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SCII Agenda Newsletter

May 2023 Issue

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

For our last publication of the 2022-2023 academic year, the SCII members decided to publish a completely student-driven edition of the SCII Agenda. The following articles showcase some of the international writings and work by our Schoolcraft students in our classes, on campus, and in the community. In this issue we highlight an award-winning essay by Ashley Xu, an interview and article by Ben Bolstrum, our Global Citizenship Award recipient Armaan Bhandal, and an article written by Carly Hahn, Claire Maginley, Aya Mansour and Matasha Robinson about their experience speaking with an award-winning author.

Award Winning Student Essay:
Setting Foot On *Unaccustomed Earth*

by Ashley Xu



“My children have had other birthplaces, and, so far as their fortunes may be within my control, shall strike their roots into unaccustomed earth” (Lahiri). These words from Nathaniel Hawthorne appear in the first few pages of Jhumpa Lahiri’s book [*Unaccustomed Earth*](#), and the meanings of the quote echo throughout the stories in the pages that follow. I read *Unaccustomed Earth* for the first time in high school when a teacher of mine recommended it. I devoured the short stories in the span of a few days. As a child of Chinese immigrants, I related to the stories on many levels. Even though Lahiri writes specifically about the experiences of Indian immigrants and their second-generation children, the stories have a central focus on Eastern culture and the universality of immigration. *Unaccustomed Earth* tackles family relationships, the dichotomy between traditional Eastern culture and modern Western culture, and plays a role in advancing diversity in literature.

Unaccustomed Earth takes an intimate, sincere look at family relationships with an added layer of portraying shifting relationship dynamics over long spans of time. Lahiri excels at writing short, clear prose with layers of meaning, and the words on the page create whole background stories for characters, which I found fascinating to unravel in the context of my own experiences with critical

parents.

The authenticity of the characters helped me connect with them and learn from them. For example, in “Unaccustomed Earth,” part of the story is told from Ruma’s father’s perspective, and hearing him reminisce about memories gave me a look into the hardships that immigrants go through when first arriving in a new country. He marks the passage of time with the apartments and houses that he moved through while in America. *Unaccustomed Earth* was my first time reading a fictional immigrant story that sounded so much like my parents’ immigration story.

Sibling relationships take center stage in the story “Only Goodness,” where Sudha as the older sibling acts as a mediator between her brother Rahul and her parents when he struggles with alcoholism. Sudha grapples with her responsibility and obligation to her brother and family and has difficulty focusing on her own life. Eventually, Sudha leaves her family and moves abroad to London, marrying an English man who has no family ties. When reading this story, I wonder at my own sibling dynamic, and how much pressure my parents must put on my older sister. I saw my own sibling relationship reflected in Ruma and her brother Romi’s. Romi moved abroad to New Zealand “maintaining only distant ties,” breaking their mother’s heart (Lahiri). After Romi left, their parents leaned much more on Ruma, who was the child accessible to them. Even though Lahiri touches on Romi for only a few sentences, I imagined a whole world to go along with his life, since my sister moved to Greece in 2016. Reading *Unaccustomed Earth* in high school opened my eyes to the perspectives of others, and I felt more compassion toward my family.

Unaccustomed Earth dives into the tug of war between Eastern and Western culture — Indian tradition and American modernity. “Characters balance precariously between two worlds — not just Asian and Western, but inner and outer, traditionally circumscribed and daringly improvised” (Hulbert). Characters walk the line between making their parents happy, which often means following tradition, or choosing paths for themselves. Characters struggle with the possible dilution of their culture and severe disapproval of parents from marrying outside of the culture.

Hulbert, Ann. “The New Global Nomads: Jhumpa Lahiri and the Perils of Assimilation.” *Slate Magazine*, Slate, 3 Apr. 2008, <https://slate.com/culture/2008/04/jhumpa-lahiri-s-unaccustomed-earth.html>.

Lahiri, Jhumpa. *Unaccustomed Earth*. eBook, Knopf, 2009.

The above writing are excerpts from a larger essay by [Ashley Xu](#) the 2023 recipient of the 2023 Harvard Malinowski Award for excellence in writing. She was recently honored for her work at the 16th Annual Schoolcraft Write Word Event on April 5th, hosted by English Department Chair and SCII GlobalEYEzers Coordinator, Professor [Anna Maheshwari](#).

Rotary International: An Interview with SC Dean Michele Kelly by Ben Bolstrum



Michele Kelly has a clear and infectious optimism for the next generation. As the Dean of Liberal Arts & Sciences on our campus, Dr. Kelly is dedicated to improving the academic experiences of students and ensuring that they receive a proper education, but her enthusiasm doesn't falter outside of the campus. She is also a passionate member of the [Rotary Club of Northville](#), a chapter of [Rotary International](#) which allows her to accomplish these goals.

With the mission statement of providing service to others, promoting integrity and advancing world understanding alongside goodwill and peace, Rotary has lofty ambitions that are accomplished through the industrious work of its members. From working to eradicate polio and fighting other diseases, to providing clean water to communities who need it and beyond, Rotary is dedicated to being a positive force for change. This is why Dr. Kelly, and her husband, Chris Kelly have been a part of this community for eight years.

Dr. Kelly has seen the positive impact that Rotary can have in a community, and hopes to tighten the bond that Schoolcraft shares with the organization as a result, and would be happy to sponsor a club on campus if the opportunity arose. Because of this, she was eager to discuss some of the opportunities available for enquiring potential members. Rotary operates via a system known as the Four Way Test, created by Darrel Thompson, which asks the following questions: Is it the TRUTH? Is it FAIR to all concerned? Will it build GOODWILL and BETTER FRIENDSHIPS? And will it be BENEFICIAL to all concerned? These tenets dictate all projects that the organization works towards on a local, national, and global level, and inform what course of action they will take.

