A PASSION FOR BRIDGING CULTURES

Tyler Karty is used to the puzzled look he receives when he tells people he went to college to study Arabic and Crop and Soil Sciences. But to him, he was just pursuing his two passions and it was at Michigan State University where it all made sense.

During his time at MSU, Karty, who graduated in May with a BA in Arabic and a BS in Crop and Soil Sciences, worked on soil science research while at the same time practiced his Arabic skills.

The recent graduate is now living in Cairo, Egypt, and working as an intern for the Research Institute for a Sustainable Environment (RISE), a research center that does agricultural extension work and tackles environmental problems in Egypt. The year-long internship, which is part of the Presidential Internship Program at The American University in Cairo, began in August.

“I have been training to do this for a long time,” Karty said. “The opportunities I’ve had at MSU have placed me in this position. And because of the classes and the great professors I’ve had, I’m able to speak Arabic very well, which allowed me to jump in head first.”

Karty first saw his two majors come together in Professor Alvin Smucker’s Soil Biophysics Lab at MSU, where he worked for the past year and a half doing research on sandy soils with a focus on improving water retention and irrigation efficiency. While working in the lab, Karty had the opportunity to practice his Arabic skills, having worked with a researcher from Syria as well as an Iraqi soil scientist, whom the lab hosted for a month.

“That job essentially jump-started my career. Not only did I work in sandy soils, but I also got to practice my Arabic. It’s kind of crazy that I was able to do all these things at MSU. I feel really fortunate,” Karty said. “And now I have a Crop and Soil Sciences degree and Arabic and can use them both at once. There are lots of possibilities.”

Karty was first drawn to MSU by its Arabic program.

“Michigan State University is one of the top schools in the nation for Arabic,” he said. “I came here knowing I wanted to study Arabic; it is something I always wanted to do.

“With all the Muslim nations around the world, being able to understand and speak Arabic is extremely important. We need Americans who are able to understand Arabic-speaking people and their culture, especially in this day and age when there is so much hatred toward Muslims and Arab people. By being able to understand and show a commitment to Arab people, we can bridge the gap between the cultures and increase understanding among us.”

And the best way to understand another culture, Karty says, is to learn the language, something he has committed himself to.

“Knowing another language is so rewarding. It’s one of the things I love most about my life right now,” he said. “There are many cognitive advantages to learning a language, and it makes you more well rounded. I have been able to enrich my life and meet lots of people who I never would have been able to speak to before. I also am a little quicker on my feet because I have studied this language.”

When Karty first came to MSU, he was part of the Arabic flagship program and studied Arabic his freshman year. He then applied what he learned by traveling to Morocco for an intensive summer Arabic program where he spoke only Arabic the entire time he was abroad.

“You don’t think about how tiring it’s going to be trying to constantly translate things in your head or trying to express yourself,” he said. “But that was part of the learning process, and my Arabic skills drastically improved. I think that serves me still today.”

Eventually, Karty would like to go to graduate school to study agronomics or soil sciences.

“I don’t think I will be able to make a big difference in the world unless I have more education, so that is definitely in my future,” he said. “But before I do that, I need to speak some Arabic first.”
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