



SAGINAW VALLEY | INTERNATIONAL
STATE UNIVERSITY | PROGRAMS

Newsletter

Winter 2026



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Featured Story

International Cardinal Award

The Office of International Programs (OIP) offered the inaugural International Cardinal Award on April 29 to two students who demonstrate exceptional commitment to fostering intercultural understanding, global awareness, and inclusive community building on campus and beyond.

This award honors students—both domestic and international—who demonstrate exceptional commitment to fostering intercultural understanding, global awareness, and inclusive community building on campus and beyond. The selection criteria include Intercultural Engagement, Leadership & Initiative, Impact on Campus or Community, Collaboration Across Differences, and Reflection of Global Citizenship Values. Two graduating seniors were selected for this award: Riley Romer (International Studies) and Gabriel Bartholomay (Computer Science, Brazil).

Riley demonstrated consistent commitment through her active participation in International Student Club as a board member and a regular contributor to Intercultural Night as one of the directors. In the leadership positions, she demonstrated initiative by ensuring that international students felt welcomed, heard, and supported. She remained actively engaged with Study Abroad initiatives, volunteering at SVSU study abroad events, serving as a study abroad peer advisor, and as a member of the campus-wide Study Abroad Advisory Committee (SAAC). She presented her own study abroad experience through a storytelling event, using reflection and personal narrative to help other students better understand the value of intercultural learning. Through these efforts, she helped normalize curiosity, reflection, and openness toward other cultures while inspiring peers to engage globally.

Gabe was the most active international student and never missed a single international event. He served as the President of International Student Club, organized many events with other student leaders, including the annual Intercultural Night, International Food Festival, cultural tours, and initiated the International Peers Program with the OIP staff, which creates a platform for international students and American students to learn from each other. He also served on the international student panel at the diversity symposium sponsored by the Community Engagement and Inclusion Council (CEIC) of the Saginaw Community Foundation and shared his personal story as an international student and student leader. The two awardees consistently embody the values of global citizenship, including respect, empathy, openness, and a commitment to learning from others. Their actions reflect cultural humility and a genuine desire to understand experiences different from their own. Whether through leadership, storytelling, or everyday interactions, they model what it means to be an engaged and thoughtful global citizen.



Gabe and Riley pose with their awards.

Cardinals Hit the Diamond

Great Lakes Loons Baseball

Nobody remembers the syllabus.

That is not an indictment of anyone's teaching. It is simply how memory works. The moments that last—the ones recalled at farewell dinners or in emails sent years later—are rarely the planned ones. They are the unplanned dinners, the late-night conversations, or the afternoon someone takes you to a baseball game where almost no one knows what is happening, and somehow that is exactly the point.

This spring, the Office of International Programs took a group of international students to see the Great Lakes Loons play in Midland.



Students from China, Taiwan, Malaysia, the Netherlands, and beyond watched baseball in person for the first time. They asked questions: Why is everyone standing during the seventh-inning stretch? What is the infield fly rule? Nobody completely answered that last one. They

laughed anyway

That laugh matters. The moment a student asks a question and someone leans over to explain, a stranger becomes a



classmate. Repeat that often enough, and SVSU becomes more than a place where someone studied. It becomes a place where they belonged.

The Loons lost. But the students were already ahead.

International Student Services

Saginaw Spirit Hockey Night

On February 14, OIP took students to the Dow Event Center for SVSU Night at the Saginaw Spirit hockey game. Students arrived by OIP van, cheered on the Spirit in the stands, and several got a once-in-a-lifetime experience riding the Fanboni and Zamboni on the ice between periods. The event offered students a chance to experience one of Michigan's most beloved winter traditions in a lively, community setting.



Peer Program: Spring 2026 Series

The Peer Program completed a four-event spring series that blended structured learning with hands-on cultural experiences. The semester opened with a mixer in March, bringing together domestic and international students for community-building activities. A second session took students to the ice skating rink, followed by a cultural competency workshop led by Dr. Rosina Hassoun on implicit bias and unexamined assumptions. The series wrapped with a trip to the Walleye Festival in Freeland, giving students a taste of a local Michigan springtime tradition.

Down the Slopes *Snow Snake Ski Trip*

There is a moment on a chairlift that cannot be prepared for. You can fill out the interest survey. You can note your shoe size and skiing experience — most students marked “beginner” or “none.” You can agree to the non-refund policy and confirm you know the bus departure time from Lot J. You can be ready, in every logistical sense, for a day at Snow Snake Mountain.



