Dear Friends:

Welcome to the spring 2014 issue of WMU International News, which features our nationally renowned College of Health and Human Services (CHHS). Read about Alumna Lili Wang, who helped develop an orientation and mobility program for people with vision disabilities in China; a “lost boy” from Sudan, who made his way to Michigan to study occupational therapy (OT) with the goal of being South Sudan’s first OT practitioner; Dr. Yvette Hyter, an international researcher, who was recently awarded one of the highest honors from the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, and more.

As we conclude this academic year, I am pleased to report that we have made much progress towards the University’s global engagement goal, including the following highlights:

• Enrollment of international students increased to 1,688, up 7.2 percent from 2012-13, which includes 38 Fulbright Fellows representing 17 countries. Enrollment in the Center for English Language and Culture for International Students (ESL program) increased by 25 percent compared to fall 2012 enrollment.

• Building on a relationship that began in 2008, WMU is now working with multiple higher education institutions in the Dominican Republic to help address needs in the D.R.’s education system, in the economy and the society at large.

• Our colleges have renewed their focus on global engagement, including the College of Fine Arts, the College of Education, and the Haworth College of Business, which sent senior delegations to visit WMU overseas partners to expand academic and research linkages.

• CELCIS faculty developed a new graduate course for international students, Academic Communications (MGMT 7100), which will help these students gain the necessary skills to achieve success in graduate programs.

• WMU joined the “Generation Study Abroad” initiative launched by the Institute of International Education, making a commitment to increase our study abroad enrollment by 50 percent by 2019.

• WMU Study Abroad will offer 23 faculty-led programs in summer 2014, four of which are new programs, including “Both Sides of the Fence,” a collaborative project developed by the College of Health and Human Services and the Fetzer Institute [see article on page 9].

• The International Education Council of the Faculty Senate in collaboration with the Office of the Provost and the Haenicke Institute organized a well-attended series of workshop on curriculum internationalization. It also conducted a process mapping exercise on study abroad course approvals and credit transfers, including recommendations for improvement.

• Our annual showcase event—International Festival—attracted a record 5,000 attendees on March 23 to experience the cultures of 15 countries via native dishes, table displays and cultural performances.

We appreciate your interest in Western Michigan University and the Haenicke Institute and we welcome your comments about WMU International News.

Please write us at: wmu-international@wmich.edu

Best regards,
Wolfgang Schlör
Associate Provost
Haenicke Institute for Global Education

We would love to hear about noteworthy accomplishments from our talented WMU students, alumni and friends:

Share Your Story
Demand high for WMU’s College of Health and Human Services nationally recognized academic programs

Alumna helps China advance services for people with vision disabilities

Sudanese “Lost Boy” finds home in WMU occupational therapy program

International researcher honored by American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

WMU, Fetzer Institute collaborative program responds to Latino demographics

Sabbatical work in Bangladesh widens perspectives for OT professor

Nigerian nursing major finds way to Kalamazoo through WMU TNE program

Former Croatian National Team basketball player takes the court at WMU
Dean Earlie Washington of Western Michigan University’s College of Health and Human Services has a problem many of her peers would like to have—more student demand for programs than the college is currently able to serve.

“Demand for health care professionals has nearly doubled the college’s enrollment from 1,600 students in 2000 to a current enrollment of more than 3,000 students,” said Washington, who joined the college’s social work program as its director in 2002 and was named dean in 2006. “The need for health care professionals had exploded, and the college was in a prime position to act on that when I became dean, despite major budget cuts coming down the pipeline. An important variable is that everyone knew people trained in health care could get not just a job, but a profession. There is still very high demand for nurses, physician assistants, speech pathologists, social workers, occupational therapists and other health care professionals.

Founded in 1976, the college has established a tradition of excellence and innovation that began at WMU in 1922 with the establishment of an occupational therapy program. CHHS graduate programs in audiology, occupational therapy, physician assistant, and speech pathology have been ranked by U.S. News & World Reports in the top 50 programs of their kind in the United States. Rehabilitation counseling and social work graduate programs are ranked in the top 100. For more than ten years, the college has been among a select few of the nation’s schools and colleges of allied health that consistently receive prestigious research awards from the National Institutes of Health.

Over the years, the college has continued to excel and innovate, responding to changing needs and developments in health care and human services. Through its 2013-2016 Strategic Plan, it is committed to delivering education via an inter-disciplinary approach that emulates how health care is delivered in many hospitals and practices across the U.S. In an increasingly diverse field where many specialties might interact to provide patient care, Washington said it is essential for students to learn how to work well on teams to best prepare them for their future careers.

“We know that research proves that health care delivered by a team of health professionals is much more effective than care delivered through a single discipline,” she said. “Employers are looking for employees with discipline-specific skills, as well as inter-disciplinary skills. That is the hallmark of our strategic plan—across the college you can see a focus on inter-disciplinary teaching and learning intended to produce effective professionals.”

Supporting this effort are faculty members serving on five major committees: Diversity and Inclusion, International, Inter-professional Education, Innovation in Teaching and Learning, and Sustainability. Washington said she formed the International Education Committee early on so that faculty could assist her in developing a comprehensive program in global education that is inclusive of, but goes beyond, just study abroad.

“Our vision was to create a cultural competence framework within the development of our strategic plan so we can sustain international initiatives over time,” Washington said. “The architects of this committee included Dr. Joyce Thompson, an endowed professor of nursing who had worked all over the globe. She brought her perspectives based on years of international exchanges and partnerships to our strategic plan, which laid the groundwork for current and future international activities.”

