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# SCII Agenda Newsletter

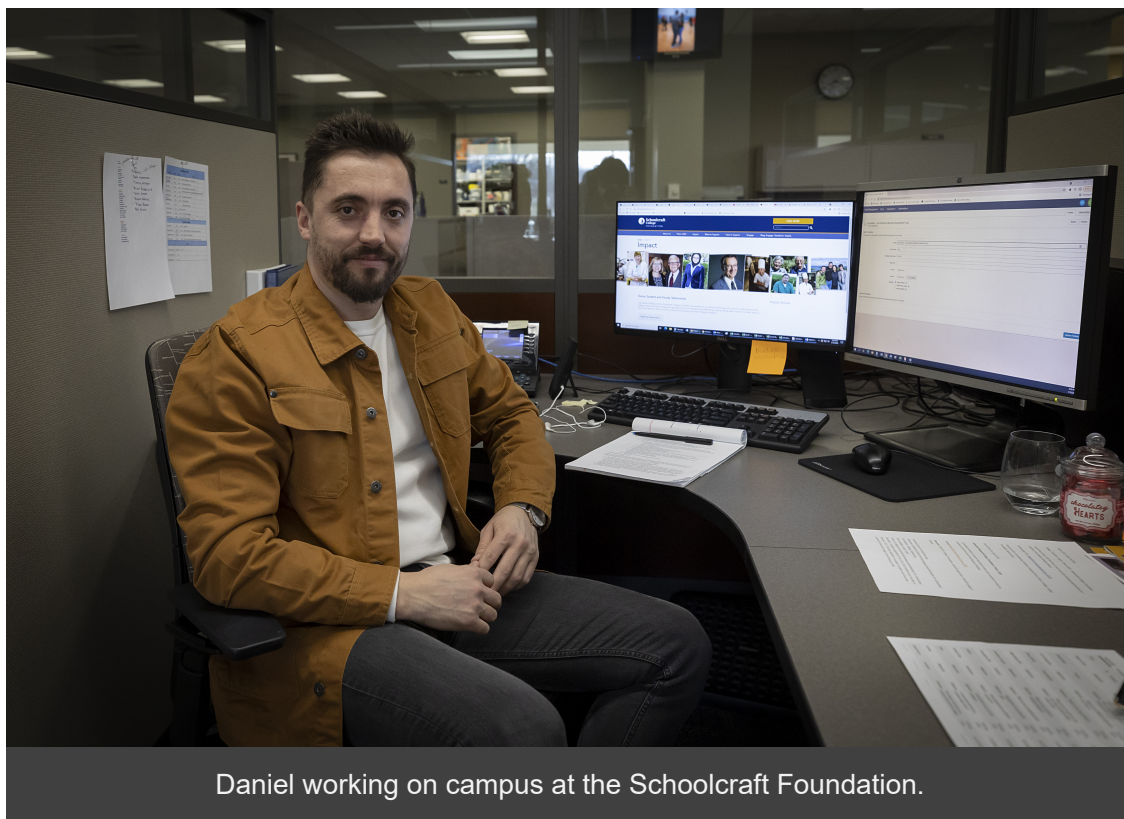
*May 2022 Issue*

*The mission of the Schoolcraft College International Institute (SCII) is to coordinate cross-cultural learning opportunities for students, faculty, staff and the community.*

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## My Endless Journey

by Daniel Shahollari



Daniel working on campus at the Schoolcraft Foundation.

It was the summer of 2019 when I quit my job after five years of working as a Marketing Manager for a tech company in [Albania](#). I loved my job and felt proud that I helped establish a startup company with only four employees; in five years, we became one of the top three tech companies in Albania. However, over time, routine replaced creativity and the excitement I associated with this job started to decline. I wasn't feeling any value or growth in my daily job as I used to, so I thought it was time to take a break. There was just one small problem. I had no idea what I wanted to do next.

I decided the best way to figure out my future was to step out of my comfort zone for a while. Planning a trip far away from home would help refresh my mind and allow for a new chapter in my life. I wanted to make an effort to exploit my full potential. I knew I was capable of so much more and that was my driving motivation.

The decision was made! I was ready to start my new adventure by visiting the greatest country in the world, the United States of America. American culture and the idea of freedom had always fascinated me and this was my opportunity to see for myself what the country offered. I jumped online, booked my flight, and started packing my luggage. After an unexpected stop in Paris (The City of Love), my plane finally landed in Florida on September 12th, 2019. My first impression of America was "Big". Everything looked bigger. Cars, houses, people. Even the espresso shot I drank at Starbucks while leaving the airport

was at least double the size of what I normally consumed.

After staying with my aunt's family in Florida for a couple of days, it was time to plan my next trip: destination New York - the city that never sleeps. The day I set foot on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan recalled a Hollywood movie scene. The architecture was gorgeous and awe-inspiring. As Winston Churchill once said, "We shape our buildings and afterwards our buildings shape us". New York was a testimony to Churchill's words and I was amazed at everything I encountered.

