

Student Spotlight: Rafaela Passos de Souza

Home country:

Brazil

Time as a Mustang:

August 2023 - February 2024

Scholarship/ Program:

- Currently pursuing a master's degree in Dentistry from [Federal University of Juiz de Fora](#) - Brazil, through the [Postgraduate Program in Dentistry](#), under the guidance of Fabíola Leite, DDS, MSc, PhD, professor at the Department of Restorative Dentistry.
- Awarded a scholarship from Global Affairs Canada to spend six months at Western as a visiting research only student, working with Sheila Butler, DDS, MSc, PhD in the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry and Vahid Dehnavi, Adjunct Research Professor in the Department of Biomedical Engineering as part of the [Emerging Leaders in the Americas Program \(ELAP\)](#)
- Completed an undergraduate degree in Dentistry and specialization in Operative Dentistry and Dental Prosthesis in Brazil prior to returning to university to complete a master's degree



Research focus:

- Her current research is focused on dental implants and developing a better surface treatment for the titanium to allow the implants to become more bioactive and better attach to bones

Western experience highlight:

Rafaela says a highlight has been meeting other Western students and others in the Western community and being made to feel so welcome.

"I participated in the [English Conversation Program](#) and went to the [Global Café](#) events and met people from all over the world. I never felt alone at Western because there was so much support and so many resources and people to talk to. I'm going back to Brazil with a completely different vision of what is possible and what I'm able to do. Being at Western really opened up my mind and now I feel more free."

Rafaela also highlights the scientific experience lived in the Western community, improving research and investigation skills in building her academic career.

“The structure of Western University is exceptional! The labs are modern and well-equipped, providing everything necessary for conducting high-quality research. The staff are all friendly and willing to assist. The learning curve was remarkable; within just a few months at Surface Science Western, I conducted numerous experiments, developed and execute top-notch scientific research, both theoretically and practically. My advisor, Dr. Butler, was outstanding, offering excellent guidance in challenging situations, always attentive and competent. I overcame barriers and exceeded my own limits, presenting my work at conferences, providing remote tutoring for an internationally taught course, and writing scientific articles.”

In her own words:

If I could give advice to others, I would say to be brave and don't be afraid to go to a different country. When I was in my city in Brazil, I was feeling a little bit stuck. Then I came here, and I realized that I'm able to do anything I put my effort into. I came by myself without my family, and I thought it would be more difficult to get used to the new environment. But it was an incredible and life-changing experience for me.

Engaging in scientific research is both challenging and exciting. The sense of accomplishment and personal growth that comes from surpassing your own limits is truly rewarding. I highly recommend this experience to others; it requires courage to reach new heights of knowledge and discovery and I am very grateful.

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