

Seminar focuses on expanding world view for WMU students

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KALAMAZOO -- When Singapore native and Western Michigan University graduate student Ruth Nair moved to America seven years ago, one surprise for her was how little Americans seemed to know about the world beyond U.S. borders.

The 23-year-old is amazed when people can't locate Singapore.

“And it's a pretty prominent Asian country. ... It's crazy being a world power that people are not as aware of what's going on around the rest of the world,” said Nair, who applauds faculty efforts at WMU to internationalize the curriculum, including in her department, geosciences, which has a new study-abroad experience in Egypt in May.

Infusing a global perspective into what professors teach and students learn is not new at Western, but the university is trying to assess, expand and improve upon that work -- both in the classroom on campus and in providing more study-abroad opportunities.

One small example of the campus effort was a seminar Friday in which several professors in the Haworth College of Business shared tips with other faculty members on how to internationalize their coursework for students.

WMU recently joined a national effort by the American Council on Education called the “Internationalization Laboratory.” The intention is to help U.S. colleges and universities with strategies to educate students to live and work in the increasingly interconnected world.

Donald McCloud, dean of WMU's Haenicke Institute for Global Education, said that American higher education turns out too many students who are globally illiterate.

McCloud said that Sept. 11 taught us that we can no longer live in the “happy bliss of global ignorance.”

“It's unacceptable to allow any student to graduate with an undergraduate degree unless that student has the tools and the knowledge to find his or her way around this world,” he said.

Educators say that goes for students who won't ever study abroad -- and the vast majority of students at WMU won't -- or leave the country during their work life.

“Even if (a person works) for a purely American company, it's going to have to work in a global marketplace,” said Stephen Malcolm, a professor of biological sciences and chairman of the Faculty Senate's International Education Council.

The connection among world economies has been demonstrated recently in the cascading effects of the financial crisis.

“The USA recognizes that India and China are gigantic economies that are growing very, very rapidly. It's important that we understand these countries,” Malcolm said.