creative industries.

SVSU students gave closing remarks and engaged in interviews, reflecting on their experiences and the university's role in global exchange. The program offered a transformative immersion into Chinese heritage while also illustrating the interconnectedness of culture, policy, technology and economic development. For many of our students, this was not just their first trip abroad; it was their first time stepping fully into a global dialogue about culture, identity, and shared humanity. Our presence underscored the idea that a smaller regional university can still have a global voice and that our commitment to experiential learning truly sets SVSU apart. The international experience cultivated the students' curiosity, humility, and understanding — the cornerstones of leadership in the 21st century. ♦



*The delegation in front of the Temple of Heaven*



*The delegation at the forum alongside SVSU staff and faculty*



 **Saginaw Valley S**

**STAND OUT**

**GLOBAL  
RELATIONSHIPS**

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## **INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS AND EXCHANGE**

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# **TIMELINE OF SVSU INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS**

<b>Year</b>	<b>University/Organization</b>	<b>Location</b>
1981	Shikoku University	Japan
1987	Polytech Lille	France
1989	Japan Center for Michigan Universities (JCMU)	Japan
1989	Jinan University	China
1989	Kansai Gaidai University	Japan
1995	Kyung Hee University	South Korea
2002	Ming Chuan University	Taiwan
2002	Shih Hsin University	Taiwan
2002	Shanghai Normal University	China
2003	Daegu University	South Korea
2010	University of Suwon	South Korea
2011	Shenyang Aerospace University	China
2011	Hangzhou Normal University	China
2011	Liaoning University	China
2015	Thai Nguyen University	Vietnam
2015	Taiyuan University of Technology	China
2015	Universidad Viña Del Mar	Chile
2016	Jahangirnagar University	Bangladesh
2016	University of Chittagong	Bangladesh
2016	University of Science and Technology Beijing	China
2017	Changchun Normal University	China
2017	University of the Itajai Valley	Brazil
2017	Pentecost University College	Ghana
2018	Vasaveshwar Verrashaiva Vidya Vardhak Sangha	India
2019	Sungshin Women's University	South Korea
2020	Ansbach University	Germany
2022	Universidad Argentina de la Empresa	Argentina
2022	Korean Institute for Industrial Economics and Trade	South Korea
2023	Escuela Superior Politecnica de Litoral	Ecuador
2024	University of Wuerzburg	Germany
2025	Georgian College	Canada

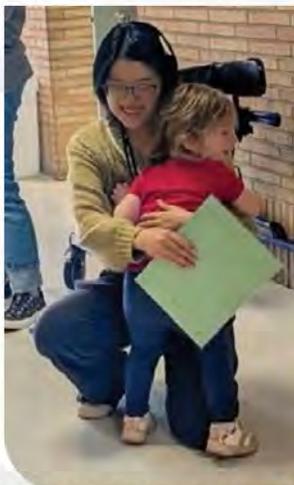
# MAP OF SVSU INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS



SVSU staff and faculty at the Universidad Argentina de la Empresa (UADE) in 2024



Ming Chuan University exchange at SVSU in 2024



Student teacher from Changchun Normal University (CCNU)



SVSU and Jinan University Delegation

## VISITING SCHOLAR PROGRAMS

### SHIKOKU UNIVERSITY

The partnership between SVSU and Shikoku University began in 1981. This exchange relationship has been in place for over 40 years and is one of SVSU's longest-running partnerships. The program allows for faculty and student exchange between the two institutions.

Under the direction of the late Dr. Robert Yien, who was the SVSU provost for 27 years, this exchange program is designed to provide one Shikoku University faculty member and one SVSU faculty member per year with an international exchange experience. SVSU sends one faculty member to Shikoku University (usually from April 1 to August 31, reflecting the Shikoku semester schedule) to teach courses in English and typically a course on American culture to members of the Shikoku campus community. During a U.S. academic semester, Shikoku University sends one faculty member to teach at SVSU. These arrangements may also involve research assignments in addition to the teaching, if approved by the host institution.

