UM Delegation in Tajikistan

Director General George Dennison, Provost Royce Engstrom, Associate Provost for International Programs, Mehrdad Kia and Associate Director of the Central and Southwest Asia Program Ardi Kia meet with the President and staff of Tajik National State University in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.

Russian Teacher Training

Governor Schweitzer along with UM’s International Programs and School of Education, Division of Educational Research & Service welcomed 11 Russian teachers/leaders for the 3 week Teachers-To-Teachers program.
Discovering New Territory-Central Asia!

Muztagh Ata Peak

By Rick & Susie Graetz

In the midst of conflicting opinions, Muztagh Ata, which in the Uygur language means “Father of Ice Mountain,” ascends 7,546 meters (24,758 feet) from the northwestern edge of the Tibetan Plateau. Some geographers claim it to be part of the Kun Lun Range that extends eastward from the Pamirs of Tajikistan and far western China, while others contend it is a Chinese Pamir Peak. Evidence of its makeup and position give credence to the latter.

This massive, huge bulk of snow and ice rises in Xinjiang Province (sometimes called the Uygur Autonomous region) of western China and about 15 miles east of the Tajikistan-Chinese border. Muztagh Ata and its neighbor Kongur Tagh 7,649 meters (25,095 feet) and the world’s 37th highest summit are in a somewhat isolated group of high peaks in-between the Pamir and Kun Lun, hence the debate as to which range is allowed to claim them.

The Karakorum Highway (KKH) flanks Muztagh’s north and south sides making the peak highly visible and accessible. The mountain’s approachability and gradual western slope renders it one of the easiest of the world’s 7,000-meter peaks to climb, but its elevation alone makes this Chinese peak a serious expedition.

Kashgar, China, a now modern, once ancient Silk Road caravan oasis, is the closest city to the mountain. From this historic settlement, it takes about five hours on the KKH to reach Karakol (Kara Lake) on Muztagh’s northeast side. The distance is only about 200 kilometers (125 miles), but spectacular mountain scenery on the way dictates a slow pace.

When not frozen, Karakol reflects Muztagh Ata’s majesty. This beautiful body of water, amidst a high, barren, dry, windswept landscape, sits at 3,700 meters (12,120 feet). It is here, in the summer that Tajik and Kazak semi-nomadic herders bring their livestock to graze in the shadow of the great peak. Yurts spring up and offer a colorful, human touch to a very high and rugged piece of geography that for much of the year is void of people.

Starting in this issue, we will run a short piece on unique and colorful places in Central Asia. They are a result of Rick and Susie Graetz’s travels and work in Central Asia on behalf of International Programs at The University of Montana
On February 22, 2007, I flew to Tbilisi, Georgia to teach at the Tbilisi Institute of Asia and Africa (TIAA) under the auspices of The University of Montana-Georgia Exchange Program. Unlike other Montana faculty who taught in Georgia, I decided to teach only at TIAA so that I might become better acquainted with the Institute, students and the city of Tbilisi. I taught two classes: History and Peoples of Africa and an upper level seminar on Ethnographic Field Methods.

TIAA is an urban campus and many students come from suburbs and therefore spend many hours on public transportation. Because of this, courses are divided into morning and afternoon classes with upper level students attending in the morning and lower level students in the afternoon. I taught two sections of the Africa class three days a week and the seminar once a week. Twenty-two students attended the Africa class and six in the seminar.

TIAA does not have a formal registration process and so I was uncertain as to how many students were enrolled. At first many came but soon all but the twenty-two dropped out. These students were very consistent in their attendance, and many were truly interested in learning about Africa. About half the lectures were on the history of sub-Saharan Africa and the second half on contemporary lives and social problems.

I was fortunate that TIAA had a DLP projector that I attached to my computer and could show power point presentations in each lecture. I taught all my classes in the Montana Room (created through collaboration between International Programs and TIAA and funded by a U.S. State Department Grant) which had a large table, comfortable chairs, two computers, book shelves and pictures of Missoula on the walls. This room was always locked when not in use. One of the computers received the internet so that I was able to surf for the pictures I used in my presentations. I had students do research on specific topics using the internet and they presented their findings to the class. I gave an oral final exam.

In the upper level/graduate seminar, students were introduced to ethnographic field methods and research. We covered topics such as how to write a research proposal, ethnographic field techniques, such as field work, observation, interviewing techniques and archival research. At first the students were excited, interested and talkative; however, over time attendance dropped off because they worked and couldn’t spend the time carrying out research projects. Students in this class were not signed up but were taking the class without credit.

