

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

TEOMAN EKIM

Teoman Ekim is a senior studying materials engineering, with minors in business and energy, and is set to graduate this May. Originally from Istanbul, Turkey, his journey to Michigan State was shaped by both academic ambition and a curiosity to experience life abroad.

“I grew up in Turkey and up until high school I was in Turkey. There’s a bit of everything in Turkey. I’m from Istanbul and I used to live in the Asian side of Istanbul, but my school was in the European side. So I would cross the bridge across continents every day to go back and forth to school.” Growing up in such a large city, Teo describes Istanbul as vibrant and full of life.

“So it’s like a really busy city of 20 million people and there’s a lot of culture and history, but also it’s a lively city that is always awake.”

After attending an international high school, Teo knew he wanted to continue his education abroad. When choosing between universities in the United States and the Netherlands, Michigan State stood out for its balance of academics and student life.

“I think MSU had the best balance overall because they have great research opportunities. It was very specialized and that was good, but it was also quite balanced. I could go out, I could meet people, I could have fun, and the whole American college experience. If I’m going to try it, it’s going to be now.”



Like many international students, his first impressions of East Lansing changed as he grew into life here.

“So I was a bit skeptical about East Lansing, given how small of a city it was. But the people here are amazing. They’re super kind and sweet, you get used to nature, to the cold and it just rubs off onto you and you start liking it.”

While the cold remains his least favorite part of Michigan life, it hasn’t stopped him from embracing new experiences, including picking up snowboarding.

“I used to ski back in Turkey, but a friend of mine here was snowboarding, so I wanted to start learning and try it.”

Ekim credits much of his positive experience at MSU to the people he’s met along the way.



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From being invited to holiday celebrations to spending weekends at friends' cabins, he found a strong sense of community early on.

“They're inviting us to their family gatherings when they've just met us. Thanksgiving was really interesting, it was me and then there were 35 Americans.”

On campus, Ekim has been involved both academically and professionally. Through the Professorial Assistantship program, he began working in research as a freshman, an experience that he notes has shaped his academic path.

“I was working with Dr. Fang on fast charging lithium, and as just incoming freshmen, that was great.”

He also found a passion for teaching as an Undergraduate Learning Assistant, a role he has held for multiple semesters.

“I took the class and then ever since I've been giving the class, there's one spot in my schedule, always dedicated to that.”

Outside the classroom, Ekim gained valuable industry experience through internships across the United States, including roles in Cleveland, Chicago, and Pittsburgh. His current plans may bring him back to Pittsburgh after graduation.

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“Career fairs are probably the biggest thing, actually meeting and networking, instead of applying online to what ends up being pointless.”

As an international student, you might not think about study abroad programs, after all, you already are studying abroad, but Ekim notes that one of his most defining experiences at MSU came through a study abroad program in Prague and Budapest.

“Studying abroad is probably one of the best things I did, meeting people, making friendships. I got to meet a whole different set of people.”

Like many international students, Ekim has also faced challenges adjusting to life far from home. Over time, he found ways to navigate homesickness, relying on technology and maintaining close relationships with family. “I think FaceTime is a great tool. When I'm doing mundane tasks, I just call my parents.”

He also found support through campus resources, particularly the Global Career Development Certificate program, which helped guide him toward career opportunities and later allowed him to mentor other students.

As he prepares to graduate, Teo encourages other international students to stay open to new experiences and opportunities. “Just be open to everything because you never know when you're going to find a new friendship or what opportunity is going to come. It happens so spontaneously. So the more out in the open you are, the more you're going to benefit from the whole experience.”

By: Bronte Noble