And then the chair lifts, and the trees drop away, and there is nothing around you but cold air and a sky that goes on longer than you expected, and the mountain below you looks both smaller and more serious than it did from the ground. One student described it as the first time she had been somewhere with no frame of reference — nothing in her life at home to compare it to. Just the cold, and the quiet, and the question of what comes next.

That is, more or less, what the Office of International Programs was going for.

The inaugural Winter 2026 ski trip — co-organized with the International Student Club — drew roughly 55 students, enough to fill a charter bus and justify a full lesson package at Snow Snake Mountain & Ski Area. The day included lift tickets, rentals, helmets, instruction, and food. Student assistants from OIP traded their lift tickets for cameras, tasked with documenting something that turns out to be difficult to capture: what it looks like when a person tries something genuinely new.

It looks, mostly, like falling. And then getting up. And then trying again. Which is, in the end, what international education has always looked like. The mountain just makes it more obvious.

Tea & Talk *Spring 2026 Series*

The Tea & Talk series held two sessions this spring, drawing participants for informal discussion over tea and snacks in Gilbertson Hall. In April, a panel on AI literacy explored the intersection of artificial intelligence and campus learning, featuring Faculty Fellow Phillip Hanson, Kyle Bylin, and Blake Johnson, with students TJ Neeb and Logan Finney also presenting their own work. The semester closed in May with a reflective open session in which graduating and departing international students shared their observations on American culture and campus life. The format continued to prove its value as a low-barrier space for genuine cross-cultural exchange.



When the Room Becomes Something Else

Lunar New Year and the Belonging Students Built

Belonging has a way of announcing itself in small moments.

It might be a shared laugh in a language neither person speaks perfectly. It might be the smell of food that tastes like home — even if home is somewhere else entirely. At SVSU this past February, for students from South Korea, Taiwan, China, Malaysia, the United States, and nearly a dozen other countries, it arrived at a Lunar New Year celebration that almost no one in the room had expected to become the highlight of their year.

Lunar New Year is not a minor holiday. For hundreds of millions of people across East Asia, it is the most important day on the calendar — a time to gather, to eat, to remember where you came from. Which means that for an international student thousands of miles from home, it is also, potentially, the loneliest night of the year.



What made this year different was that the students decided not to let it be.

The event — organized almost entirely by students, in partnership with OIP and the SVSU Chinese Club — was the kind of thing that gets remembered. Not because it was flawless, but because it was real. Lanterns. Calligraphy. A zither performance. A room full of people who had never celebrated this holiday together, figuring out how to do it anyway. Faculty came. Community members came. And for a few hours, the gap between



“international student” and “domestic student” collapsed into something more interesting: people learning, together, what someone else’s most important day feels like.

That is experiential learning in its truest form. Not a simulation. Not a cultural awareness module. A room where belonging was built, in real time, by the students themselves.

2026 CEIC Diversity Symposium

SVSU International Cardinal Experiences and Success

The Office of International Programs (OIP) was invited by the Saginaw Community Engagement and Inclusion Council (CEIC) to present at the 2026 Diversity Symposium, Forward Together – Inclusive Growth for All, on February 24.

Dr. Alice Yang, OIP Director, joined three international student leaders—Esther Gariba (Vice President of the African Students Association), Gabriel Batholomay (President of the International Student Club), and Ankit Sanjel (President of the Nepali Student Association)—for a panel discussion, Building Bridges – SVSU International Cardinal Experiences and Success. The panel highlighted how involvement in student organizations, campus jobs, and community initiatives helps international students build confidence, develop professional skills, and form meaningful connections.

Dr. Yang highlighted international students' contributions to academic enrichment, the economy, innovation and workforce development, diplomacy, campus diversity and global competence, and mutual understanding. She also shared OIP's services and programs, including immigration, cultural, academic, and personal advising; the International Student Club, International Peers Program, and Community Friends Program; Intercultural Night, the International Food Festival, monthly birthday celebrations, and cultural excursions such as Mackinac Island. She encouraged students to serve as cultural ambassadors and build bridges through people-to-people exchange.



The student leaders shared their study abroad experiences and leadership journeys at SVSU, reflecting on how they contribute to campus internationalization by bringing diverse perspectives, cultures, and experiences. They also discussed challenges such as adjusting to a new academic system, navigating cultural differences, overcoming homesickness, and building support networks, emphasizing how a welcoming community makes a lasting difference.

“One recurring theme throughout the panel was how welcoming SVSU has been for all of us. We also recognized how similar we are in many ways—academically driven, culturally curious, and united by the shared desire to grow and succeed. Engagement creates belonging. When international students step into leadership roles or actively participate in campus life, it not only builds confidence and communication skills but also strengthens the entire campus community.”
— Ankit Sanjel

NAFSA: Association of International Educators states that international education strengthens institutions, communities, and nations. The true measure of that commitment is whether students feel they belong, are supported during uncertainty, and know their contributions are valued. If diversity is about representation and equity is about access, belonging is about feeling seen, respected, and valued. International student success is a shared responsibility, shaped by advising, faculty engagement, peer relationships, and institutional support.

