



INTERNATIONAL STUDENT ESSAY CONTEST 2024

**OFFICE FOR INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS AND SCHOLARS
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY**

Essay Topic:

Celebrating Each Other

Just like a box of crayons, our differences bring unique colors to the world. By blending different perspectives, cultures and opinions, we can create a vibrant world of endless possibilities. So, let us celebrate our differences and work together to build a more inclusive and diverse world for everyone. Think about the following questions as you write your essay:

How do you define yourself? Why do you think it is important for an institution like MSU to be comprised of students from a variety of backgrounds with different identities? How do you embrace and celebrate your unique self? What are some aspects of yourself and your community that you wish others knew more about or better understood, what do you want to understand more about others and how does MSU create space for sharing and understanding our identities?



Winners

Subhamoy Bhowmik

Best Overall Essay

(pages 2–3)

Nishit Nagpal

Best Essay by an Undergraduate Student

(pages 4–5)

Olajumoke Oluwatobiloba Emmanuel

Best Essay by a Graduate Student

(pages 6–7)

Subhamoy Bhowmik

Best Overall Essay

The moment I came to Michigan, the first thing I wondered was why these people love summer so much. Coming from a hot and humid country, where we need to use AC or fan for almost 9 months a year, I was not able to comprehend this affection towards summer. I was eagerly awaiting my first snowfall experience. But the excitement of living in a surrounding of snow amid sub-zero temperatures did not last for long. A couple of months later I was begging for the sun to come out. Then I realized the source of cravings for the summer. Probably, it has nothing to do with the beautiful sunny weather, it has nothing to do with the above 90-degree temperatures, but it has everything to do with the beauty that lies in diversity.

Although the weather in Michigan hardly justifies the true meaning of diversity, our beloved Michigan State University most certainly does. In a world where intolerance to difference is increasing day by day in people, our university stands apart. As a member of the spartan community, I reflect upon the essence of identity, the significance of a diverse student body, and how we can actively embrace and appreciate our unique selves.

I am not a random, isolated individual, rather, I define myself as a tapestry woven from the experience and knowledge gained from my own life and the cultural values inherited from my family. Recognizing the uniqueness of my individuality allows me to appreciate the myriad colors that collectively paint the canvas of our shared existence.

Let us recall a famous fable to understand the importance of diversity at MSU. An old man gives his sons a bundle of sticks and asks them to break it. When they fail to do so, he unbundles the sticks and then his sons can easily break each of those. We, the students of MSU are like those sticks. We bring different values, different ideas, and different perspectives of life to the table. When we add all those in one pot, then they act as the catalysts for academic excellence, social growth, and cultural enrichment. Exposure to a variety of perspectives fosters critical thinking, creativity, and a broader understanding of the world. In essence, a diverse student body prepares individuals for a globalized society, promoting empathy and collaboration beyond cultural boundaries.

Embracing my unique self involves a journey of self-discovery and acceptance. I celebrate my individuality by actively engaging with diverse perspectives, participating in cultural events, and fostering connections with individuals who bring different colors to

my life's palette. It is through this celebration that I find strength in diversity and appreciate the richness it adds to my personal growth. On a lighter note, modern science believes that humans share almost 99.6- 99.9 percent of the genetic code. So, although we are culturally different, by diversifying my views I am having a better understanding of my inner self.

As an Indian Bengali, I wish others knew more about our rich literature, poetry, and intellectual traditions, about the literary giants like Rabindranath Tagore, and the cultural significance of the Bengali language in shaping the identity of the community. West Bengal is known for its grand celebrations of festivals, especially Durga Puja. I wish others understood the scale, artistry, and cultural importance of these festivals in Bengali society.

As an individual, I am genuinely interested in understanding more about the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of my fellow students. I am curious about the cultural backgrounds of my peers and the traditions, customs, and celebrations that hold significance for them. I am also interested in learning more about the personal journeys, and struggles of students of different backgrounds to finally arrive at MSU, a place to enjoy every ounce of diversity.

Celebrating each other at Michigan State University is not just a theme but a commitment to nurturing an inclusive and supportive community. As we define ourselves and appreciate our unique qualities, we contribute to the vibrant mosaic that characterizes our university. Through active engagement, open dialogue, and a commitment to understanding, we can collectively create a space where every color contributes to the masterpiece of our shared experience. I addressed Michiganders as “these people” in my first paragraph. But by actively participating in all these things, unknowingly I have also become a part of “these people”. This is the meaning of unity in diversity, this is where the success of MSU lies.

Nishit Nagpal

Best Essay by an Undergraduate Student

As a freshman at Michigan State University, originally hailing from a small town in Chhattisgarh, India, my journey has been a profound blend of self-discovery and cultural immersion. The moment I stepped onto the lush, expansive campus of MSU, I was engulfed in a world vastly different from the warm, familiar streets of my hometown. In India, life revolved around community, traditions, and a rich tapestry of cultural practices that have been passed down through generations. My identity was deeply rooted in these traditions, from the vibrant festivals like Diwali and Holi to the daily rituals and the delicious North Indian cuisine that was a staple at our family table. This contrasted starkly with the individualistic and fast-paced culture I encountered at MSU. Here, independence was not just encouraged; it was a way of life. At first, this shift was overwhelming. In India, families often lived together in joint households, sharing not only meals but also joys and sorrows. My family was the epitome of this lifestyle. Our days would often culminate with everyone gathering to share stories over homemade Roti, Daal, and Sabji. The lively discussions were as much a part of our meal as the food itself. In stark contrast, the individualism in the U.S. was palpable. The concept of personal space and privacy, the quiet meals in the university cafeteria, and the fast-food culture were new to me. Another aspect that stood out was the difference in communication styles. In India, communication is often indirect and nuanced, with a strong emphasis on maintaining harmony and respect. In contrast, I found the communication in the U.S. to be more direct and explicit. This shift was challenging initially, as I learned to navigate and adapt to these different styles of interactions.