The college now offers four short-term faculty-led programs in Ireland, Mexico, Senegal and the Netherlands. Plans are also in the works for new programs in Guatemala and Jamaica.

“I am committed to the practice that study abroad programs must benefit both the college and the host country,” says Washington. “We are interested in reciprocal partnerships in which we go to overseas colleges and universities and their faculty and students come here. The college has hosted social work faculty members from Rajagiri Institute in India. Their participation in some of our classes allowed our students to learn about social work from a very different perspective.”
Washington cited one example of the benefits that result from supporting faculty interest in conducting research or teaching abroad. Dr. Debra Lindstrom from the occupational therapy program traveled to Bangladesh a couple of years ago to train a group of faculty and to work with them in her area of expertise—ergonomics. That experience resulted in a faculty exchange for one of the participants who visited WMU. Additionally, Lindstrom will present her findings this year at an international conference in Japan, and she will take two WMU students with her to Bangladesh this summer to train more faculty. “Deb’s work is a good example of the benefit of building international relationships and how they are key to our success,” Washington said.

Through a collaboration with the Fetzer Institute in Kalamazoo, the college is launching a new study abroad program in summer 2014 named Both Sides of the Fence. Developed by CHHS faculty members Denise J. Bowen, assistant professor for the physician assistant program, and Dr. Maureen Mickus, associate professor of occupational therapy, the program is intended to foster greater understanding of the migration issues that affect people and communities—in Mexico as well as the United States—and to better prepare future health and human services professionals to respond to these issues. The Fetzer Institute is interested in how participating students can aid the Kalamazoo community in changing perceptions of “the other” through public presentations they will give after completing the program.

“This program ties together several of the goals and concepts of the college’s strategic plan and its vision to provide transformative educational experiences in partnership with the community,” Washington said. “The Mexico project is Kalamazoo-centric, yet has a global focus, so it does that. This is a partnership that I believe could be replicated by other colleges seeking partnerships to expand global education.”

Both Sides of the Fence, along with other domestic and international programs and initiatives offered by the college provide a broad base of support for achieving the college’s goal to contribute to the knowledge base while giving back to the local and global community. Through the college’s clinical programs at the Unified Clinics and the Center for Disability Services, CHHS students practice clinical skills and deliver specialized health care to a broad population of community members—about 1,800 patients per week in more than 80,000 appointments annually. Washington said students and faculty also extend the reach of the college and the University through significant community engagement and service. With required internships, field placements and clinical rotations alone, faculty-supervised CHHS students provide more than 350,000 hours of service annually to children and families in the community and region.

“In all of our professions, service is not an option—it is a mandate,” Washington said, “and we are obligated to engage in leadership service on campus, in the community, and throughout the globe. Creating educational and financial opportunities so more students and faculty can experience health care from a global perspective is important to our strategic plan, and I expect to see an increase in these activities.”
College of Health and Human Services

STUDY ABROAD PROGRAMS

International Perspectives on Aging, Ireland (spring break and summer)
Both Sides of the Fence: Understanding Mexican Migration in Guanajuato, Mexico (summer)
Cultural Connections in Senegal: Causes of Globalization and Consequences on Systems, Senegal (summer)
Focus on Health Care: Summer School Utrecht, Netherlands (summer)

SCHOOLS AND PROGRAMS

Department of Blindness and Low Vision Studies
Integrative Holistic Health and Wellness
Information Technology Services
School of Interdisciplinary Health Programs
Interdisciplinary Health Services
Ph.D. in Interdisciplinary Health Sciences
WMU Bronson School of Nursing
Department of Occupational Therapy
Department of Physician Assistant
School of Social Work
Specialty Program in Alcohol and Drug Abuse
Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE

Denise Bowen, B.S, PA-C., Assistant Professor, Physician Assistant
Jennifer Harrison, MSW, Coordinator of Field Education
Yvette Hyter, Ph.D., Professor, Speech Pathology and Audiology
Mary Lagerwey, Ph.D., Professor, Nursing (Committee Chair)
Maureen Mickus, Ph.D., Associate Professor, OT
Doris Ravotas, Ph.D., Interdisciplinary Health Studies, Program Coordinator
Gay Walker, M.S., Program Coordinator, Holistic Health
Jane Blyth, Ph.D., Director of Study Abroad and Global Program Development
Lili Wang, an alumna of Western Michigan University’s blindness and low vision studies program, was a “ground breaker” for the teaching of orientation and mobility for the visually impaired in China. She has become a national resource for her field as a specialist at the Beijing School for the Blind. Through her work at the school, she recognized that China lacked resources for teachers and others providing services to people who are visually impaired. That prompted her to come to Kalamazoo to study in WMU’s internationally renowned blindness and low vision studies program. Wang enrolled at WMU in Spring 2009 and graduated with a master’s degree in April 2010.

What prompted your decision to enroll at WMU?