At the end of my stay, I gave a major presentation on the history and culture of Native Americans. The President of TIAA, Dr. Chikovani invited many outside groups, such as the U.S. Embassy, and the talk was well attended. I gave a power point presentation in English and my assistant translated it into Georgian. We worked well together.

Overall, I found this teaching exchange to be fun and beneficial. Unfortunately no reading materials could be assigned because no literature was available. TIAA has a computer room with a bank of computers connected to the internet but they were heavily used and at times electricity was not available. Most of the students had a fair knowledge of English but their spoken English was inadequate.

I was fortunate to have an assistant (Thea Gagnadzi) who had been delegated to take care of the Montana Room. She attended my classes, took care of attendance and was a go-between the administration and myself. Most of the personnel in the main office did not speak English very well and Thea was very useful. Thea spoke good English, besides Georgian, Russian, Arabic and Dutch.

Dr. Chikovani, was most kind and gracious. His wife found good accommodations for me across from the school. His family showed me around the important sites of Tbilisi and arranged for other faculty to accompany me on visits and to the ballet. He is an extremely busy person, with visitors coming frequently, but he was always helpful to me and took time to talk about the history of Georgia and his plans for the Institute. He truly enjoys having an exchange with The University of Montana.

My accommodations were good. My landlady was a retired lawyer for Tbilisi State University, and she had a flat in the university’s faculty housing. Although the building is very ugly with about 200 flats, the apartment itself was very nice with parquet floors, spacious rooms, good electricity and running water. Unfortunately Lia, the landlady, didn’t speak English and my Georgian was non-existent. Even so, she was pleasant, not demanding and very gracious. She invited me to her dinner parties and made certain that the flat’s facilities were functioning. We were sad to part from each other.

Tbilisi is an interesting city of almost 4 million. One million of these are refugees from Abkhazia. The architecture tends to be Soviet and very ugly but some of the older buildings are beautiful. Some parts of the city go back many hundreds of years and reflect the architecture of the Caucasus region. People speak primarily Georgian and Russian, although I seldom heard that language spoken. The major market is a bit difficult to get to but the food is fresh, plentiful and inexpensive. The people are lively, fun and helpful. I sensed no hostility at my being American. There are lots of cars on the streets and driving seems reckless to me. Fortunately there are many underground walkways.
I seldom traveled outside Tbilisi. Thea took me to visit her family in Khashuri during the Easter holidays. There I experienced the Georgian family with lots of eating (great food!), drinking home made wines, and Easter rituals. Dr. Chikovani took Thea, a visiting friend and me to a nearby town noted for its old cathedral. Travel outside Tbilisi if you don’t have a car is by taxi or train and since I was alone and didn’t communicate well in Georgian, I felt limited in how much I could travel.

Since I returned to the U.S., I have given two presentations about Georgia. The first was at the University during an international week in November 2007 and the second was to the American Association of Women in February 2008. Many people in Georgia spoke with great feeling about the country’s history and culture and the importance of these to their present day situation. They are struggling with poverty, lack of resources, poor refugees and poor infrastructure; but they are very proud of who they are and are working hard to overcome difficulties.

High Enrollments in Arabic: What’s Next

By Khaled Huthaily and Samir Bitar

Modern and Classical Languages and Literatures & Central and Southwest Asia Program

Arabic is a semitic language that has been taught at the UM for more than a decade. Interest and enrollment in Arabic language and culture at The University of Montana is constantly on the rise. The chart on page 5 shows enrollment numbers in beginning Arabic (ARAB 101) from Fall 1999 to Fall 2008, when both beginning sections were filled to capacity with no room to accommodate more students. The numbers increased from 19 students in Fall 1999 to 106 this current semester. The UM currently offers seven courses in Arabic: 101, 102, 201, 202, 301, 302 and 396. This enthusiasm in Arabic studies is a trend evident nationwide. A number of governmental agencies, including the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs and the Council of American Overseas Research Centers (CAORC), offer scholarships to study intensive courses in this critically needed foreign language. This comes as a response to the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) to increase the number of Americans learning and becoming proficient in Arabic.