Despite these challenges, MSU became a canvas where I painted my new life with the colors of diversity and inclusion. The university's vibrant international community became a second home, where I could share my culture and embrace others'. The Indian Student Association at MSU was particularly instrumental in this transition. It was a gateway to celebrate our festivals and traditions with the same fervor I experienced back home. It also became a platform to educate others about the rich heritage of India, showcasing our dances, music, and history.

The celebration of Ganesh Chaturthi at MSU was a poignant moment for me. It not only brought a piece of my home to MSU but also allowed me to share the significance of this festival with my peers from various backgrounds. The event was a microcosm of the cultural melting pot that MSU represented, with students of different nationalities partaking in our rituals, savoring Indian cuisine, and learning about our deity, Lord

Ganesh. This event was instrumental in bridging the cultural gap and fostering a sense of community. Engaging in the Christmas celebrations was equally enriching. It allowed me to experience and appreciate the cultural nuances of the U.S. The warmth and joy of the festive season were reminiscent of the community spirit back home, yet uniquely different in its expressions and traditions. This intercultural exchange broadened my perspective, enabling me to appreciate the beauty in diversity.

'Spartan Strong' is more than a motto; it's a lived experience. It signifies resilience, unity, and the celebration of diversity. At MSU, I've learned that my Indian identity is not just a part of who I am; it's a lens through which I contribute to the vibrant tapestry of this university. It's about embracing my roots while opening my arms to the myriad cultures around me. Here, every interaction is a learning opportunity, every friendship a window to a new world, and every challenge a step towards personal growth. My journey at MSU is more than just an academic pursuit; it's a journey of cultural integration, self-discovery, and building a global community. As I walk the campus, I carry with me the richness of my Indian heritage and the openness to embrace the diverse experiences that surround me. This blend of cultures, traditions, and perspectives is what makes my experience at MSU uniquely enriching and profoundly transformative.

Olajumoke Oluwatobiloba Emmanuel

Best Essay by a Graduate Student

One perfect scheme to view the world is to see it as a canvas, not a monochrome terrain but a vibrant tapestry woven from countless hues. Each individual, like a crayon, contributes a unique shade, a distinct perspective, and a brushstroke that adds depth and texture to the overall masterpiece. These differences are not only an attestation to the richness of our experiences but also crucial to the richness of our experiences but also an essential element in fostering an inclusive and dynamic world. At Michigan State University, we are fortunate to be a part of this collective artistry, where a kaleidoscope of backgrounds, identities, and experiences come together to paint a world of endless possibilities.

Defining myself in this vibrant spectrum is a constant work in progress. I am a son to two loving parents, a budding scientist, a voracious reader, and a lover of music that transcends borders. I am shaped by the values of my family, the rhythm of my community, and the endless curiosity that propels me forward. But I am also a product of the countless interactions I have with others, the stories I hear, the perspectives I encounter. Each encounter leaves a trace, a subtle blend of colors that enriches my own palette.

This is why diversity at MSU is not just a statistic, but a beating heart. It is the reason our classrooms buzz with debates that challenge assumptions and classrooms with ideas that spark innovation. It is the fuel that drives our research, pushing us to explore the world through lenses far broader than our own. A diverse MSU is not just a reflection of the real world, it is an incubator for a better one, a space where understanding and empathy bloom from the fertile ground of shared experiences.

Embracing my unique self at MSU means celebrating the colors that make me who I am. It means speaking my mother tongue with pride, sharing my family's traditions with open arms, and delving deeper into the scientific mysteries that ignite my passion. It means stepping outside my comfort zone, seeking out voices different from my own, and learning from the lived experiences that paint our world in diverse shades.

But it also means acknowledging the gaps in my understanding. I want to know more about the struggles faced by my fellow students of color, the challenges of navigating a world built on unspoken biases, and the stories etched in the tapestry of their lives that remain unseen by my privileged eyes. I want to understand the nuances of cultural

differences, the power of religious beliefs, and the language of identities that differ from my own.

MSU, with its vibrant tapestry of student organizations, cultural events, and academic initiatives, creates a space for these stories to be shared and understood. The university strives to be a microcosm of the diverse world that students will eventually step into. Initiatives like mentorship programs, cultural awareness, and inclusive curriculums contribute to an environment where diversity is celebrated and acknowledged. The International Festival explodes with the colors of a hundred flags, the Diwali celebration illuminates the night with the warmth of a thousand clay lamps, and the Black Business Association opens doors to worlds of entrepreneurship and resilience. These moments are not just spectacles, they are brushstrokes on the canvas of our collective understanding, bridges built across the divides of ignorance and prejudice.

In conclusion, embracing diversity at MSU is not a passive act, it is an active engagement with the world around us. It is a commitment to listening, learning, and celebrating the crayons that paint our world in vibrant hues. It is the promise to use our unique colors to create a campus, a community, a world where every voice is heard, every story valued, and every brushstroke contributes to a masterpiece of understanding and inclusivity. Let us continue to paint together, not with a single shade, but with the full spectrum of human experience, for in this vibrant tapestry lies the true potential of our shared future.