On the third day, it was time to visit the Statue of Liberty; a monument recognized as a universal symbol of freedom and democracy. While I was trying to catch the ferry - the only way to visit the Statue of Liberty - an accident occurred. I twisted my ankle. In a blink of an eye, my leg doubled in size and the pain started to increase. However, I was determined to not allow the pain to stop me from visiting this symbol of Freedom, even if I had to suffer a bit. At the end of the day, I ended up visiting the Statue of Liberty in a wheelchair. I noticed people's behavior was so much different once they realized I was injured or had a disability. They were kind and empathetic. Several people encouraged me to stay strong. In hindsight, the world would be a much better place if we could exhibit such kindness and compassion with every human being, even with those who don't have a visible disability.

The next day while I was leaving New York, I started to question what had happened to me and why it had occurred in the first place. When something bad happens, we tend to ask questions like: Why did this happen to me? Why now? What did I do wrong? What is this trying to teach me? Unfortunately, I wasn't capable of answering those questions instantly, but my inner voice communicated reason. I believe everything in this world happens for a reason so after thinking deeply about the meaning behind the accident, I came to a conclusion. I would continue exploring the new world in front of me in an attempt to figure out why I ended up here and what my next steps would be.

When I told my mother that I wouldn't be back home for a while, she thought I was crazy. It was tough to leave everything behind: family, friends, my career. I suddenly found myself alone in a new country with no plan. But still I was feeling excited about the unknown.

Detroit, the Motor City, was about to become my next stop. I planned to visit my uncle's family and some relatives whom I hadn't seen for years. It was impressive to see how much they had changed and the progress they had

made in their lives. The Albanian-American community in Michigan is large and they made me feel at home. But this time I realized my observations were different. Beyond a tourist point of view, I went deeper into everything I was experiencing in this new world. I noticed that I was surrounded by people who dressed differently, ate differently, and spoke a foreign language. This all made me feel out of place. However, from all these differences, the language barrier would prove the most challenging. Before, I believed my English was not that bad; I was able to handle at least a basic conversation. Apparently, I couldn't handle even that! I struggled to order a hamburger. Moments like this can make you give up or motivate you to work hard to overcome the challenges ahead. Learning the language is the first step to understanding the culture of a country.

Immediately, I started searching online for ways to learn English, as quickly as possible. I found an interesting article about the story of an Albanian student named Joana who experienced the same language barriers when she first came to the United States. "I was so shy and worried to say something because it might be wrong", she told me later when we met at Eastern Michigan University where Joana was studying Pharmacy. "Forget online courses, you need to go to a real school if you want to learn English well" she suggested. "You need to interact with people face to face", she added. Joana was a former student at Schoolcraft College before transferring to EMU; that was why Schoolcraft College was her first suggestion. We started filling the application online and after a couple of weeks, I received the acceptance email. I was in heaven.

Studying Broadcast Communications at Schoolcraft has been one of the best experiences of my life. I have grown so much personally and academically. Every day I learn new things while meeting with other classmates with different backgrounds and cultures. I have realized that once you open up and become curious, the world becomes a huge library. When you exchange experiences with others you also learn more about yourself, your beliefs, and your values. Being vulnerable with others might feel like a weakness sometimes, but it is the strongest skill for creating better relationships.

Schoolcraft College provides opportunities to grow, learn, challenge yourself and enjoy your student life to the fullest. I have been lucky to learn a lot from great professors like Helen Ditouras, my Humanities 212 and English 102 professor. Her passion and dedication towards her students is beyond words and she has always provided a space where I can interact with other classmates. With such great professors, every student has a stronger chance

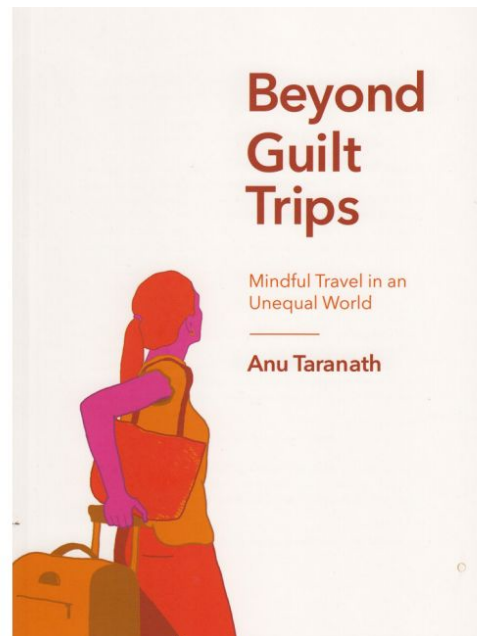
of succeeding in the future. I am currently finishing my third semester. Last semester I was able to achieve a 4.0 GPA and I am looking forward to maintaining this GPA as I eventually plan to transfer to Eastern Michigan University. In the end, I don't know where this seemingly endless journey will take me, but I certainly know it has taught me so much about myself and my various destinations.

Daniel Shahollari is an international student at Schoolcraft College and can be reached at [daniel.shaholari@apps.schoolcraft.edu](mailto:daniel.shaholari@apps.schoolcraft.edu).