### JINAN UNIVERSITY

Jinan University, a prestigious national public university located in Guangzhou, Guangdong, China, has maintained a long-standing academic partnership with SVSU. This collaboration dates back to 1986, when it was inspired by the late Dr. Robert Yien's visionary efforts to promote cross-cultural understanding and enhance nursing education between China and the U.S. Since then — excluding the interruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic — Jinan University has regularly sent visiting scholars to SVSU. The program provides faculty and staff from Jinan University with valuable opportunities for professional development and academic exchange, particularly in the field of nursing. To date, about 30 nurses and staff members from Jinan have participated in the visiting scholar program at SVSU. In exchange, more than 110 SVSU faculty and students have taken part in week-long academic exchanges at Jinan University. These visits have offered immersive experiences in traditional Chinese medicine

and acupuncture as well as rich engagement with Chinese culture and history — thereby fostering meaningful dialogue and global perspectives in healthcare and education.

The visiting scholars actively engaged in coursework, clinical observations and academic seminars to broaden their international perspectives and enhance their professional competencies. They enroll in English and nursing courses, including the evidence-based practice and doctor of nursing practice (DNP) programs and participated in joint discussions with SVSU nursing students on differences between the U.S. and Chinese healthcare systems. Clinical visits to institutions such as McLaren and MyMichigan Health offered firsthand insights into advanced nursing management and service systems in the U.S. These experiences significantly strengthen their academic communication, clinical practice and cross-cultural understanding, thus laying a strong foundation for future collaboration in nursing education and healthcare between China and the U.S.

## CHANGCHUN NORMAL UNIVERSITY

The visiting scholar program is an integral component of the early childhood education joint program between SVSU and Changchun Normal University (CCNU). In accordance with the program agreement, CCNU nominates three faculty members to visit SVSU every two years. During their stay, the visiting scholars engage in a variety of academic and professional development activities. These include site visits to local early childhood education and special education facilities, classroom observations of related courses at SVSU, meetings with SVSU administrators, and collaborative discussions with SVSU faculty to promote mutual learning and the exchange of best practices. The program also incorporates cultural enrichment through organized excursions to nearby cities to offer visiting faculty an opportunity to explore the region and further enhance their cross-cultural experience.



*Visiting scholar from Shikoku University with two SVSU art professors*



*Visiting scholars from Jinan University with SVSU nursing professor*

# GROUNDBREAKING TREASURE

## HIGHLIGHTS OF INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION BETWEEN SAGINAW VALLEY STATE UNIVERSITY AND MING CHUAN UNIVERSITY

*LeAnn Eyerman, Director of Ming Chuan University U.S. Location, and  
Andy Lee, Special Assistant to the President of Ming Chuan University*

A product of academic matchmaking orchestrated by Ming Chuan University's Executive Vice President Dr. Robert Yien, former SVSU provost, and based on a strong brotherly bond that developed between then presidents of the two institutions — Dr. Eric Gilbertson and Dr. Chuan Lee — a joint venture agreement was signed for the Ming Chuan University Michigan (MCU-MI) location on the SVSU campus in June 2012. With great joy and anticipation, MCU-MI held its opening reception in October of that year, marking the beginning of a groundbreaking chapter in Taiwan higher education as MCU became the first Taiwan-based university to have a formally recognized operating location in the U.S. This was not the absolute beginning of the collaboration story. A decade earlier, in 2002, SVSU and MCU embarked on initial student exchanges that continue through today with BBA and MBA collaboration.

Groundwork was laid for this formal higher education collaboration through granting of approvals by the Taiwan Ministry of Education, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education — aligned with MCU's U.S. institutional accreditation — and licensing approval from the State of Michigan. The ambitious foresight and executive energy of Dr. Lee, Dr. Gilbertson and Dr. Yien were instrumental in forging such an innovative partnership that



*SVSU students learn to play Chinese board game*

brought part of the opposite side of the globe from Taiwan to reside on the SVSU campus in central Michigan. Once approvals were in hand to begin recruitment for a joint master's degree program in teaching Chinese as a foreign language (TCFL), the stage was set to host a formal grand opening of the Ming Chuan University Michigan location. A second joint master's degree in new media and communication administration also recruited and graduated students for several years.