I have been a teacher for nearly 18 years. After I graduated from the medical school in 1997, I worked at the Beijing School for the Blind. In order to better serve the students, I studied in the Educational Leadership Program at the Perkins School for the Blind in Boston, where my mind was totally opened—there were so many things we could learn to do to help our visually impaired students. While I was studying in the Perkins School, I got to know a former WMU graduate, Kirk Horton, a great person who had been working with the visually impaired all over the world. In 2006, I was involved in a national orientation and mobility project for the visually impaired conducted by the China Disabled People’s Federation. Gradually, people working in the field came to the agreement that orientation and mobility were basic key skills for the visually impaired and that China needed to offer systematic training through an orientation and mobility program. Kirk Horton recommended WMU as one of the best orientation and mobility programs in the world and encouraged me to go to Kalamazoo to study. With the support of CBM, an international Christian development organization, I applied to WMU and, luckily, was accepted.

What do you most enjoy about your career?

Almost all the students who are visually impaired that I work with enjoy and benefit from the training I received at WMU. I can observe their progress as they learn to use a white cane to navigate and their increased confidence in dealing with daily life. Now, most families accept the importance of how the white canes help their loved ones and encourage them to use canes. Six years ago, many in China discouraged the use of the white canes by the visually impaired because of possible negative connotations. Colleagues who have participated in lectures and workshops I have presented on the topic have expressed that they learned a lot and some of them became interested in orientation and mobility and plan to become a professional in this field. So, I am very happy that I am valuable to others through my work.

Were there any WMU professors who were particularly inspiring or helpful?

Yes. All of the professors at WMU were great. Dr. Jim Leja was always patient and encouraged me while I was going through different challenges; without his support, I wouldn’t have finished my studies so smoothly. Dr. Robert Wall Emerson was also very knowledgeable and professional and I still regularly benefit in my practice and teaching from what I have learned from his lectures. Mr. Bob Savage and Mr. David Greenwald taught me many practical skills, which have absolutely benefited me in my career.

How would you describe your overall experience at Western?

Great and enjoyable! All of the professors and students were very nice and I made many great friends there. But, most importantly, I feel very confident in my field because of what I have learned at WMU. The WMU library provided me with rich resources while I was studying for my degree that helped me earn As in all my classes. On campus, I enjoyed attending Bronco sports events. I also enjoyed visiting the Kalamazoo Valley Museum in downtown Kalamazoo.

What advice would you give to anyone thinking about going abroad for school?

Although it is hard to go abroad to study, it is really valuable; Respect yourself and others and be honest, kind, and friendly to people; Open your mind and get involved in some of the many activities going on in and around campus; Don’t be too shy to ask for help; and, organize your time and study hard, but also find time to enjoy life a bit while getting your education.
Sudanese “Lost Boy” finds home in WMU occupational therapy program

By: Linda Hanes

“When I left my family, it was not something that I would be able to come back to. I was six years old when government troops and government-sponsored militias attacked my village in southern Sudan. I awoke to the sound of automatic weapon fire blasting through my small hut. Terrified and confused, I fled barefoot. But, I was noticed and chased into the dark woods by armed militants on horseback firing at me. This horrific attack on my village resulted in the death of my ten sisters and my father.”

Since the start of the second Sudanese Civil War in 1983, millions of people have been killed or displaced from their homes. The conflict raging in the region of southern Sudan might as well have been a world away from the tranquil suburbs of West Michigan. But for one Western Michigan University student—Akol Abol—the civil war would forever change the course of his life.

Abol, who is seeking a master’s degree in occupational therapy at Western Michigan University, was born thirty-three years ago in the small town of Kuajok, South Sudan. The early years of Abol’s life were simple and innocent. Surrounded by his 11 sisters and deeply loved and cared for by his mother and father, Abol fondly remembers the dry heat and the livestock. When the civil war broke out, his family had to move to the countryside.

While he busied himself with growing up, the war had slowly moved into his world until Abol eventually had to abandon all he had ever known for the hope of a safe future. Taking one last look at his family, most of whom he would never see again, he headed out into the dangerous unknown when he was just six years old.

“I stayed a couple nights in the forest until I found other people and I journeyed with them for a good three months walk. All the clothes I had on were the clothes that I had for three months. I will always remember sucking liquid from mud and eating unknown leaves and berries just to stay alive. Along with other escapees, I traveled for years in search of safe refuge. This journey carried me over a thousand miles across three countries to refugee camps where I resided in Ethiopia and later in Kenya. Three-fourths of my fellow boys and girls died along the way due to starvation, disease and attacks by wild animals and enemy soldiers. Most of the conditions and challenges we faced were indescribable. I will always remember sucking liquid from mud and eating unknown leaves and berries just to stay alive.”

Abol became one of the “Lost Boys of Sudan”—one of the more than 20,000 boys of the Nuer and Dinka ethnic groups who were displaced and/or orphaned during the civil war (1983 to 2005). The name “Lost Boys of Sudan” was colloquially used by aid workers in the refugee camps where the boys resided in Africa.

Although Abol was one of the few individuals to survive on the long journey to the camps, safety was not guaranteed. If the young boys could survive the unsanitary conditions and the scarce food rations, they still had to worry about intruders coming at night to steal what little they owned. Death was a seemingly inevitable cloud hanging over the camps due to a lack of food and insecurity.

“There were days that I would call the black days of our life. What about the food you are given? You run out of it and you have three or four days to find a way to survive. Those were the days that I would go to school, drink water as lunch, do homework, drink...
As dinner and go to sleep right afterward with your stomach rumbling or growling. That time was like being in a prison."

His roommate, Alfred Uthou Ukech, ended up being one of the unlucky ones to succumb to the challenges of life in the camp. Although Abol had rushed to donate blood to his friend dying of anemia, he was turned away due to his own anemic conditions and his roommate passed away by his side.