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## Focus Series Highlight

### *"Beyond Guilt Trips: Mindful Travel in an Unequal World"*



In April 2022, Schoolcraft College, along with the University of Michigan's Middle Eastern & North African Studies, sponsored a [lecture](#) by [Dr. Anu Taranath](#). Professor Taranath has taught at the University of Washington for the past 20+ years and invites people into conversation about global issues, race, gender, identity and equity. Professor Taranath shared her lessons of cultural competence with our SC and Michigan students, and discussed tenets of her

award-winning book [\*Beyond Guilt Trips: Mindful Travel in an Unequal World\*](#).

In addition to her campus-wide talk, Dr. Taranath met with Schoolcraft Social Psychology students in Professor Colleen Pilgrim's class for a special Q&A to discuss their reading of her book. Students in this course are primarily psychology and mental health majors; the students were able to apply their studies of prejudice, stereotypes and institutional discrimination and discuss them directly with Professor Taranuth. The Social Psychology course is a [SC Global Endorsed](#) course, which means global content is embedded throughout the course. Students discussed many issues with Dr. Taranuth such as implicit bias and collectivism/individualism, which were key components of the course and aligned with their reading of *Beyond Guilt Trips*. Professor Taranuth was a gracious presenter and the students were thrilled to meet with her and learn even more about these global topics.

The student discussion of *Beyond Guilt Trips* was so successful that in the Fall 2022 Semester the [SC Phi Theta Kappa \(PTK\)](#) honor society will host another book reading and a Q&A with Professor Taranuth. The [SC Foundation](#) supported student reading of the book by purchasing copies for Dr. Pilgrim's Social Psychology students, PTK students, as well as copies for the Board of Trustees to further embed her message of equity.

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## Highlights on Campus



On April 13, [Honors Scholars](#), [PTK](#), and the [Focus Series](#) hosted a fundraiser and film screening of [The Guide](#), a critically acclaimed 2014 Ukrainian film

directed by Oles Sanin. The film explores the persecution of the kobzars (Ukrainian folk minstrel) whose music and culture was nearly lost under Soviet rule. An updated trailer for the film states, “Russia's invasion of Ukraine is creating a catastrophe with thousands dying and millions forced to flee. *The Guide* tells a story of tragedy that parallels what we see today.” Although the event has passed, you can still donate [here](#). 100% of all the money goes to humanitarian relief for Ukraine.

*Questions about screening the film or donations can be directed to Emily Podwoiski the Honors Program Coordinator, the Amnesty International Club Advisor, and Associate Editor of the SCII Agenda; she can be reached at [epodwois@schoolcraft.edu](mailto:epodwois@schoolcraft.edu).*



The [SC International Institute](#) in collaboration with the English Department awarded the *Kehrl Global Citizenship Award* to international student Daniel Shahollari. The Kehrl Academic Awards are funded by the [SC Foundation](#) and provide not only recognition to our students, but funds to further their education. Below are some accolades from those who recommended Mr. Shahollari for the Award.

*“He is an action-oriented person who will take the initiative to find ways to get involved on campus with various organizations. Furthermore, Daniel is hardworking and dedicated, always following through with the commitments he makes.”* Kyla Lahiff, International Advisor

*“As a Schoolcraft community member, his empathy and concern for helping others aligns him with the mission of the Schoolcraft Foundation. We could not be more pleased to have him as part of our team.”* Carole Booms, Director, Annual Giving and Scholarships: Schoolcraft Foundation

*“While his work ethic is tireless, his professional accolades illustrate the level of global citizenship we can only aspire to reach. Fluent in four languages, Daniel brings to Schoolcraft an international awareness that is impressive and infectious.”* Helen Dituras, Co-Chair, International Institute

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## Our Partner: Midwest Institute Workshops



### [Climate Change and People's Livelihoods](#)

Date: 7-May-2022 - 10 AM To 3:30 PM EST

This workshop will examine how climate change is impacting people's livelihoods in various parts of the world. There are useful insights from different parts of the world trying to adapt and/or mitigate climate change challenges, in their effort to improve or at least maintain their livelihoods.



### [Human Rights and Human Diversity](#)

Date: 01-Aug-2022 To 05-Aug-2022

This workshop explores how universal human rights can exist in a culturally diverse world. As the international community becomes increasingly



integrated, how can cultural diversity and integrity coexist between cultures in a mutually respectable way?

**Finally, Schoolcraft College will be hosting the next MIIE Conference; it has been rescheduled to October 2022; stay tuned for forthcoming details.**

*The Midwest Institute is directed by [Theo Sypris](#) and located at [Kalamazoo Valley Community College](#), Kalamazoo, MI.*

*Helen Ditouras is a Midwest Board Member and our SC Liaison, Professor of English, Co-Chair for SCII, and a Consulting Editor of the SCII Agenda; she can be reached at [hditoura@schoolcraft.edu](mailto:hditoura@schoolcraft.edu).*

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activists. Together, they "leverage the power of the internet to build understanding across borders".

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