May 2016 marked MCU-MI's first commencement ceremony, a celebration worth waiting for and made possible only by the countless hours and tireless efforts of the staff, faculty and administrators on the SVSU and

MCU sides to make a way where no path existed previously. Awarding joint master's degrees to this first graduating class had to meet the rigorous academic requirements required by the accreditations of both institutions while finding feasible and appropriate ways to offer the flexibility needed for such a collaboration to succeed.

As the TCFL students needed to practice applying what they were learning, MCU-MI also actively hosted Mandarin-language and cultural sessions in its office area for anyone in the SVSU community to sign up and participate in. Over the years, this included Mandarin Corner, modules in Mandarin language, tea culture, Chinese calligraphy, cooking, handicrafts and more.



Chancellor Chuan Lee and Dr. Bob Yien, Vice President Emeritus of Academic Affairs

Moreover, some Chinese history came to reside on the SVSU campus with the December 2016 unveiling ceremony of the Liu Mingchuan statue in the MCU-MI office suite. This statue was installed in preparation for the MCU 60th diamond jubilee celebration held across borders and oceans in March 2017. Donated by and imported from Anhui, China, the birthplace of Mr. Liu, the statue has great significance for MCU. The institution is named "Ming Chuan" after him because he served as the first governor of Taiwan.

One of the notable collaborations at MCU-MI on the SVSU campus has been the Learning Away from Home (LAFH) program and Mandarin summer camps that took place from 2012 through 2024, with the exception of the three years disrupted by the COVID pandemic. MCU students and faculty brought lively and innovative Mandarin-language and culture programs to the SVSU campus and community annually. Meanwhile, the students from Taiwan were immersed in

American language and culture for multifaceted experiential learning through on- and off-campus events and friendships.

A key aspect of the friendships for LAFH students resulted from MCU hosting Roberts-Gilbertson Fellows (formerly Roberts Fellows) in Taiwan during spring trips to Asia from May 2013-May 2025 (except during the COVID pandemic). Initially, MCU-MI collaborated in the pre-trip orientation program for the Roberts-Gilbertson Fellowship (RGF) groups, and MCU has warmly hosted them on one of its campuses each spring while involving the LAFH students who would be traveling to Michigan in the summer of the same year. Then, in Michigan, the RGF group would host the LAFH students for one or more social events during the summers. Warm bonds were formed and many happy memories were made!

Besides LAFH and RGF, MCU-MI also cooperated with SVSU to host study-abroad tour groups from Taiwan from 2016 through 2019 and a summer study program

from Japan's Sanno University in 2019, further enriching the cultural exchange scene in Saginaw. In addition, groups of faculty from MCU in Taiwan spent several weeks on the SVSU campus each year from 2016 through 2019, then online for 2022 and 2023, engaged in English-mediated instruction workshops for professional development. Not only did the faculty boost their skills for delivering courses in English but they also benefited from the cultural exchange with SVSU colleagues and the wider community.

Over more than two decades, the ties between SVSU and MCU remain strong and vibrant, and we look forward to what the future may bring. ♦



*Debbie Lively with students at Changchun Normal University*

## **A PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE U.S.-CHINA EARLY-CHILDHOOD PARTNERSHIP**

*Dr. Debbie Lively, Professor of Teacher Education*

My journey with the U.S.-China early-childhood partnership has been one of the most meaningful and rewarding experiences of my career. What began as a single trip in May 2016 to Taiyuan, China quickly blossomed into a deep, sustained and truly collaborative international endeavor.

That first visit opened my eyes to the incredible possibilities of cross-cultural education and inspired me to seek a long-term partnership that could extend beyond a single visit. Through the dedication of SVSU's Office of International Programs and the support of Beijing Prepare, a third-party

educational liaison, we connected with Changchun Normal University (CCNU). What followed has been nearly a decade of shared learning, growth and innovation.