Other projects and initiatives that Dr. Kelly hopes to highlight that are being worked towards around the world include promoting peace, saving mothers and children, supporting education, growing local economies, protecting the environment, and providing clean water as well as sanitation and hygiene. All of this while promoting world peace.

Dr. Kelly notes that the Northville chapter has focused their efforts on raising money and awareness for groups such as Civic Concern, a food bank in the city. They also host events such as the [Tour de Ville](#), a community bike ride which follows a route around the surrounding area. Over \$200,000 in proceeds has been raised over the first eight years of this event with over 3,200 riders. These funds have been spread across The [Rotary Foundation of Rotary International](#), [Kids Against Hunger](#), local scholarships, student exchange programs, [Little Free Libraries](#), [Shelter Box](#), [Life Remodeled](#), and local food

banks.

On a global scale, Rotary International makes it possible for a wide range of students in different phases of their lives to get involved in activism both local and global through different subchapters. [Interact Clubs](#), for example, are for children aged 12-18 and aim to teach members the importance of the idea that volunteering should be a selfless act. They do this by promoting cooperative projects all across the world that introduce members to new cultures and communities. There are 342,953 interactors worldwide across 145 countries making up 14,911 Interact clubs worldwide at the time of writing.

[Rotaract Clubs](#) specifically benefit college communities with the opportunity to create fellowship among peers. They are very malleable, led by the community to foster leadership skills and work to enact positive change to communities big and small all over the world. Schoolcraft does not currently have a Rotaract club, but Dr. Kelly hopes that one forms through student initiative because she would be happy to advise it.

There are 203,298 rotaractors worldwide across 180 countries making up 10,698 Rotaract clubs worldwide at the time of writing. Dr. Kelly hopes students see the wide variety of opportunities available with Rotary, and look into becoming a force of change themselves. There's something for everybody with this organization and she has emphasized that they are open to suggestions when it comes to directing their activism. Be the change you want to see in the world! Those interested in joining Rotary can do so by visiting the [Join Rotary](#) page to begin the process of finding the right chapter.

[Ben Bolstrum](#) is a Schoolcraft College student and Editor of the student newspaper the Schoolcraft Connection.

Global Citizenship Award

Armaan Bhandal



Armaan Bhandal, a full-time student at Schoolcraft College, was recently nominated and awarded the SCII Global Citizenship Award. Despite facing numerous language, social, and financial challenges, he has continued the path to being the best version of himself. Armaan is the President of the SC Asian Students Association, works at the Hinkle Center and continues to "ace" his classes. He inspires and motivates other students to work together; he worked hard to get Chinese, Korean and Pakistani students to join the Asian Students Association.

He was described by faculty in his nomination as "sincere, hardworking, and dedicated in his studies while working tirelessly until the task at hand is completed". Armaan displays "empathy and kindness and helps others achieve their goals, a rare quality nowadays, and despite all his accomplishments, he remains humble and is constantly striving to make others' lives just a little better".

Armaan, how has your leadership with the Asian Student Association

added to your experiences as a student on campus?

"My leadership with the Asian Student Association has added a better experience to being a student on campus. Every day I'm always thinking of new ways to make this club better and ensure the success of this club for me and my club mates. Coming up with events, talking about issues, and coming together with the Asian community makes it the best."

What are your future educational and professional plans?

"My future educational plan is to continue working through computer science and building a portfolio for future internships and keep updating this portfolio as I go through college."

How has your work with the ASA helped bring a more global perspective to campus?

"I feel like my work and my fellow club mates' work has brought a global perspective on the Asian community; the beauty of our cultures. For example, we had a coffee and culture event where each of my club mates presented the traditions, good food, morals, etc., of our own culture. I feel it brought a better perspective for the Asian community."

[Armaan Bhandal](#) welcomes anyone interested in the SC Asian Student Association to reach out to him for more information.

Intimate Conversation with Award Wining Author

By: Carly Hahn, Claire Maginley,
Aya Mansour & Matasha Robinson



Dr. Amra Sabic El-Rayess joined us in Professor Helen Ditousas's class *Modern Literature by and About Women* (ENG 170) via zoom for an intimate conversation regarding her award-winning memoir *The Cat I Never Named*. We had an opportunity to engage with Dr. Sabic El-Rayess, an acclaimed author, scholar, and professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, who shared details of her personal experience as a Bosnian genocide survivor and her path to academic success as an immigrant and educator in the United States. We thoroughly enjoyed meeting the author of one of our favorite assigned texts in one of our favorite classes. We wanted to share some of our individual thoughts:

"The meeting with Dr. Amra had something that affected me a lot. Her noble morals and interesting conversations made me excited to listen to her. Her book expresses the feelings she experienced during the war in her country. How nice it is to read a book and meet the author! I consider myself lucky to have met her and to have Professor Ditousas!" (Aya)

"Dr. Sabic personally impacted me when she reflected on her relationship with her father. She discussed some of his background, how he grew up, and she also shared about her grandfather. Something that I didn't know before was how her dad lost contact with her grandfather and ultimately never even knew what became of him or even where his father was buried. This was very devastating for her family to say the least. Having recently lost my own father this was very personal and emotional to me. This helped me realize how blessed we are for the little things like being able to go visit our loved ones at the grave site, etc. In reading the novel, we know that this is her personal story

and journey of survival during the war. But after having the opportunity to speak with her in person, we were able to hear the passion in her voice when reflecting about all they did to survive during the genocide. The way she repeatedly emphasized how everything was about survival just really put things in a different perspective for me; so much more than just reading the book.” (Matasha).

“It was a pleasure to meet Dr. Sabic and receive a more thorough understanding of her experience living through the Bosnian genocide” (Carly).

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