Intercultural Night Recap



This past March, the auditorium doors opened to the larger community for our highly anticipated Intercultural Night, put on by the International Student Club. Centered around the theme, "Culture Makes the World Go Round," the evening showed just how much our global traditions connect us. The opening song of "Waving Flags" for the parade of flags set the stage perfectly for a night of high-energy performances, kicking off a celebration that brought everyone together.

The sheer scale of this year's showcase was a major milestone for the club. With approximately 65 performers from 16 different countries representing 18 distinct cultures, the stage was constantly alive with talent. A huge highlight this year was the focus on movement, with an impressive 9 of the 15 acts being dance numbers—significantly more dances compared to previous years. These dance numbers were a fantastic way for groups of friends to share the stage, supporting one another while proudly highlighting their cultures together.

Beyond the energetic dance routines, attendees got to experience an educational presentation on Malaysia and a spectacular fashion show that highlighted traditional outfits from 8 different countries.

Ultimately, the night was a powerful reminder of how celebrating your culture brings people together. By sharing these traditions openly on the auditorium stage, the International Student Club and our talented performers found common ground with the community, proving that our diverse cultures really do make the world go round.

If you missed out on performing this time, we want to encourage future students to grab your friends, form a dance group, and share your unique talents with us next year!



International Students Visit the Dow Company

On April 28, two OIP staff members (Dr. Alice Yang and Collin Glenn) and some international students visited Dow Chemical Company to learn about the local industry as an experiential learning experience in the local community.

Dow is a multinational materials science corporation headquartered in Midland, Michigan, which is only 20 minutes away from SVSU. Founded in 1897, it is one of the world's largest chemical producers, supplying innovative plastics, performance materials, and agricultural solutions to industries spanning packaging, infrastructure, and transportation. Its staff is proud that Dow is a global company that operates manufacturing sites in 31 countries.

The company visit was an opportunity OIP created for international students to learn more about Dow, its work, and the different career paths and functions within the company. During the visit, the students had the chance to hear a company overview, take part in a guided tour, and attend panel conversations with Dow professionals and leaders.

Ms. Tiffany Torain, the Dow Inclusion Relationship Manager hosted the event and invited quite a few senior and young professionals to share their career paths with our students. She said, "Together, we had the privilege of engaging with students representing a wide range of global perspectives and academic experiences across business, engineering, technology, and communications. Our diverse colleagues from across the company—and many from countries around the globe— shared their experiences and reminded students, and all of us, to stay curious, embrace flexibility, and remain open to continuous learning and growth."



We really appreciate Ms. Torain and her team who created an impactful day for the students. Their personal/professional stories and passion for Dow were very inspiring to the students. One student expressed her appreciation. "This experience truly meant a lot to me. I learned so much from this visit, especially at a time when I am close to graduation and have been struggling with my job search. It was genuinely very helpful and encouraging for me."

Visiting Dow provide international students with experiential learning opportunities that connect academic knowledge with professional practice, enhance understanding of U.S. workplace culture, expand career awareness, and strengthen engagement with the local community. Through direct interaction with employers, students develop cultural competence, professional skills, and a deeper appreciation of the region's economic and industrial landscape.

International Student Send-Off Reception

The Office of International Programs recently hosted our annual International Student Send-Off Reception to honor our graduating international seniors. This year marked our largest student participation to date, with 22 graduating seniors from 15 different countries coming together to celebrate this incredible milestone.

Before the official program began, graduating seniors, their invited friends, family, deans, and notable campus staff all gathered to enjoy a celebratory meal together.

The main program featured inspiring speeches from the university president, the international student advisor, and the director of international programs, all praising the seniors for their academic achievements and contributions to our campus community.

The highlight of the reception was the individual recognition of each graduate. One by one, students were called up by name to the front of the room. Staff members placed colorful flag stoles representing each student's home country around their shoulders, and presented them with a certificate officially welcoming them into the International Student



Alumni chapter, along with a small gift bag from the Office of International Programs. Each senior then posed for a front-and-center photo to capture the moment.

With a packed room of loved ones and faculty cheering them on, the reception was a massive success for everyone involved. We are incredibly proud of our international seniors and look forward to seeing the impact they will make as they take their talents out into the world!



