MSU College of Arts & Letters spring 2012 graduate and senior class commencement speaker Rebecca Farnum, who once served as an intern for First Lady Michelle Obama, took her passion for environmental justice to the United Kingdom as one of two students from Michigan to be named a 2012 Marshall Scholar. Farnum, of Mt. Pleasant, earned one of 36 coveted Marshall Scholarships. She is MSU’s 13th Marshall Scholar.

Marshall Scholars conduct postgraduate studies in the United Kingdom, financed by the UK’s Foreign and Commonwealth Office, to strengthen relationships between the British and American peoples, their governments and their institutions. The program was started by a 1953 Act of Parliament and is overseen by the Marshall Commission.

Rebecca graduated with four majors: interdisciplinary humanities in the College of Arts & Letters; international relations in James Madison College; and anthropology, and global and area studies in the College of Social Science. She was also a member of MSU Honors College, and senior class speaker at the May 2012 Commencement.

Farnum has been engaged in undergraduate research her entire academic career. Most recently, she’s been using mathematic methodology to predict how—and if—people, organizations and governments will work together to improve food and water shortages in the Middle East and North Africa.

“Feeding people can feed peace,” Farnum said. “Helping to ensure equality, through mechanisms such as access to food and water, can help make societies more stable and productive. But do nations need to cooperate around issues of food and water, or can focusing within the state allow for everyone to have sufficient access?”

Building on a strong global relations foundation, Farnum pursued a master’s degree in water policy and international development at University of East Anglia in Norwich, England. This year, she will study nature, society and environmental policy at University of Oxford in Oxford, just outside of London.

While at MSU, Farnum was a key player in starting The Center for Gender in Global Context’s first undergraduate research showcase, said Julia Grant, professor of social relations and policy at James Madison College.

In addition, she worked with Dr. Grant to design MSU’s first study abroad program examining global lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues. The program kicked off during summer 2013 in the Netherlands.

“Marshall Scholars are chosen based on academic merit, leadership potential and ambassadorial potential,” Farnum said. “The selection committee was impressed with my strong interdisciplinary background and clear focus on the issue of food and water security. At MSU, I enjoyed networking and building bridges between different groups of people. I hope to continue doing so in the future.”