In 2000, Abol began the process of coming to America to start a new life. After going through several rounds of interviews, he had to meet with an American lawyer, who would ultimately determine that he could indeed come to the United States. "The process was long, and some of my friends didn't make it because of cultural differences," Abol said. "We are taught not to look into people's eyes, and American immigration lawyers thought we were hiding something, which led to a failure of the interview for many lost boys and girls." After everything was said and done, Abol flew into Nairobi and then halfway across the world to Grand Rapids, Mich. He found living in Michigan was like living in another universe.

"In southern Sudan we don't have any winter ever. Period. The transportation is also different. I used to always walk on foot and eat corn grain for decades; I had never rode a bicycle, driven a car or been on a highway. In addition, back in Sudan, you would know your neighbors. Here it is different. You can live next door to a neighbor in an apartment, but you don't even speak to each other."

I am also Catholic, and one of the shocking things that happened to me was when I was in Sunday service was that I saw couples cuddling during mass. In Sudan, you kiss your wife while you're in secret places where nobody can see."

After working in the food delivery business for a couple of months, Abol realized that he wanted to pursue higher education. He applied to work at St. Mary's Hospital in Grand Rapids while earning his associate's degree. Still unsatisfied, Akol listened to the advice of a friend who had attended WMU and transferred to Western to complete a bachelor's degree. Akol is now working on a master's degree in occupational therapy and expects to graduate in December 2014.

These accomplishments were only the first of many wonderful changes in Akol's life. "In 2003, I was fortunate to meet a person from Washington, D.C., who connected me to someone in Sudan's capital city, who then connected me to the Red Cross and I was finally able to talk to my mom and my sister for the first time since my village was attacked," he said. "In 2007 I got married to the love of my life and my wife, Sarra, and I have been blessed so far with three young sons. In 2009, I was able to travel and meet with my mom and my sister for the first time in 22 years. I spent three weeks with them and that was the best moment of life—to my see my mother and sister again."

Although he has been able to come out on the other side of a tragedy that shook Sudan to its very core, Abol still mourns his lost childhood. "I did grow up missing the love of a mother and my family as whole," he said. "I lost ten sisters and my dad. If there's anything I could do to gain that time back, I would, but that cannot happen."

With an optimistic and humanitarian spirit, Abol has devoted himself to his studies and working towards educating others on the trials he had to face as a "lost boy" of the civil war. His goal is to pursue a career as an occupational therapist and create a widespread difference in the quality of lives of underserved populations, both in the U.S. and in South Sudan. After completion of his degree, he plans to work as general practitioner with disabled and low-income groups in the U.S., giving back to the community that has provided him with the opportunity for a second chance in life. In addition to working with communities in the U.S., Abol intends to become South Sudan's first occupational therapist and to eventually establish an occupational therapy program in his home country.

Abol said the helpful faculty at WMU have been a major factor in his overall success. "Professors teach classes but also want to be involved in the student's lives," he said. "I am blessed to be a part of Western. It has exceeded my expectations."

Abol is in the process of writing a book about his experiences that he hopes will be published in late 2014 or early 2015. He is also planning to start a foundation in the next year or two. With his passion for Western and helping others, Abol is a true example of Bronco pride.
A Western Michigan University professor was recently awarded one of the highest honors bestowed by an internationally recognized professional association for speech-language pathologists, audiologists and speech, language and hearing scientists. Dr. Yvette D. Hyter, professor of speech pathology and audiology, was honored as a fellow of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association at the association's 2013 convention in November. One of the highest honors the association awards, the ASHA Fellowship distinguishes Hyter as an exemplary professional and recognizes her outstanding contributions to the discipline of communication sciences and disorders. Specifically cited was her work in the areas of clinical service and education, teaching, and leadership in the field. “I felt honored that my colleagues recognized my work and contributions enough to nominate me,” Hyter said, who joined WMU’s CHHS faculty in 1998.

Hyter is one of the five co-founders of the WMU Unified Clinic’s Southwest Michigan Children’s Trauma Assessment Center (CTAC), a trans-disciplinary collaboration that comprehensively assesses the effects of trauma, maltreatment and fetal alcohol exposure on the development of children. She began work on the project in the year 2000 with colleagues Dr. Jim Henry, professor of social work, Dr. Ben Atchison, professor of occupational therapy, Dr. Mark Sloan, a local pediatrician, and Ms. Connie Black, a licensed counselor and social worker who serves as the clinical director. Hyter and graduate-level speech-language pathology students participate in CTAC assessments two Friday’s each month during the academic year.

“This collaboration worked like magic—we meshed and pulled something together in a few months that normally could have taken up to three years to develop,” Hyter said. “We were interested in making sure that the assessments were not only culturally appropriate, but also trauma-focused, because we are dealing with children who’ve had histories of maltreatment and prenatal alcoholic exposure.”

In 2012, Hyter and two colleagues, Dr. Sarah Summy, associate professor of special education, and Dr. W.F. Santiago-Valles, a now retired professor from WMU’s Africana studies program, launched Cultural Connections in Senegal: Causes of Globalization and Consequences on Systems, a study abroad course which is designed to help focus the attention of students from three different colleges on trans-disciplinary collaboration applied to a transnational platform. The course examines the consequences of globalization on public policy, health and education systems in West Africa and the U.S. Midwest.