Vtito Trip to the Netherlands



Eleven Vtito fellows spent the week of Spring Break 2026 in Amsterdam, experiencing the culture and meeting daily with business leaders as part of their experiential global leadership course. Company visits, including Ecco, IBM Amsterdam and Mattel, were informative and personal as proven leaders sought to share wisdom and personally connect with students. The Vtito fellows were active participants when visiting Heineken and Stay Future Proof, with breakout sessions and workshops prepared for them. On the cultural side, students enjoyed walking, boat and bike tours. They visited museums, the Royal Palace, and the Anne Frank House. They also had a day trip to The Hague, where they saw the Peace Palace, which houses the International Court of Justice. Throughout the week, the students immersed themselves in the international experience – they showed a love for the people, an appreciation for the history and culture of Amsterdam, and they were inspired by personable leaders who shared their vision and heart.

Global Business in Athens Greece

This winter, 11 students from the Scott L. Carmona College of Business traveled to Athens, Greece, for a week of amazing food, sightseeing, and learning. Along with faculty members Professor Stacie Krupp and Dr. Kevin Meyer, the group visited a new business each day, from large investment firms (AXIA Ventures) to smaller businesses focused on helping the local homeless community (Shedia Home). Afterward, they visited unique cultural sites such as the Acropolis and the Agora, stopped at an olive oil bar, explored the city through a food tour, and went on a half-day excursion to the Temple of Poseidon. At the end of the trip, students gave a presentation on their favorite parts of the experience. They unanimously reported a positive learning experience and a strong desire to keep traveling and learning about new cultures!



Following Fellowship to Thailand

The RGF 27th Cohort Abroad

Dr. Eric Gilbertson, who cofounded the Roberts-Gilbertson Fellowship and later served as SVSU's president, was not looking for talented students. He was looking for students who refused to be spectators.

Twenty-seven cohorts later, those students keep showing up.

The 27th class spent their year the way every class before them has — in seminars designed to make comfortable thinking uncomfortable, in community projects that required actual follow-through, in the company of peers chosen specifically because easy agreement between them was never going to be possible. And then, as the program has always promised, they traveled.

This year, they went to Thailand.

The Office of International Programs at SVSU has built its work on a straightforward premise: that there are things you cannot learn in a classroom, and that the responsibility of a university is to put students in front of those things. The Thailand Study Tour is what that premise looks like in practice. Seven fellows — Eric Dahley, Zachary Green, Lila Duvendack, Luke Hanson, Sophia Dreamer-Acevedo, Lauryn Rousseau, and Isaac Zamora-Ayres — traveled with staff/faculty coordinators Collin Glenn, Dr. David Nichols, and Dr. Jennifer McCullough across sixteen days and a country that resists easy categorization, which was precisely the point.



They started in Bangkok. The Grand Palace. Haroon Mosque, established in 1837 in a Muslim neighborhood tucked along a canal behind the Jim Thompson House — the kind of place that collapses the easy story about Thai culture being one thing. Then a full day at Ayutthaya, the ancient capital destroyed by Burma in 1767 and now a UNESCO World Heritage Site, where a bodhi tree has been slowly consuming a stone Buddha head for so long that the roots and the face have become indistinguishable. You stand in front of it and the standard coordinates — past and present, sacred and ruined, foreign and familiar — stop organizing themselves the way they usually do.

That is, more or less, the point of the whole program.

The rain found them on a Sunday in Bangkok, after church. The kind of downpour that doesn't negotiate. Someone got out their phone and took a selfie anyway. Wet, laughing, thumbs up. It is a very specific kind of group that responds to a Bangkok rainstorm like that, and the Office of International Programs had assembled exactly that kind of group.

The overnight train north — all ten in Car 2, twelve hours and forty minutes to Chiang Mai — marked the turn. Lanna history. A walk along the Ping River through a neighborhood containing, within a few blocks of each other, the city's first church, first mosque, first Sikh gurdwara, and oldest Chinese



merchant temple. An afternoon at Payap University's Yunus Social Business Center, where students and civic leaders described a Northern Thailand that most visitors never encounter. Muay Thai on a weeknight, with marigold garlands around their necks and fighters standing beside them after the bouts.

Then four days deeper north with Green Trails Outdoor Adventures — into terrain that doesn't appear in most people's mental map of Thailand at all. At a Karen village in Mae Wang, they bought ingredients at a local market in the morning and ate what they made from them at lunch, sitting with their hosts on the floor. At the Huay Hoi Waterfall, they swam. At a tea plantation on a ridge in Mae Salong, they stood with rolling hills running toward Myanmar at their backs and tried to explain to each other what they were looking at.