Since the beginning, I've been fortunate to take on a central role in shaping and sustaining this partnership. My responsibilities have included managing curriculum and instruction, mentoring visiting scholars from China, supporting U.S. faculty teaching abroad, providing special lectures when needed, and welcoming new cohorts of Chinese students each fall. Working closely with SVSU faculty and local public

school early-childhood education leaders, we created a curriculum grounded in U.S. evidence-based early-childhood general and special education practices while respecting cultural differences.

In 2018, we expanded our presence in Changchun, where I met with a new cohort of 100 eager early-childhood students. I delivered lectures on kindergarten and preschool similarities and differences across cultures and helped set the stage for what would become our first in-person course in May-June 2019. Collaborating with a U.S. colleague and skilled translators, we taught

an early-childhood education class that brought this partnership into fruition.

To maintain the integrity, consistency and quality of instruction, I've returned to China several times to supervise adjunct faculty and meet with incoming students. When the COVID-19 pandemic happened in 2020, we adapted quickly by moving to online delivery supported by local teaching assistants/translators. By May 2023, we entered a transitional phase of two weeks of in-person instruction followed by online sessions led by a teaching assistant. Presently, all courses are now face-to-face four times throughout the year. Though the transition from the pandemic was not without challenges, the resilience and flexibility of everyone involved allowed the program to thrive.

This partnership has had a powerful impact on everyone involved. We've introduced special-education practices to Chinese educators, improved teaching strategies for faculty on both sides

of the world, and created life-changing opportunities for cultural exchange. Our Chinese students who visit SVSU expand their global awareness, while U.S. faculty gain invaluable insight and inspiration from teaching abroad.

This partnership has shown me what's possible when people from different cultures come together with a shared mission: to prepare future early-childhood educators and improve the lives of young children everywhere. Since the beginning of the program, I've had the privilege of teaching every spring at CCNU. I've had the chance to work with so many incredible people. From the faculty members, CCNU translators/teaching assistants and the Beijing Prepare staff, each person has brought a unique perspective, but they still all share a deep commitment to early-childhood general and special education. I feel truly blessed to be part of this extraordinary journey. It has touched my heart, enriched my teaching and reaffirmed my belief in the transformative power of global education. ♦

## FACULTY FOR SVSU-CCNU JOINT PROGRAM

### Spring 2018 May

One Week Guest Lectures: Dr. Debbie Lively and Amber Scott (grad student)  
*Presentation about the differences of Chinese kindergarten and American preschool*

### Spring 2019 May-June

Dr. Debbie Lively  
*Introduction to EC*  
Lori Cummings  
*Co-taught Introduction to EC*  
Amber Scott  
*Introduction to EC*

### Fall 2019 August-November

Tabbatha Greco  
*Infants & Toddlers, PreK*  
*\*Hired by Beijing Prepared but from the U.S.*

### Spring 2020 March/April

Dr. Kathryn Murray  
*Leadership course*  
*\*changed to online due to Covid*

### Spring 2020-Spring 2023

Online Instruction with  
TAs from CCNU

### Fall 2023 August-December

Gabbie Marguery  
*Literature and the Arts, Pre-K, Infants/Toddlers*  
Dr. Kathryn Peckham  
*Reading K-3, Assessment & Curriculum*  
*\*From Great Britain and hired by Beijing Prepared*

### Spring 2024 March-April

Dr. Kathryn Peckham  
*Leadership, Social Studies, & Health*  
*\*Hired by Beijing Prepared*

### Spring 2024 May-June

Dr. Debbie Lively  
*Introduction to EC, EC Exceptionalities, Language*  
Dr. Jennifer Ward  
*EC Exceptionalities, Writing K-3, Science K-3*  
Dr. Helen McCabe  
*Writing K-3, Science K-3*  
Dr. Kathryn Peckham  
*Introduction to EC, Exceptionalities, Language*  
*\*Hired by Beijing Prepared*