The first year these scholarships were offered, two of our students received Critical Language Scholarships (CLS) from the Department of State. This semester, more than a dozen of our students are in the process of applying for this scholarship to be able to study Arabic in one of the following Arabic-speaking countries: Egypt, Jordan, Oman, Tunisia or Morocco. Such an opportunity helps our students further improve their Arabic communicative skills and broadens their cultural knowledge and competence.

Our UM graduates who studied Arabic are now harvesting the advantage of enrolling in Arabic studies. Professor Bitar, who has been with the program since 1999, does his best to stay in touch with students as they move on. Jacob Childers, who studied Arabic for three years and travelled to Palestine, is currently with the Council for the National Interest Foundation in Washington, D.C. Many Seekins, who also studied Arabic for three years and travelled to Morocco, is currently doing graduate work in Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. Nadia Selim and Juliana Ugalde, both of whom studied Arabic for three years, are currently enrolled at the American University in Cairo, Egypt, and have applied to study at the graduate level specializing in Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Washington in Seattle.

Samir Bitar, a lecturer, and Khaled Huthaily, an adjunct assistant professor, have been actively involved in a number of projects. They both prepared a proposal for and received a STARTALK grant in summer 2008 to teach an intensive Arabic summer course and to establish the Montana Arabic Summer Institute (MASI). Seventeen high school students attended the program and learned the basics of Arabic and learned much about the Arab culture. The program was described by STARTALK evaluators as “a model program for learning Arabic” and that it “would also provide a great experience for any language teacher, to demonstrate how to engage true novice level students completely in Arabic with multisensory, engaging, and effective instruction and assessment techniques”.

Two of the students who successfully completed the MASI program are now working on their senior projects, during which each one of them will teach Arabic to middle
school students under the supervision and guidance of Dr. Huthaily and Professor Bitar.

Both Bitar and Huthaily have given presentations at the annual Modern & Classical Languages & Literatures’ Foreign Language Day, during which high school students and teachers in Missoula and the surrounding areas learn about foreign languages offered at the UM. Professor Bitar talks about the Arabic language from a cultural perspective, Dr. Huthaily talks about Arabic from a linguistic perspective.

Professor Bitar has given a number of presentations/lectures at the University, community, regional and national levels. His service and contributions in the realm of outreach serve to educate all who care about Arabic language and culture, the Middle East, and Islam.

During the STARTALK Post Summer Meeting in Chicago, IL, October 16-18, 2008, Bitar and Huthaily were interviewed for an Instructional Video STARTALK in preparing to answer the question “What did you do to maximize the use of the target language in your program?” They both presented to other participating programs that come from all over the nation “Adopting Authentic Materials with Embedded Culture in Language Instruction.”

On the evening of October 29th, Bitar was the guest speaker at the United Methodist Church at Columbia Falls. He talked about growing up in Arab-Jerusalem, Palestinian History, gave a photo tour of Jerusalem and discussed with the group how each of us could contribute to bringing peace to the world.

Dr. Huthaily’s work in the field of Arabic linguistics has been cited in Bauman-Waengler’s textbook “Introduction to Phonetics and Phonology: From Concepts to Transcription”. Currently, Dr. Huthaily is working on a textbook with a teachers’ manual on the sound system of Arabic. This project is sponsored by a three-year Title VI grant from the U.S. Department of Education. He has recently presented at the 2008 MEA-MFT Educators’ Conference that took place in Missoula on October 16-17 and talked about second language curriculum development. He also spoke to UM speech pathology students about the importance of comparative phonology to language instructors and speech pathologists. Nationally, Dr. Huthaily presented at a number of conferences and academic meetings to talk about Arabic teaching methodology based on linguistics analysis, including the Arabic Language Conference that took place in DePaul University, Chicago, IL, on June 13-15, 2008 and the Arabic Action Research Meeting that took place at Michigan State University, Lansing, MI, on November 15, 2008. In summer 2008, Dr. Huthaily developed the curriculum for an advanced Arabic course for National University, San Diego, CA.

Enrollments in Arabic courses are increasing, which provides an excellent opportunity to establish a nationally competitive Arabic studies at the UM. We hope that Arabic will receive the support it deserves and grows to offer a major/minor at the UM to meet the increasing demands by our students.
As the plane is taking off from Ankara, the landscape beneath coupled with nostalgia and insomnia have triggered a flood of memories of conversations, and travels in Turkey, which in turn are making me record my thoughts before they vanish. I returned to Gazi University in Ankara this year for my summer visiting professorship, thanks again to the efforts of Professors Ziya Argun, Ahmet Arikan and Dean Basri Atasoy. I sat in on the Turkish course offered by Tamila Meladze in Fall’ 2007 at UM which gave me a foothold for two months of self-study in the Spring. So, I was more than ready to become immersed in the language, culture and people of Turkey. Among the highlights of my visit this year was an unforgettable road trip along the eastern Black Sea coast, from Samsun to Trabzon and into the Black Sea mountains stretching into Georgia, as well as jury the doctoral defense examination of PhD student Serdar Azketin, at Gazi University.