Mae Salong — Santikhiri — sits in the mountains of Chiang Rai Province, settled by soldiers of the Chinese Nationalist Army who retreated there after 1949 and never left. Their descendants grow oolong tea on terraced hillsides and maintain a Martyrs' Memorial Hall for the men buried there. The fellows visited the tomb of General Duan Xiwen, who built the community, and climbed to a pagoda for panoramic views of everything he built. The next morning, they were up before sunrise.

The last major stop was Wat Rong Khun — the White Temple outside Chiang Rai, a living place of worship still under construction by a single artist who intends it to outlast him. Sixteen days in, and the group was still intact, still curious, still together.

This is what the Office of International Programs makes possible. Not the managed exposure of a tour, but the accumulated weight of actually being somewhere — long enough, and with enough intention, that students stop performing their own open-mindedness and start just paying attention. For several members of the 27th cohort, Thailand was their first time abroad. For all of them, it was a first time in this particular country, with this particular group, inside experiences that no seminar could have produced.

The Fellowship now counts nearly 300 alumni. Most will tell you the seminars mattered. That the community project was formative. That they are glad they did it. And then they will tell you about the trip.

Experiential Mandarin: Sing & Learn

Promoting Global Competence Through Language, Culture, and Music

The Experiential Mandarin: Sing & Learn Program, designed by Dr. Alice Yang in Winter 2026, introduced students to the Chinese language and culture through an engaging, experiential approach. The five-session class used music, cultural exploration, and interactive activities to help students develop foundational Mandarin skills while learning about Chinese history, society, and traditions. The class attracted students from diverse academic backgrounds, many with little or no prior Mandarin experience. Through singing popular Mandarin songs, learning cultural stories, and practicing basic communication, students experienced language learning in an enjoyable and meaningful way. Lexy Shiyu Lei, Vice-President of the Cardinal Mandarin Club, assisted with instruction.

Mandarin Chinese is one of the world's most important languages. With more than one billion speakers, it is the most widely spoken native language and serves as the official language of China, Taiwan, Singapore, and many Chinese-speaking communities worldwide. As economic and cultural connections between the United States and China continue to shape the twenty-first century, Mandarin proficiency and cultural understanding have become increasingly valuable skills for students entering a global workforce.

Throughout the sessions, students were introduced to foundational Mandarin concepts, including the Pinyin system and Chinese strokes, radicals, and characters. They practiced Chinese calligraphy, gaining firsthand experience with a traditional art form reflecting centuries of cultural heritage. Students also learned practical vocabulary and expressions for everyday situations, including greetings, enabling them to engage in basic communication with greater confidence. Music was a central component of the course. Students learned and performed Mandarin songs, including Happy Birthday in Chinese. Through singing, they improved pronunciation, vocabulary, listening comprehension, and speaking confidence while gaining insight into contemporary Chinese society and culture. Students also learned about traditional instruments such as Guzheng, Erhu, Pipa, and Dizi, as well as China's linguistic diversity through regional varieties including Cantonese, Shanghaiese, and Hokkien.

The Experiential Mandarin: Sing & Learn Program contributes directly to the university's internationalization efforts by creating opportunities for students to engage with global cultures and perspectives. Language learning helps students understand how culture shapes communication, identity, and human relationships, while cultural learning fosters curiosity, respect, and understanding across diverse communities. Together, these skills prepare students for responsible global citizenship in an increasingly interconnected world.

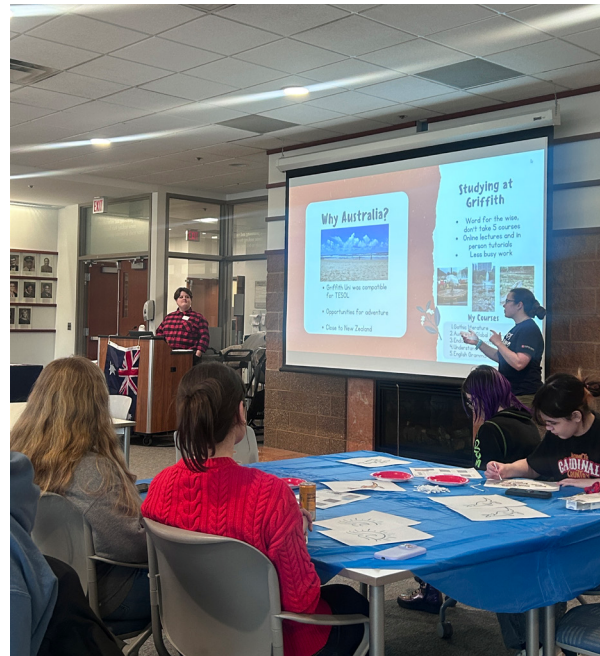


Study Abroad Passports Events

Bringing the World to Campus

The Study Abroad Office hosted another successful winter semester of Passport Events, giving students the opportunity to explore four exciting study abroad destinations while learning about the academic, cultural, and personal benefits each program offers. Every event featured snacks from the host country, cultural crafts, trivia, and giveaways.