### Fall 2024 August-December

Gabbie Marguery  
*Infants and Toddlers, Literature and the Arts, Pre-K*  
Dawn Edwards  
*K-3 Literacy & Assessment and Curriculum*

### Spring 2025 March-April

Gabbie Marguery  
*Health, Social Studies, Leadership*

### Spring 2025 May-June

Dr. Debbie Lively  
*Spring 2025 May: Introduction, EC Exceptionalities, Language*  
Dawn Edwards  
*Introduction, Science K-3, Writing K-3*  
Dr. Chenyi Zhang  
*Introduction, EC Exceptionalities, Language*  
Dr. Sara Tours  
*Introduction, Science K-3, Writing K-3*



Debbie Lively with students from Changchun University

# WHEN TEACHING IS LEARNING

## COLLABORATION BETWEEN CHANGCHUN NORMAL UNIVERSITY AND SVSU IN PRESERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

*Dr. Sara Tours, International Early Childhood Education Fellow, and Skye Zheng, Teaching Assistant at Changchun Normal University*

In the summer of 2025, through the Office of International Programs at SVSU, Dr. Sara Tours, an early childhood faculty fellow from the U.S., joined forces with Skye Zheng, a talented teaching assistant from China, to co-teach several education classes at Changchun Normal University. Together, they brought a rich and inspiring blend of perspectives to the classroom that was grounded in mutual respect, cultural exchange and a shared passion for preservice teacher education.

Sara and Skye approached teaching as a true partnership. Each brought unique insights to the classroom: Sara drawing on her extensive experience in child development and U.S.-based teacher preparation, and Skye contributing deep cultural understanding and fluency in

Chinese educational practices in curriculum and instruction. “Working with Skye allowed me to reflect more deeply on the cultural foundations of my teaching methods,” Sara noted. “We learned from one another in every class, constantly adapting and enhancing our approach for the benefit of our students.”

Skye expressed similar appreciation for the collaboration: “Sara welcomed me into the teaching process so naturally. I was inspired by her academic approaches and her willingness to adjust strategies to best fit our students. It felt like a true exchange of knowledge, not a one-way street.”

The courses were filled with hands-on, experiential activities: role-playing, one-on-one

conferences with students, movement, games, and small-group projects, all designed to demonstrate developmentally appropriate practices that students could use in their future classrooms. The atmosphere was joyful and highly engaged, with Sara and Skye modeling a co-teaching relationship built on trust, openness and a shared commitment to student learning.

More than a cross-cultural teaching exchange, this experience embodied the spirit of international collaboration in higher education. As Sara and Skye discovered, the most meaningful learning often occurs not only when we teach but also when we teach and learn together. ♦



*Sara Tours with students at Changchun Normal University*

# LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER COLLABORATION TO IMPROVE HEALTHCARE IN CHINA AND THE U.S.

Dr. Beth Roe, Professor of Nursing



Jinan University Gate

SVSU and Jinan University in Guangzhou, China have enjoyed a long-term relationship for over 20 years through which they exchange both students and faculty. In 2018, researchers from SVSU and two local hospitals (Covenant and MyMichigan Midland) collaborated with two scholars from Jinan University on a research project whose results potentially improved the care of patients in both countries. Two scholars from Jinan University in China, who had been visiting scholars at SVSU, two faculty members from SVSU and several nurses from the two local hospitals embarked on a research project.

Patient falls in hospitals are a problem across the world and lead to morbidity and mortality. Because of the cost of patient falls, both financially and related to quality of life, there are various methods of assessing for the risk of falls. These assessment measures, although valid and reliable, are not perfect and vary across the world. In this research study, nurses' knowledge regarding patient fall risk was assessed in both the U.S.

and China.