During my visit, I could metaphorically and physically live through and feel the Osmanli soul. The study of Turkish led to a profound awareness and appreciation of the influence of Persian (Farsi) and Hindustani languages on modern Turkish. A small sampling of the 500 or so new words and sentences I discovered and recorded on this trip, then internalized, and used will better reveal what I am saying. For example the words: Insaaniyat, Qurbanat, Kudrat, Ilahiyat, Nihayat, Hukumat, Adalat, Janaat, Riyaziat etc in Turkish are identical in Hindustani and Persian that end in the “at” sound, and they denote the same concepts: humanity, sacrifice, nature (human and otherwise), theology, finality/conclusion, justice/law, court, heaven, and mathematics respectively, and these are some words that evoke strong feelings of the Osmanli (the Ottoman Empire) times. There is also an abundance of day-to-day words common in these languages. Take any letter or sound, say “d” and one can reel off a long list of words: duniya, dushman, dost, dukhan, dard, deriya, etc which mean: world, enemy, friend, shop, pain, sea respectively in Turkish, Farsi and Hindustani.

Better yet, and less intellectually speaking, the food, the body language, ways of expressing approval/disapproval, humor, laughter, hospitality, friendship, concern for “strangers” [Musafirs] are similar stretching from Turkey-Iran-India with localized anomalies in some artificially created “-stans” in between. I was in awe at times as well as wondered why I felt such a connection with the Turkish people and culture? When I asked numerous university colleagues, in Ankara and some on the Black Sea coast, about their thoughts and reflections on such a connection, an immediate response was that much of South, Central and Western Asia bears the influence of Turkic conquests and migrations, Persian dynasties and subsequently the influence of the Osmanli for over 600 years on countries stretching from the Balkans to India and Western China. One of the objectives of this visit was to find a personal, humanistic, cultural dimension to the dry narratives given by historians and linguists of Central/SW Asia, i.e., understanding the common knowledge of the people of our shared past. The reader is advised that this narrative is based on self study, travel and personal experiences in Turkic lands, and not that of an expert–many pedantic books are available on the subject.

I often posed the question- What does it mean to be Turkish?, and interesting variations in responses arose. Many university intellectuals spoke of the various migrations, conquests and trans-migrations of Turkic tribes within Asia and to an extent in Europe, the battles for supremacy on the Anatolian lands in post-Genghis Khanates and agreed that the Osmanli empire embraced, synthesized and nurtured numerous distinct cultures within its boundaries with an emphasis on fairness, respect and equality. In doing so the Turkish language evolved from its Oghuz-Uighur roots into one that bore a strong influence of Farsi, Hindustani and Arabic. On the other hand, some intellectuals and people who tended towards modern Turkish nationalism emphasized more strongly the role and influence of the Seljuks (Saljuqyan in Farsi and Hindustani), in modern Turkish identity. For the uninitiated, the Seljuks’ origins lie in the Oghuz Turkic tribes (in today’s geography, this is the region of Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan) that crossed the Volga and settled into the Black Sea steppes and Khorasan around the 10th century. Seljuks became Persian in culture and language over time and then went on to capture Turkey, and in a sense created a beautiful synthesis of Turkish and Persian cultures. Another offshoot of this synthesis is found in India and Pakistan in what is now known as the Moghul culture, a synthesis of Mongol-Turkic-Persian cultures, one of the better consequences of the (infamous) Mongol invasions starting with Genghis Khan. In a nutshell a documented history of various Turkic nations stretches for
1500 years(!) from the 6th century onto 1921 [from small conglomerations of the Huns until the end of the Osmanli Empire]. In fact history textbooks in Turkey contain detailed maps of the migrations, settlements and formation of Turkic nations over these 1500 years, and modern day Turkey is the 16th nation!! When I queried about the reasons for frequent invasions and battles for Anatolia- the answer was simple: The various kingdoms lived in peace until some proclaimed themselves as the “Big Boss”. Such a proclamation provoked neighboring Turkic kingdoms to attack. One should note that the Seljuks were a highly Persianized culture and originally not Islamic to begin with. The Osmanli Empire at its peak spanned three continents [North Africa, Eastern Europe, and Asia] and epitomized both modern day ideals of justice, scientific research, tolerance, culture, equality as well as decadence. The Osmanli alliance with the Germans in World War I contributed to their demise and the formation of independent modern day Turkey was through bloody battles fought on nearly all fronts of Turkey against the British, French and their allies. The colors of the Turkish flag [Blood red with a white sliver moon and star] symbolize the reflection of the moon and star on the bloodied soil.