We kicked off the series with Australia, where Kate Johnson shared her experience studying at the University of the Sunshine Coast, one of our direct enrollment partners. The Germany session showcased two of our newest exchange partnerships at Ansbach University and the University of Würzburg. These programs provide students with exciting new opportunities to study German while offering a wide variety of courses taught in English.



Our Kenya event featured information about our study abroad program in Nairobi with KEI, presented by Study Abroad Coordinator Kal Spencer. Students also enjoyed a cultural presentation by Kenyan student Jeff Karanja, who shared insights into Kenyan traditions, daily life, and culture. The final event explored Japan, where Ethan Olds and Vaughn Severance shared their experiences studying through our exchange partnership with Kansai Gaidai University. Representatives from the Japan Center for Michigan Universities presented opportunities to study at their Semester in Hikone program, while Paige Jurik also discussed her internship experience in Japan through a study abroad provider.

At the conclusion of each Passport Event, one student received a scholarship generously provided by WorldStrides. Four students were given \$1,000 to attend any WorldStrides provider program. Students who attended all four sessions were entered into the grand prize drawing for a \$1,500 Passport Event Scholarship. Congratulations to Arianna Kelly, who was selected as this year's recipient. The scholarship can be applied toward any SVSU study abroad program.

SVSU Students Earn Gilman International Scholarships

Saginaw Valley State University is proud to celebrate three outstanding students who have been awarded the U.S. Department of State's Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship. This prestigious recognition reflects not only each student's academic dedication, but also SVSU's growing culture of global engagement and opportunity.

Marissa Slavin will participate in a faculty-led study abroad program in Ecuador during Summer 2026 and was awarded a \$2,000 scholarship.

Jazzelle Kierst will spend the Summer 2026 semester in the United Kingdom and received a \$2,500 scholarship toward her studies abroad.

Breyan Shimizu will study in Greece during Fall 2026 through a provider program and was awarded \$3,000 to help fund her experience.

Receiving the Gilman Scholarship is a highly competitive achievement. Each recipient demonstrated academic merit and commitment to cultural exchange. The Office of International Programs and Study Abroad congratulates these three students on their successes and future travels.

About the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship

The Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship is a program of the U.S. Department of State, funded by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. Its mission is to diversify the kinds of American students who study and intern abroad by supporting those who might not otherwise have the financial means to pursue international experiences.

The scholarship provides up to \$5,000 to eligible undergraduate students for credit-bearing study or internship programs abroad. An additional Critical Need Language Supplement of up to \$3,000 is available for students studying a critical need language during their program. To be eligible, applicants must:

- Be U.S. citizen or national undergraduate students
- Be current recipients of a Federal Pell Grant
- Be participating in a credit-bearing study abroad program or international internship

SVSU students interested in applying for the next cycle should contact the Office of International Programs for advising and support. Studying abroad can be accessible for everyone.

"As a pre veterinary student, pursuing a career in veterinary medicine, I am excited to learn more about the ecosystems and animals in Ecuador! I am excited for this opportunity and am grateful for the Gilman Scholarship in helping me fund this trip!"

- Marissa Salvin



A Season of Belonging

The J-1 Guest Student Experience at SVSU

Exchange & Partnerships

The hardest part of studying abroad is not the language barrier or the unfamiliar food or the coursework in a system that does not quite work the way you expected.

The hardest part is the timeline.

When you come for four years, you have time to find your footing slowly. When you come for a semester, the clock is already running. Every week that passes without connection is a week you cannot get back. And so the students who arrive as J-1 non-degree exchange visitors — from Changchun Normal University in China, from universities in Taiwan and Malaysia, from Germany — tend to arrive with a particular kind of urgency. They are not here to observe. They are here to live it.

This year's cohort did exactly that.

They were at the Lunar New Year celebration — not just attending, but helping build it. They were at the baseball game, asking about the infield fly rule alongside everyone else. Hockey games. Ski slopes. Kickboxing classes. Weekly clubs. They showed up, consistently, to everything — not because OIP scheduled them to, but because they understood something that takes some students years to learn: that belonging is not given. It is accumulated, one small decision at a time.



