

When Dr. Imad Haffar first decided to attend Michigan State University for his Ph.D., he was confident that the program would provide a quality education. In addition to this fulfilled expectation, Dr. Haffar developed a true sense of global citizenship and passion for lifelong learning. His personal growth at MSU led him to a professional career executing high-level projects in over 34 countries. While evolving as a renowned international figure in sustainable development, Dr. Haffar has never lost touch with his Spartan roots. During a recent visit to East Lansing, the Canadian Studies Center sat down with Dr. Haffar, who currently lives in Toronto, to learn more about the role MSU has played in his journey.

How did your life experiences bring you to Michigan State University?

In 1981, I was a graduate student finishing my MSc. Agricultural Mechanization at the American University of Beirut. I developed a great interest in research and in pursuing an academic career in this field. I visited the Kennedy Center in Beirut – A U.S. cultural center. While there, I did an extensive search of universities because online search and emailing were not around at that time. Two universities attracted my attention: MSU and Iowa State University- I applied to both. Fortunately, the speed at which MSU replied to me and the positive approach they showed made me quickly decide that MSU would be the place.

What do you remember most about your time on MSU's campus?

I had lots of very sincere and memorable events at MSU. My learning and research experience was full of hands-on work, I made lifelong friends while enjoying campus life and the various vibes it had on many occasions, teaching at MSU. Most memorable of all, I saw our twin girls born at Sparrow Hospital in Lansing.

What defined your MSU experience as compared to others? What might have been unique to your experience?

MSU has taught me that education is a life-long endeavor. It does not stop at the graduation ceremony but rather keeps growing to continuously position you as a true leader. MSU enhanced my critical thinking and determination to always improvise in finding practical, executable logical and beneficial solutions to problems that you and / or your company might face. MSU revealed to me the importance of communication and how it is a basic platform for progress and development.

How did MSU prepare you as a global citizen?

I met a wide range of people from all over the world at MSU. We had the basement at Farrall Hall set for graduate students' offices. That basement was our home. Each office had eight desks and almost each desk was a different nationality. In my room I had Alex from Nigeria, Omar from Senegal, Angela from Brazil, Elena from Argentina, Xi from China and Steve from USA. What a beautiful global gathering. We shared national experiences and cultural diversity and had lots of fun together.

Who do you remember as influential during your time at MSU? Who would you advise students to find as mentors or life coaches?

I always remember how professional, caring and approachable the entire team of faculty and staff were around me. My graduate professor was with me as a mentor, teacher and friend in every moment that I spent at MSU. He was very supportive and understanding and continuously challenged me to think and find the best answer. Accordingly, I advise students to enjoy every moment of their stay at MSU. Those are your golden days. Cherish your experiences and make use of the marvelous facilities and opportunities. Yes, there are tremendous stresses on your shoulders including homework, exams and biggest of all finances. However, learn to turn liabilities into assets and let every challenge become a lively candle that lightens your road to a bright future. Reach out to others and seek help when needed. MSU has a lot to offer. Your friends and mentors are the most precious gift you get from MSU.

What advice would you give to a Spartan looking to expand their global network?

Trust yourself, your knowledge and the experiences you gain at MSU. They are abundant. Hit the road with strength and confidence like a true Spartan. I had never imagined upon my graduation that this degree would take me to over 34 different countries to execute high level projects.

Given that you have made Canada your home, in your opinion, what is the relationship between the USA and Canada?

The USA and Canada share a unique relationship that stems from strong and integrated social, cultural and economic affiliation. Family relations and business affairs go beyond borders to establish solidarity and policies that ensure the safety, integrity and prosperity of both countries.

We want to tell the MSU community and beyond the story that you want to tell. Is there anything else you would like to add about your experiences?

I feel very lucky to be a graduate of MSU. I am very proud to be a global Spartan and have been a strong advocate of MSU. In various occasions when I was an academician, students would seek my advice as to which University they should attend for higher education. I am thrilled to have assisted and encouraged seven PhD graduates from MSU, who now hold key positions around the world.