“In 2002, Santiago and I took our first trip there together,” she said. “Two years before, in 2000, we also had the opportunity to meet a visiting scholar from Senegal at Kalamazoo College. The more we talked, the more we realized we were developing a synergy of ideas. We started dreaming of ways in which we could set up some type of system where there was a faculty and student exchange of ideas, collaboration, and where we could engage in research projects together.”

On that first trip to Senegal the WMU researchers met with representatives of the Center for International Education and Exchange, an organization designed to fund exploratory journeys specifically for educators. “We met more people, learned about the Senegalese context, and realized that we had even more things in common, especially around the consequences of globalization,” Hyter said.

By: Jerry Malec

International researcher honored by American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

Dr. Sarah Summy
Their collaborative efforts in Kalamazoo and recurring travel back to West Africa resulted in the awarding of two Fulbright Hays Group Project Abroad grants, which allowed Hyter and Santiago-Valles to perform fieldwork in Cape Verde, Mali, and Senegal. An overarching goal of both the field research and study abroad projects is to support development at WMU of a transnational curriculum that engages health care providers, policy analysts and teachers in training in thinking critically about global citizenship. Ten students are now enrolled in the Senegal program, which will run from May 5 to June 15, 2014.

"What you usually hear in the U.S. are all the positive aspects of corporate globalization," said Hyter, a native of Detroit, Michigan. "What you don't hear about are the people who had to pay for the consequences of governments taking on loans and eliminating tariffs that made it cheaper to import items than the locals could produce. We want our students to think of themselves as global citizens and how the world is interconnected, to realize that decisions made in the U.S. affect other people, and that they are often further ahead than we are in solving shared problems."

Students enrolled in the program will be required to complete a capstone research project in which they will present their findings about West Africa and the U.S. Midwest on a poster that includes photographs and data related to the positive and negative effects of globalization, as well as possible outcomes and solutions. Students have studied such topics as language policy and literacy. Hyter explained that one former student presented findings on food sovereignty.

"The student did a lot of interviews and visited many farms during the program," Hyter said. "She observed how the people were working and how the workers are saving and developing their product and the land that they have to work with in community farms. Otherwise, they are unable to afford fresh vegetables. If they are able to grow vegetables and distribute them to the community, they will have more control over their own food sources. The lessons from this research can be adapted to the food deserts in the U.S. Midwest."

Hyter also incorporates some positive takeaways from her experiences in Senegal in her classes at WMU, though noting that living in Senegal offers a stark contrast to life in the U.S.; the average life expectancy is 60 years old and more than 50 percent of Senegal's citizens live below the poverty line. Perhaps most surprising to people from the U.S. would be that it is normal for a person from Senegal to speak six or more languages.

"We can learn from the Senegalese how they successfully employ those languages and use them effectively, whereas in the U.S. most of us struggle to understand just one other language," she said. "They look at languages as useful tools because they speak French in school, they often speak English with people who are visiting their country, and when visiting friends, they may speak Wolof, which is one of the local languages. This is relevant in the U.S. where the linguistic landscape is rapidly changing and where almost 61 million people (21 percent of the population) in the U.S. speak languages other than English."

Hyter is widely published with a body of work that spans several decades. She is regularly invited to present and lead seminars and workshops throughout the nation and internationally, and has leadership positions in national and international speech-language-hearing associations. With a strong commitment to teaching and clinical practice, Hyter continues to apply her research findings to enhance the educational experiences of future speech-language pathologists and to benefit the broader communities requiring clinical services. Her on-campus teaching load includes graduate classes in language acquisition and communication, disordered language development, and cultural competence each academic year. She also participates each Tuesday and Thursday in a clinical program she developed for WMU students through Head Start, a government program that provides comprehensive early childhood education, health, nutrition, and parent involvement services to low-income children and their families.

"I wanted to give them experiences working in a contextualized setting and to give them the tools to collaborate with teachers and staff in support of children’s language and literacy," she said. "In addition to the content of any course I teach, I want my students to develop a holistic vision of themselves. I want to get them out of this ‘me, myself, and I mentality’. I want them to understand the connections we have with the people who are from distant continents, because we are in a global time—everything is connected, and we all need to be able to operate that way."
Western Michigan University’s College of Health and Human Services and the Fetzer Institute have teamed up to address the disconnect between America’s fastest growing minority group and the health and human services that are available to its members.

In summer 2014, the two Kalamazoo-based organizations will launch Both Sides of the Fence, a faculty-led academic program that focuses on Latinos, which offers a service-learning as well as a study abroad component. The Fetzer Institute is interested in how participating students can aid the Kalamazoo community in changing perceptions of “the other” through public presentations they will give after completing the program. On the academic side, the program is designed to foster greater understanding of the migration issues that affect people and communities—in Mexico as well as the United States—and better prepare future health and human services professionals to respond to these issues.

The Fetzer Advisory Council on Health Professions approached WMU because it was seeking to develop a project that complemented the institute's work with the Community Foundation of the Bajio, a Mexican non-profit association working in local development in rural Mexican communities affected by migration to the United States. The advisory council is chaired by Dr. Patricia Novick, a research associate at the Chicago Field Museum’s Science Action Center and pastor of the city’s University Church. Novick will also serve as the program’s contemplative practice leader.

