

# Traveling through an unfamiliar airport?

**SAROJ DAHAL HOPES HIS APP WILL ACT AS YOUR AIRPORT TRAVEL COMPANION.**

Kent State University is a world away from the small town in Nepal where international student Saroj Dahal was born and raised. It takes Dahal and his family nearly 15 hours to travel the more than 7,000 miles between Nepal and the United States.

So when his grandparents, who do not speak English, were planning to fly from Nepal to Boston in June 2019 to visit his uncle, Dahal flew to Nepal to accompany them on their journey. Without his assistance, they may have had difficulty ordering food or finding restrooms.

His family's situation inspired Dahal, a Kent State mechanical engineering technology major, and his teammates when they competed in Kent State's SkyHack 2019 last fall semester. SkyHack is a weekendlong design challenge for students from any US university to provide solutions to issues related to the aviation industry—presented by the College of Aeronautics and Engineering (CAE) and LaunchNET, with major sponsorship by the Burton D. Morgan Foundation.

Dahal's team entered the "Improving the Air Traveler Experience" challenge, sponsored by Kent State's Design Innovation initiative. In response to the challenge, the team created Copilot, a digital application designed to help international travelers navigate

through unfamiliar airports—and their "airport travel companion" won the competition's \$10,000 grand prize. "I generated the concept, but each member of the team made contributions," says Dahal, who is a senior this year.

The Copilot team took their innovation to LaunchNET, where they received suggestions on how to move forward to bring the app to market. Although the teammates have been separated by the pandemic and two of them have graduated, they remain in contact and plan to resume work on the Copilot app.

After participating in SkyHack, Dahal did summer research and began a mechanical engineering internship at Olsträd Engineering Corp., in Kent, Ohio. His responsibilities include working on CAD (Computer Aided Design) and HMI (Human Machine Interface)—a user interface, such as a touch-screen or keyboard, that connects a person to a machine, system or device.

Dahal hopes to get a full-time job at Olsträd or a similar company after he graduates in spring 2021 with a Bachelor of Science in mechanical engineering technology and a minor in sustainability.

"He is not only a brilliant student, but he has taken advantage of the many opportunities available to him at Kent State," says Jackie Ruller, assistant

dean in the College of Aeronautics and Engineering, who has known Dahal since his freshman year.

The excellent reputation of CAE is one of the reasons he chose to attend Kent State, Dahal says. He also learned through a college counseling program in Nepal that the university had an impressive number of international students, and he received several scholarships, which made it affordable.

"The Office of Global Education does a great job," says Dahal, who participates in the office's Global Ambassador Program, helping Kent State international students from his native Nepal find housing and other resources prior to and during their first semester. "I work to pay forward the help and experiences I have received at Kent State."

—April McClellan-Copeland

See video at:  
[www.kent.edu/magazine/saroj](http://www.kent.edu/magazine/saroj)

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[www.kent.edu/SkyHack](http://www.kent.edu/SkyHack),  
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