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WKU student honored as Fulbright Scholar

By AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com Mar 16, 2019



Growing up in public housing in Bowling Green, the eldest of three sons to a single mother, Deven Richardson had to learn many lessons early in life.

“It kind of like thrust responsibility on to me at a really young age,” said Richardson, a 2015 Bowling Green High School graduate and current Honors College student at Western Kentucky University.

From an early age, Richardson did what he could to help his mother and be a good role model for his two younger brothers. His father wasn’t around after being incarcerated when Richardson was just 9 or 10 years old, he said.

“I decided to just like put in the work, focus on my studies and make sure that I had a way, for lack of a better phrase, to get out of the trap that I was put in,” Richardson said.

That work seems to be paying off for Richardson, who recently received a letter naming him a Fulbright Scholar.

Jonathan Vaughn, now an assistant principal at Warren East High School, had Richardson in his class when he taught social studies at Bowling Green High School. He’s proud of how far his former student has come, especially being named a Fulbright Scholar.

“I think that says a lot about not just who he is and also not just how smart he is, but also what his potential is going forward,” Vaughn said.

With a passion for Japanese culture and language – one he honed through a study abroad experience as a WKU Mahurin Honors College student – Richardson is now considering a 10-month research project in Japan.

Ideally, Richardson dreams of being a U.S. diplomat to Japan, but he also has an interest in working in East Asia generally.

“I can’t wait to go back for sure,” he said.

Richardson credits a good friend who is Japanese for spurring his interest in the country, which led him to study its language as a WKU Mahurin Honors College student.

When he first came to WKU with an interest in studying Japanese, Richardson said Honors College Executive Director Craig Cobane helped him connect to Kansai Gaidai University in the Osaka prefecture. There, he studied not just Japanese, but took courses in economics from an East Asian perspective and Japanese politics and public policy.

Cobane described Richardson as “one of the most coachable young people I have ever met.”

“You give him advice and he is on it,” he said.

Looking back at that study abroad experience in the spring of 2017, Richardson said it pushed him to pursue a career in the foreign service.

“I came back and I talked with the advisers at (the Office of Scholar Development) about like what I needed to do to be a foreign service officer,” he said.

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Richardson said they encouraged him to apply to the summer enrichment program offered by the prestigious Charles B. Rangel International Affairs program. The U.S. Department of State program, administered by Howard University, attracted and prepares young people for careers in international service, according to its website.

After applying, Richardson was admitted into the summer program, during which he spent six weeks in Washington. This summer, he will participate in another internship on Capitol Hill as a Rangel Fellow.

Richardson is the first WKU student to be named a Rangel Fellow, a university news release said. He is one of just 30 fellows named nationwide in 2019.

The graduate fellowship program, which offers two internships – one in Washington and at a U.S. embassy, supports participants through two years of graduate study, internships, mentoring and professional development activities, according to the program’s website. Each fellow also receives mentoring from a foreign service officer during the fellowship.

“Now grad school is essentially going to be paid for,” Richardson said.

Although some might underestimate a young student from Kentucky, Richardson sees himself as an example of how wrong they are.

“If you put in the hard work, you can achieve success,” he said.

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