Development of the academic side of Both Sides of the Fence was handled by two CHHS faculty, Denise J. Bowen, assistant professor for the physician assistant program, and Dr. Maureen Mickus, associate professor of occupational therapy, in conjunction with Dr. Jane Blyth, director of study abroad and global program development.

“The vast majority of immigrants to the United States are Mexican, with a large percent coming from the Mexican state of Guanajuato,” said Bowen, who has more than 20 years of experience in primary health care delivery and education. “That’s one of the most important U.S. demographic trends, so there’s a critical need to educate students, particularly future health care professionals, about the cultural, economic and social impact of migration. Health disparities among Latinos, coupled with a lack of trained, culturally sensitive, Spanish-speaking professionals, already present serious problems in the U.S. This program seeks to bridge the gap by preparing students to be informed, compassionate leaders in this complex societal arena. It offers students a two-pronged approach to learning about the challenges of migration, both from people living in Mexico and those who have already migrated to the United States, while developing cultural humility.”
Dr. Jane Blyth, WMU study abroad director, said the program includes two weeks of U.S.-based course work and field trips to visit migrant communities and service organizations in southwest Michigan. The Mexican portion of the trip includes an orientation in the city of Guanajuato, followed by a four-week placement in a rural community. During this time, students will be involved in an array of service and community health projects. Upon their return to WMU, students will give campus and community presentations to share what they learned about migration and health-care delivery.

“WMU welcomed the opportunity from the Fetzer Institute to develop this experience for our students,” Blyth said. “It’s an ideal study abroad program because it offers cross-cultural exchange, language immersion, as well as the chance to explore migration issues and provide health-based community services under the direction of a non-profit organization.”

Mickus, who for 8 years has served as faculty director of WMU’s study abroad program, International Perspectives on Aging in Ireland, has been tracking the growing Latino population in the U.S. for several years. Concerned about her students’ ability to effectively serve Latinos and other native Spanish-language patients, Mickus, in 2010 initiated in the College of Health and Human Services, “Mesa Espanola,” informal meetings that encourage students, faculty and staff to learn and practice the Spanish language.

“These sessions have been led by native speakers who typically focused on health and human service-related vocabulary and medical scenario role-playing,” Mickus said. “This new program is an extension of these efforts to build awareness of Latinos with a focus on migration. Michigan is a popular state for migrant workers and is highly dependent on the produce they harvest each year. These workers face a range of challenges, including long and difficult working conditions and often suboptimal housing. Yet, to most of us, these workers are “invisible.”

Changing perceptions key to Fetzer Institute

The Fetzer Institute provided the seed money to launch the program, which will significantly help to defray the costs for WMU students and faculty leaders to participate. Novick said the project supports the institute’s overarching goal to foster awareness of the power of love and forgiveness in the emerging global community, united by a desire to help improve the human condition by increasing conscious awareness of the relationship between the inner life of spirit and outer life of service and action.

“Every advisory council of the institute chooses an exemplary model of love and forgiveness to build projects around,” Novick said. “We selected Adriana Cortes Jimenez, who is the executive director of the Community Foundation of the Bajio. Because the Fetzer Institute has a long-standing relationship with the University, it was a natural fit for us to work with WMU on this project. Our focus is on the end product—raising awareness about the power of love and forgiveness and helping to change perceptions about “the other.” Our emphasis is on having the students share what they have learned with the local community after they return. Proof of the program’s success from our end will be based on evaluations of those presentations and whether the students have changed hearts and minds in regard to perceptions of migrant workers.”

In addition to Novick, the institute’s delegation for the program will include Dr. Valerie Bemo, an eye surgeon who serves as a senior program officer for the Gates Foundation in Seattle, and Oswaldo Alvarez, a program officer with the Lloyd A. Fry Foundation in Chicago.

Bowen hopes that participating in Both Sides of the Fence will help her students understand the often unintentional bias that comes into play in the health provider/patient relationship, especially in the immigrant population. She believes misunderstandings about cultural differences and social determinants of health may lead to disparities in the provision of health care.

“I believe strongly that training of health care professionals should prepare them to understand and address those differences and the inequities that they will confront in their careers, “Bowen said.” I believe contact with other cultures through a well-organized and focused study abroad experience is the most effective way to accomplish this. Specifically, given the changing population demographics in our country (and the fact that the majority of our immigrant population is from Mexico), I think it is time for health care professionals to prepare themselves to serve the emerging Mexican American community by increasing their competency in the Spanish language and Mexican culture. Both Sides of the Fence will address these issues.”
When Debra Lindstrom traveled to the People’s Republic of Bangladesh in fall 2011 to embark on a research project related to her field she quickly learned that the professionals she would be working with were dealing with issues and concerns largely unknown to American practitioners.

Lindstrom has been teaching for 22 years in Western Michigan University’s occupational therapy (OT) program. She became interested in Bangladesh when she first traveled there with her daughter, who was enrolled in a service-learning program. To make that trip more fruitful for her own work, Lindstrom contacted a rehabilitation center close to where she and her daughter would be staying so that she could learn more about how OT services were being provided in an underdeveloped country.