Having detailed the historical pleasantries [pun intended], I will now reveal the heterogeneity/diversity of people, language, geography, music and culture within Turkey with an emphasis on the Black Sea Region. Modern Turkey is divided into seven distinct regions, and each region has its own cultural traditions, food, music, dialects, mannerisms and “mood”. The Karadeniz [Black Sea] region is known for its stunning vistas and fjords where the mountains intersect the sea [see picture]. The culture of this region bears the influence of the Greeks and to a lesser extent Russian cultures. Odessa, Ukraine is across the Black Sea. As one travels east, the region gets lush with vegetation, the mountains become more rugged. The climate is generally wet, with many overcast days and a turbulent sea. The nature of the people is similar to the weather. They are extremely hospitable to outsiders because of the strong belief that travelers [Musafirs] are sent by God, and they must be looked after. Each region of Turkey has its distinct music and dances, however the cadence and beat of the Black Sea music is much faster than the other regions and their corresponding folk dances are equally fast and resemble the hand and foot movements of Gaelic cultures, but fast forwarded!. Their melancholic nature also reminds one of corresponding Gaelic tendencies. There is a saying in the Black Sea for the music of the other regions of Turkey, such as the Aegean, Marmara and Mediterranean provinces, “Even my grandfather can play and dance to your music!”

Jokes aside, the region is one of the most stunning places I have visited in every respect- the culture, flora, food, music and landscape. There are numerous hazel nut orchards, tea farms and fruit orchards in this region. The highway from Samsun to Trabzon is brand new and the drive is not the least bit boring. The music on the local stations reveals the alternation in dialect for the discerning ear. The University system of Turkey is very well structured because each state university has a teacher’s hotel in which travelers (and teachers) affiliated with any other university in Turkey can stay at a subsidized rate. Most of these hotels are located on prime property since they are built on state owned land. I had the pleasure of staying at such hotels when traveling from Ankara to Samsun and Trabzon and back. From Trabzon, we traveled to the famous Sumela monastery nested on the cliffs of the Black Sea mountains enroute to Batumi, Georgia.

For more details visit http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C3%BCmela_Monastery

Upon the return to Ankara, we juried the dissertation progress of doctoral students [Yasemin Kyymaz, and Cagri Biber] in mathematics education at Gazi, and conducted the dissertation examination of Serdar Azketin [see picture]. The tradition in Turkey is that when a doctoral student successfully defends their dissertation, the chair of the department clothes the student with an elaborate robe [cüppa] to signify the transition from student to scholar. I am both happy and proud to be a part of this tradition and facilitate the completion of doctoral student’s dissertations at Gazi. I eagerly look forward to my next visit in May 2009 at which time I hope to become proficient in Turkish and visit a different region of Turkey. I am particularly keen on the provinces bordering the Aegean on the west and Iran on the east. I am also hoping that Dean Basri Atasoy from Gazi and one of the faculty members will visit Montana in the near future to open up a discussion of setting up a faculty/student exchange between the two universities. The intense language programs at the Language Institute of Gazi University offers a wonderful chance for UM students with an elementary knowledge of Turkish to gain fluency, not to mention the cultural and travel opportunities in and around Turkey.

Some final thoughts: Turkey is a very “young” country in terms of its demographics with many talented and energetic students in mathematics education and other fields. I anticipate many of them making good contributions to scholarship and curriculum development. On a larger scale, the infrastructure and economy of the country is booming and there is a vibrant energy about it. However, it still remains unclear whether the EU will judge Turkey for its secular, economic, political and institutional merits and offer it membership or whether the collective consciousness of the EU is still haunted by the Osmanli flag flying across the Danube during the last siege of Vienna in 1683. Only time will tell!
The Seventh Annual Central Asia Conference will be held April 23 to 25 in the UC Center.

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