What made this semester remarkable was not just what these students took from SVSU. It was what they brought to it. Every time a student from Changchun explained the meaning of a brushstroke to a classmate from Michigan, or a student from Malaysia described what Lunar New Year meant at home, the exchange ran both directions. That is the version of international education that is hardest to put in a brochure and easiest to remember.

By the end of the semester, they were not visitors anymore. They were something harder to describe and more important — people who had been somewhere long enough to know it, and to be known by it.

We were lucky to host them.

Visiting Nurse

The Scholar-in-Residence Experience of Lirong Mo



The partnership between SVSU and Jinan University did not begin with a memorandum of understanding. It began with a man named Dr. Robert Yien.

Dr. Yien served as SVSU's Provost for 27 years, and he understood something that does not fit neatly into any strategic plan: knowledge does not travel well through documents alone. It travels through people. So in 1986, he built a sustained relationship between SVSU's Department of Nursing and one of China's most prestigious national universities — and he committed to it year after year, regardless of how inconvenient or complicated it became. Roughly 30 Jinan nurses and faculty members have made that trip since, interrupted only briefly by a pandemic.

Lirong Mo arrived this year as the latest chapter in that tradition.

What set Lirong apart was not her credentials, though those are considerable. It was her presence. She showed up — to evidence-based practice seminars and DNP discussions, yes, but also to tree planting events, football games, tennis matches, and the kind of informal moments that never make it onto any program itinerary but are, in the end, where relationships actually form. She connected with faculty, with students, with other international guests, with families. She enriched classroom conversations about the differences between American and Chinese healthcare systems in ways no textbook could replicate, and she brought knowledge of traditional Chinese medicine and acupuncture that opened doors the curriculum had not thought to knock on.

And when SVSU faculty and students needed to navigate travel to Jinan, she helped make it possible — because that is what a real partnership looks like. Not an agreement on paper, but a person who has been here long enough to care about both sides of the relationship.

That is what Dr. Yien was building in 1986. Lirong Mo is exactly what he had in mind.



Scholars from Changchun

CCNU Visiting Scholars at SVSU

There is a tendency in higher education to measure international partnerships by the number of agreements signed. A growing map of partner institutions. A metric that is easy to report and difficult to interrogate.

SVSU's relationship with Changchun Normal University (长春师范大学) is something different. It is not built wide. It is built deep.

This past winter offered a quiet measure of how deep. Four CCNU students crossed the stage at graduation — three of them having spent two years in Changchun and two years at SVSU, completing a degree that belongs to both institutions. The fourth finished three years at CCNU and one final year here. These are not exchange statistics. They are students who built a life in University Center, Michigan, and earned something real at the end of it.

Then, in April, two visiting scholars arrived.

Mengzhuo Li and Jingyi Xia came as the latest chapter in a story SVSU and CCNU have been writing together for years. Dr. Debra Lively — who has spent years doing the patient, relationship-building work that no MOU can substitute for — built an itinerary that treated their time here as more than an academic exercise. The scholars visited early childhood education centers across the Great Lakes Bay Area, met with faculty and students, and explored the kind of locally owned businesses, restaurants, and cultural sites that turn a campus visit into an understanding of a place.

That is the point of a partnership like this one. Not just to connect institutions, but to connect people to a community — and a community to the world that keeps showing up at its door.

We were glad they were here. We look forward to the next chapter.



Nursing Beyond Borders

38 Years of Nursing Exchange between SVSU and Jinan University

SVSU's nursing partnership with Jinan University (Guangzhou, China) is one of the university's oldest international relationships. It grew over nearly four decades through personal relationships, academic exchanges, and sustained institutional commitment. The late Dr. Rob Yien, SVSU's Vice President for Academic Affairs, and the late Dr. Crystal Lange, Dean of the College of Nursing and Health Sciences, helped launch the nursing exchange program in 1988. Jinan University credits the partnership with developing and internationalizing its nursing discipline through advances in outpatient care, community engagement, daily safety briefings, evidence-based practice, nursing assessment, nurse scheduling, patient fall prevention, and simulation methodology.



In May 2026, Dr. Andrea Frederick and Dr. Mindy Fabbro, two nursing professors, and Dr. Alice Yang, Director of the Office of International Programs and Senior International Officer (SIO), visited Jinan University with students for the annual faculty and student exchange. This was the second delegation since COVID-19 in 2020. The group met with staff from the International Affairs Office, School of Nursing, and School of Medicine; toured the First Affiliated Hospital of Jinan University; and attended and presented at the 15th International Forum on Nursing and Jinan International Nurses Day activities. Beyond the academic program,

they enjoyed cultural activities arranged by the welcoming Jinan nurses, including a Pearl River night cruise, visits to the Traditional Chinese Medicine Market, Chen Clan Academy, Baiyun Mountain, and karaoke. The experience strengthened students' cultural competence, understanding of global health challenges and healthcare systems, and commitment to patient-centered care.