That initial visit spurred a strong desire to return to Bangladesh, which Lindstrom did in fall 2011 for seven weeks to conduct a formal research project as part of a year-long sabbatical. Her primary research objective was to work with “expert” OT professionals in Bangladesh to gain understanding of how they made clinical decisions during regular treatment sessions. She observed and interviewed 12 therapists with varying levels of experience who provided treatment and services to adults and children at the Centre for Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed. As she conducted her qualitative analysis, she found that the Bangladeshi occupational therapists were focused on the environment that their patients would return to after their rehabilitation, and on following the right protocols/rules for implementing treatment. She found that they were interested in knowing the rules to follow for their specific patients, consistent with the elementary and high school educational system in Bangladesh. Asking questions was not considered as important in this culture as it was to follow the right rules.

“Although when I went there, I had the clinical reasoning research project in my head, after I had been there for a few weeks, my Bangladesh colleagues really stressed the need for the therapists in Bangladesh to have more experience conducting good research and writing research manuscripts (in English),” Lindstrom said. “Most of the current faculty had earned their bachelor’s degree, so they did not have extensive research experience, and especially did not have experience writing for publication.” Lindstrom picked up on this need and worked with students and faculty to mentor their research while she was there.

In addition to observing clinical services in the rehabilitation center, Lindstrom and her Bangladesh colleagues observed and consulted on worker safety in an upscale garment factory and at the rehabilitation center where construction, landscaping and kitchen work was underway. “The conditions at factories in Bangladesh are very different than they are in the United States, where we have national standards that are strictly enforced for worker safety,” she said.
“Work safety policies and enforcement of the policies are now starting to be addressed more seriously in Bangladesh due to the recent tragedies in the garment factories of fires and buildings collapsing. It was difficult for the Bangladesh students to prioritize what was most important in their recommendations when there were so many obvious problems that needed to be addressed.”

With the high rate of unemployment, poverty and hunger in Bangladesh, Lindstrom said many people are willing to take jobs that can do considerable harm to their bodies. Because the factories exist to make money, many times they forego safety measures in order to keep production up.

“For instance, at the high-end garment factory a fire escape from the 3rd floor was pointed out to me,” she said. “That had to be installed before one of the U.S. companies would negotiate with the factory, but after installation, the factory did not end up getting the contract. The management representative pointed to the fire escape as a loss in that process, not realizing that this fire escape was an improvement for the workers, not just a negotiating chip that was wasted. Even for the ergonomic consultant, the general safety for the workers is the highest priority at this time in the garment factories. Adjustable chairs may be reasonable recommendations in the future, but maybe not right now in many of the factories.”

After returning to the U.S. Lindstrom analyzed research results from the clinical reasoning project. Lindstrom began to understand how the therapists reasoned through their treatment sessions, and she will present those findings in June 2014 when she returns to Bangladesh on her way to present the findings at the World Federation of OT International Congress in Tokyo Japan on June 21. Besides presenting her clinical reasoning findings while she is in Bangladesh, she will celebrate the scholars of the seven manuscripts accepted for publication in a special issue of the journal “Work” called “Work in Bangladesh” to be published in 2015. She will also begin the process of working with the Bangladesh Occupational Therapy Association to create a Bangladesh Scope of Practice for OT.

When Lindstrom entered college, she initially thought she would be a special education teacher for life. She graduated from Northern Illinois University in 1976 and taught special needs children for four years before a colleague encouraged her to take her education to the next level. She decided the OT field was more in line with her interests and enrolled at WMU, where she completed her master’s degree in 1982; her first job was working as a pediatric specialist in Vermont, but she found herself missing Michigan and Kalamazoo. She returned to Michigan in 1984 and worked in rehabilitation and ergonomics in the area until 1992, when she was hired to teach in WMU’s OT program. She was awarded her Ph.D. in Medical Sociology in 2000 from WMU.

“Many years ago I wrote a special thank you note to my mentor for guiding me into OT,” she said. “The one thing that has driven me since I’ve been at WMU is to help students—on campus and in Bangladesh—think like an OT, which means to me to connect with a person to find what is really meaningful and important to each individual and to figure out how to help the person accomplish those goals. We have more high technology to help people in the U.S. reach their goals, but the low technology, made right at the rehabilitation centre has allowed many people to accomplish their goals with minimal costs. We have much to learn from creative people in developing countries about low-cost effective solutions to help people live life to the fullest.”

The Centre of Rehabilitation makes wheelchairs with bicycle tires for easy repair.
Losing his father at a very young age inspired Brown Osaretin Idehen to pursue a career in health care, which he plans to begin as a nurse, with the ultimate goal of becoming a neurosurgeon.

Idehen began his studies in a transnational education program Western Michigan University offers through its institutional partner of nearly 30 years, Sunway University in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. He completed the first two years of a bachelor’s degree program at Sunway with an impressive 3.94 grade point average.

“My eldest brother, Elvis Idehen, was living in Malaysia and was approached by university agents about opportunities to study there,” he said. “I am thankful that Elvis and my brother Kenneth encouraged me to leave Nigeria to study at Sunway, and they provided financial support to make it possible. When it was time to transfer to WMU, I was offered a $14,000 scholarship through the Haenicke Institute for Global Education, which helped me pay my tuition here. That really showed me that hard work pays off.”

As a lifelong fan of American pop culture, Idehen had seen many movies made in the United States before he arrived in Kalamazoo. He has also traveled extensively and was originally planning on studying in Poland. But then he learned about the American education system at an education fair and he decided that the U.S. was a better place for him to continue his studies. He ultimately decided on WMU after doing his own research on the institution and the city of Kalamazoo.