A total of 1,702 nurses in China and the U.S. completed the project's survey. In both the U.S. and China, the knowledge of fall prevention was high. However, nurses from both countries were less familiar with uncommon fall risk factors, such as vertigo and vestibular dysfunction, vision, foot problems, balance and cognitive changes. The findings have implications for practice and education and suggest a need to include factors related to falls in nursing education and intervention in both countries. ♦

The results of this research were jointly published by the researchers in a prestigious publication *Journal of Patient Safety* 18(2);p e580-e584, March 2022. | DOI: 10.1097/PTS.0000000000000873

# SVSU FACULTY CONTINUE LONG-STANDING PARTNERSHIP IN GUANGZHOU, CHINA

*Dr. Cynthia Hupert, Professor of Nursing*



*SVSU nursing faculty with Jinan nursing faculty*



*SVSU faculty and Jinan faculty sightseeing in Guangzhou, China*

Two SVSU faculty members and one community agency representative traveled to Guangzhou, China in May 2024 to continue a remarkable partnership that has spanned nearly four decades. SVSU's long-standing relationship with Jinan University, now in its 37th year, has fostered deep collegial relationships with the nurses at First Affiliated Hospital of Jinan University and created a wealth of shared healthcare knowledge and practices.

During this visit, the team participated in a nursing conference at the First Affiliated Hospital of Medical College, Jinan University. Conference participants demonstrated enthusiasm for learning about critical healthcare topics including fall prevention strategies in hospital settings, evidence-based diabetes management and advanced nursing practice. The collaborative discussions with the nurses highlighted the universal commitment to improving patient safety and quality care across cultures.

The experience significantly deepened the team's understanding of Chinese values and traditions and their influence on healthcare delivery. It was fascinating to compare the healthcare environment of China with that of the U.S. This relationship demonstrates how collaboration improves healthcare delivery and creates lasting benefits for patients, healthcare professionals, and the communities they serve. ♦

# THE SINO-AMERICAN COLLABORATION BETWEEN SVSU AND JINAN UNIVERSITY

## AN EXCERPT FROM THE 30TH ANNIVERSARY MEMORIAL PHOTO ALBUM FOR THE SINO-AMERICAN COLLABORATION BETWEEN SVSU AND JINAN UNIVERSITY

The friendly partnership between Jinan University's hospital and SVSU has been established since 1988, and academic exchange of nursing has lasted for 30 years. One to two paramedics are dispatched to SVSU each year, and a total of 25 nurses have studied in SVSU. Meanwhile, we have invited over 110 teachers and students from SVSU to visit Jinan University for a short-term academic exchange over the years and provided them a platform for getting a deep understanding of traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture as well as Chinese culture and history. The advanced nursing management skills and educational philosophy from SVSU have played an important role in the progress of the development in our nursing department, through which the nurses who have studied abroad have become elites in our hospital.

Over the past 30 years, we have successfully set up a bridge of cooperation of a trans-Pacific partnership between Jinan University and SVSU that offers teachers and students a wide range of opportunities to broaden their horizons and increase their insight. We are particularly grateful to President Eric R. Gilbertson, Vice President Dr. Yien, and the Dean of the Nursing College, Prof. Crystal M. Lange, for developing this program. Thanks to the teachers of SVSU for their guidance and assistance. Thanks to Prof. Marcia for coming to China no matter how busy she is and being committed to the cooperation and growth between SVSU and Jinan University. Thanks to the leaders of Jinan University and affiliated hospital support. Please allow us to give the highest respect to those who promoted the implementation of the program.

With the progression of seasons, 30 years have passed, and innumerable great achievements have been obtained. At a new starting point, our cooperation and exchanges could be greatly improved. Therefore, both sides should carry out more multilevel, wide-ranging cooperation programs in the near future. We are looking forward to more communication of professors, experts, teachers, and students from Saginaw Valley State University as well. Meanwhile, we also hope that more nurses from our hospital could go to SVSU for learning and exchange.

Finally, we wish SVSU will get better and better, all of our friends are healthy and happy.

May our friendship last forever!

