We enjoy putting a spotlight on our outstanding students. If you’d like to nominate a student to be profiled, please contact us.

GRADUATE STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

GRAD STUDENT AND “FOODIE” PUTS HIS PASSION TO WORK

Ray Pang, a self-described foodie, has found a way to translate his passion to his work. As a master’s student in anthropology, Pang focuses his research on grassroots food activism and poses the following question: does food activism have the potential to empower vulnerable members of society? To answer this question Pang hopes to conduct research with a group of Somali Bantu refugees at a local urban farm this summer.

“To me, anthropology is a form of self-definition, offering a multitude of lenses to view the world,” said Pang. “Specifically, cultural anthropology presents the flexibility to connect fitting research methods to my interests in dynamic food systems, environmental and social justice and race.”

Pang’s love for food can be traced back to his childhood when he started to cook at the age of 13. Both of his parents love to cook and they encouraged Pang’s passion when he was a child. “For me, cooking is an enterprise that provides a great outlet for my spontaneous creativity,” he said. “It was a short step from cooking to gardening to sharing my love for both with whomever I can.”

Pang began his involvement in food justice as an undergraduate at the University of Wisconsin. He joined the University Slow Food chapter and frequented the farmers market on a weekly basis. He also taught cooking and gardening lessons to teens. Pang was also accepted into the competitive ethnography program, Off the Beaten Track Summer School for Anthropologists and Social Scientists, which was held on the islet of Gozo, Malta. He did so well that he was invited back for the following summer to serve as a teaching assistant.

“Ray does more than meet expectations. He evaluates the tasks that need to be done in order to reach his goals, and accomplishes them,” said Richard Clemmer-Smith, professor of anthropology and Pang’s advisor. “Ray is intellectually curious and well informed, personally engaging, and dependable. He has demonstrated the ability to understand and synthesize complex material and to apply critical analysis to it.”

Pang cites the anthropology program as playing a large part in his success here at DU. He describes the camaraderie of his fellow graduate students and the quality of faculty as...
being invaluable.

"The faculty has provided mentorship by helping me focus my ideas and interests for a thesis project that I'm truly passionate and excited about. My role as a teaching assistant in the department last fall also helped further develop my teaching, time management and critical analysis skills," Pang said.

Pang's immediate goals include focusing on his thesis project and finishing his master's degree. After that, he sees himself continuing his work in food activism.

"What I do know is that I love food and working with other people who are passionate about food, whether it's inventing recipes, gardening, teaching cooking lessons to kids or simply cooking with people I care about," he said.

Being the avid cook and gardener that he is, Pang also has plans to grow a plot in DU's community garden. To discuss issues of sustainability, food systems and other related issues, visit Pang's food blog.

**ARCHIVED GRADUATE STUDENT STORIES (PDF FORMAT)**