“I like Kalamazoo—it is an educational community,” he said. “WMU has a great bunch of people as well and offers a lot of learning resources, like tutoring, which can help students with their studies. It has been a very wonderful and beautiful ride and I’ve had a great time working with students and professors in the College of Health and Human Services. Overall WMU is a great place to be.”

Transitioning to life in the United States has been fairly easy for Idehen, though he admits his perceptions about what life is actually like in the states had been skewed by watching U.S. films.

“I knew that I would fit in because of my exposure to the western way of life and society,” he said. “When I first stepped out of the airport I thought, ‘Ok, I’m here now.’ I was very calm and realized that I had to do the best I could. But, I soon realized that life in America was not the same as I had seen in movies, where everyone was rich and had a nice place to live.”

The U.S. education system also presented some challenges for Idehen, but he said working through them have made him a better student, and person.

“Every country has a different teaching system,” he said. “In America, they put more emphasis on course work. The other places that I have studied put most of the emphasis on reading and exams. That was an adjustment I had to make. I’ve also learned how to be more independent because I’ve had to face all these challenges on my own. I have overcome most of the challenges and studying at WMU is giving me tools I need to succeed in life.”
Former Croatian National Team basketball player takes the court at WMU

Western Michigan University freshman Mario Matasovic made his first visit to the United States as a member of the Croatian National Team participating in the Adidas Nations Global Experience in Los Angeles in 2011, which was a great honor considering he started playing the game just two years earlier.

“One of my friends talked me into playing basketball in high school because I was so tall,” said Matasovic, a 6’8” forward, who was raised in Slovanski Brod, Croatia. “I was the best player and I just kept going and here I am now. WMU has 25,000 students and just 15 to 16 guys get to represent the University as a basketball team. It’s really nice to know that you have a chance to do that.”

He arrived at WMU just in time to play with a team that won the 2014 Mid-American Conference Tournament title with a 98-77 victory over the Toledo Rockets in early March. That win earned the Broncos a berth in the annual NCAA Tournament, the team’s first opportunity since the 2003-04 season to play in what is commonly called the “March Madness” tournament. The Broncos fell in its first game of the tournament 77-53 to 11th-ranked Syracuse, finishing the season with a 23-10 record, the third-highest single-season wins total in program history.

Matasovic made his collegiate debut against New Mexico State in November and continued to earn more playing time as the season progressed. He scored a collegiate career-high five points against Central Michigan University in February.

Now that the season has ended for this year, Matasovic can turn to what he says is his main focus of enrolling at WMU—earning a degree in electrical engineering. “Right now I’m concentrating on these four years and doing the best that I can here at Western,” he said.

His first chance to play on an American team came when he was recruited in October 212 by St. John’s Military NW Military Academy in Wisconsin, where Matasovic was a stand-out player, scoring 13 points in a 71-60 win over Notre Dame Prep (Massachusetts) at the 2013 National Prep School Invitational. “They chose me—I got an email saying that I got a scholarship and it was my only chance to come to the U.S., so I grabbed it,” he said.

WMU also chose Matasovic after Bronco Coach Steve Hawkins spotted Matasovic playing in a high school-level tournament. Matasovic said that he had received offers from other colleges, but in the end, Western seemed like the right fit. By the time he arrived on campus, Matasovic had a good command of the English language and was ready to excel in the classroom, as well as on the court. And, he was pleasantly surprised to learn that taking college courses at WMU would not be quite as rigorous as it would have been for him if he had studied in Croatia.

“In Croatia, college is an all-day responsibility,” he said. “Students take 10 classes per semester and school is much harder. In U.S. colleges, you only have to take four or five classes per semester and you have the rest of the day to do whatever you want, which in my case is to play basketball.”

Back in Croatia, Matasovic attended a technical high school, so he already had four years of experience in electrical engineering before enrolling at WMU. That has made his academic work a bit easier than it might have been, but he says it is still very challenging to manage your time well when you are a student athlete. “It’s not easy, especially during the season,” he said. “Sometimes we play three times a week. Personally I try to do as much work as I can over the weekend or on the bus on the road. The main thing is to have good time management skills so you can do all of your course work on time.”

Thanks to technology, Matasovic rarely feels homesick; he and his family communicate regularly via Skype calls. He is very grateful to his parents, who he said have given him unconditional support to achieve his goal of playing basketball in America in college. “When I was graduating at my high school back home, it was impossible to go to a Croatian college and play basketball,” he said. “A friend connected me to some U.S. coaches, which helped me find opportunities. At first my parents didn’t want me to study in the U.S., but after a while they realized how the system (collegiate athletics) works over here and they supported me.”

Playing basketball for the Croatian National Team and the A-1 Djuro Djakovic team, as well as for the military academy and WMU has also provided Matasovic with many opportunities to travel. With the Bronco team alone he has visited New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Hawaii. “I like traveling, and playing basketball has given me the chance to travel all over the world,” he said. “You can meet a bunch of new people and make good connections.”

For now, Matasovic is enjoying life in Kalamazoo. He is currently staying in WMU’s Ernest/Burnham residence hall, which is home to many Bronco athletes. He plans to move to an apartment near campus for his sophomore year, and to continue his discovery of Kalamazoo and other areas of the Midwest. “One of the main reasons I like Kalamazoo is its location,” he said. “The city is centrally located right between Detroit and Chicago.”
Support WMU’s global engagement efforts through a donation to the Haenicke Institute for Global Education:

www.mywmu.com/haenickeinstitute