The Nursing Department  
The First Affiliated Hospital of Jinan University  
April 10, 2018



Kay Wagner speaking at Jinan University

# SVSU AND ITS SISTER-CITY RELATIONSHIPS

John L. Kaczynski, Vice President of Governmental and Community Affairs



*The partnership agreement signing between SVSU and Ansbach University.*

SVSU has significantly deepened international engagement through sister-city partnerships across the Great Lakes Bay Region, thereby reinforcing cultural exchange, educational collaboration and economic cooperation. SVSU's involvement aligns closely with President Dwight D. Eisenhower's original vision of citizen diplomacy through the Sister Cities International (SCI) initiative, which promotes peace and understanding at the municipal level through sustained community and institutional interactions.

SVSU's relationship with Hochschule Ansbach in Bavaria started due to preexisting relationships between Bay City, Michigan and Ansbach, Bavaria, as well as Frankenmuth, Michigan and Gunzenhausen, Bavaria. These types of relationships exemplify the university's robust

international engagement. Initiated formally in 2017 by Judy Zehnder Keller, founder of the Bavarian Inn Lodge, connections between SVSU and Hochschule Ansbach rapidly advanced, ultimately resulting in the establishment of a formal memorandum of understanding (MOU) in 2020. This agreement, renewed in 2025, supports ongoing student and faculty exchanges and facilitates professional development and cross-cultural experiences for both institutions.

The Gerstacker Fellowship, an SVSU-led program, has been central to strengthening regional connections with Ansbach and Gunzenhausen. The fellows participate in educational exchanges, cultural celebrations, and community-building activities.

SVSU's active involvement was particularly highlighted during the 60th anniversary celebrations of the Bay City-Ansbach and Frankenmuth-Gunzenhausen relationships. The university played a key role in creating Ansbach Platz in Bay City, which was symbolized by the sculpture Two Cities Connected, to embody the spirit of international friendship. Additionally, SVSU's contributions have led to new institutional ties, notably the recently established collaboration with Würzburg University.

Expanding its global footprint, SVSU maintains vibrant partnerships beyond Germany. Long-standing exchanges with Shikoku University in Tokushima, Japan, which was formed due to Tokushima being the sister city of Saginaw, have featured substantial faculty and student



*Students from Tokushima, Japan, on a short-term language-learning trip at SVSU*

engagements complemented by reciprocal visits involving SVSU's Roberts-Gilbertson and Gerstacker Fellowship programs. Additionally, Tokushima High School's involvement has further extended these exchanges to the secondary education level, thus fostering early cross-cultural appreciation among younger students.

In Amanokrom, Ghana, SVSU has nurtured a dynamic collaboration with Pentecostal University since 2010. Spearheaded by Dr. Joseph Ofori-Dankwa, the partnership includes numerous faculty and student exchanges that focus on educational enhancement, community service and mutual cultural understanding. Notably, these interactions directly contributed to the establishment of the official sister-city agreement between Saginaw and Amanokrom in 2019, further strengthening the

bond between the communities through sustained educational and cultural exchange.

SVSU's recent MOU with Georgian College in Barrie, Ontario, which stemmed directly from the Saginaw-Barrie sister-city agreement in 2024, exemplifies the university's strategic approach to expanding regional internationalization. Moreover, discussions with Niagara College, initiated through the Frankenmuth-Niagara-on-the-Lake friendship city arrangement, illustrate ongoing efforts to foster educational cooperation with institutions in Ontario.

The Judy Zehnder Keller German Study Fellowship further demonstrates SVSU's commitment to international academic enrichment. Through these extensive networks, SVSU

not only reinforces Eisenhower's vision of global understanding but also significantly enhances regional educational, cultural and economic development by establishing lasting international bonds beneficial to all partner communities. By cultivating these diverse global relationships, SVSU continues to serve as a prominent advocate for international education, cultural exchange, and mutual understanding, thereby shaping future leaders equipped with the global awareness and cultural competencies necessary for a connected and collaborative world. ♦

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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This publication would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the staff, faculty, students, and alumni who contributed to its development. We are sincerely grateful for their support and for advancing the global impact of SVSU.

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And a special thanks to:

**The Office of the President and  
The Office of Academic Affairs**



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# CARDINALS **STAND** OUT