Several factors made the partnership sustainable, including a focused academic purpose, regular exchanges, faculty champions, and institutional support. More than 110 SVSU faculty and students and over 30 Jinan nurses and staff have participated in exchanges. The relationship endured leadership changes because faculty on both sides remained committed. Dr. Weiju Chen, who came to SVSU as a visiting scholar in the 1990s, later became Dean of Nursing at Jinan University and received an honorary Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree from SVSU in 2022. Dr. Marcia Shannon also played a key role, visiting Jinan University 11 times.



The Jinan-SVSU partnership illustrates several best practices: building on shared academic strengths, identifying committed faculty champions, creating recurring exchanges, fostering long-term trust and friendships, ensuring leadership support, focusing on mutual benefit, and sharing knowledge through publications and joint research. It grew beyond a signed agreement into a community of faculty, students, nurses, and administrators working together year after year. After nearly 40 years, it remains one of SVSU's strongest examples of sustained international engagement. "Nursing Beyond Borders" is more than a slogan—it is what both sides believe and practice.

A Season of Belonging

Winter 2026 at SVSU's Office of International Programs

Winter arrived the way it always does in Saginaw — quietly, completely, blanketing the campus in white and wrapping everything in the particular stillness that only comes with cold. For four students who had traveled thousands of miles to call SVSU home for a semester, it was their first glimpse of a Michigan winter. It would not be their last impression.



This winter semester, the Office of International Programs was proud to welcome four exchange students to our campus community — one from mainland China, two from Taiwan, and one from Malaysia. They arrived with suitcases, curiosity, and an extraordinary willingness to dive in. What followed was a semester neither they, nor we, will soon forget.

From the very first weeks, these students became a genuine part of the fabric of campus life. They joined the International Student Club, brought energy and cultural richness to Intercultural Night, and were central to one of the semester's most celebrated events — the Lunar New Year Celebration, a joyful gathering of red lanterns, traditional dress, paper-cutting art, and the kind of laughter that needs no translation. They didn't just attend SVSU; they enriched it.

But the experience extended well beyond the classroom and the campus. These students explored the Great Lakes Bay Region in ways that most local residents never do. They cheered on the Saginaw Spirit at a thrilling hockey game, took in a Great

Lakes Loons baseball game as spring began to stir, and carved down ski slopes at a local resort on the OIP Ski Trip — helmets on, flags raised, smiling through every fall and every run. They traveled to Lansing for a maple syrup festival and a tour of the State Capitol, tasting a little piece of Michigan history and tradition that they'll carry home with them.

And while they were learning about us, we were learning about them.

This semester also brought remarkable depth to SVSU's most treasured international relationship. Two visiting scholars from Changchun Normal University — a cornerstone partner of SVSU's global portfolio — spent time on our campus conducting site visits and deepening the early childhood education collaboration that has defined this partnership for years. Their presence reminded us why this work matters: not as a transaction between institutions, but as a sustained relationship built on trust, mutual respect, and a shared belief in what education can do.

Winter semester at SVSU has its own particular magic. Students arrive as the world is gray and cold, and over the weeks, they watch the campus transform. The snow melts. The trees remember themselves. The colors shift from white and silver to the full, brilliant palette of a Michigan spring. By the time the semester ends, the world is in bloom — and so, in a way, are the relationships formed within it.

As our exchange students prepare to return home, we are filled with gratitude. Gratitude for what they brought to our classrooms, our events, our hallways, and our community. Gratitude for their patience and courage in navigating a new culture and a new climate. And gratitude for what they reminded us: that a Midwest university with a global heart is not just a tagline. It's a living, breathing commitment — renewed every semester, one student at a time.

Safe travels. You will always have a home here.



Cover Story

An International Student Leader and Women Athlete



Xsandrie Viande Guimba is a senior international student from the Philippines majoring in exercise science. She is the Former President of the SVSU International Student Club and also an achievable women athlete. She was part of the part of the 3000-meter Women's Relay Team (Bronze) at the Southeast Asian Games in 2025 and the silver medalist in all individual events and gold medalist for both Women's and Mixed Relay in 2026 SEA Trophy Manila Series.

In addition to sports, she was part of the Forensics team in 2025 that got 7th place for the Team Sweepstakes at the National Speech Championship and 1st in the National Forensics Association's President's Division 3. Individually, she also got 3rd in Extemporaneous Speech once in 2024 Fall MISL tournament.

Congratulations to Xsandrie!

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