

Educational Resources and Developments

Editors' Note: With this issue, the Educational Resources and Developments section begins a series that profiles programs for graduate study of the Central Eurasian region at universities around the world. The series begins with two accounts from US universities, the University of Washington and the University of Chicago. Our intent in presenting this series is to inform CESR readers — prospective students, instructors, researchers, agencies seeking qualified employees, and others — of the variety of programs and resources that universities provide and the challenges that institutions face in maintaining and developing their programs. We encourage you to contact the Editors with a proposal for a profile of your institution's programs (or your experiences in them) that is analytical and reflective in nature. The articles in this series are not meant to be free advertising for recruitment purposes; rather, they should be conceived as a way to help fellow specialists keep abreast of institutional and programmatic developments, as resources for the study of Central Eurasia grow and shift.

Central Eurasia Across the Curriculum and Beyond Institutional Walls: A Tale from Real Life

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The focus of this essay is the array of opportunities and challenges for graduate study of Central Asia at the University of Washington. UW is an institution long known for its specialization in Central Asia, but students here must nevertheless enlist resources across departmental boundaries and even beyond the walls of the university itself. The essay draws upon the personal experience of Ali İğmen, who defended his doctoral dissertation on Central Asian history in 2004. Ali came to the History Department with a master's degree from the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization (NELC). Daniel Waugh was a member of his PhD committee. We expect that Ali's experience is far from unique among those who pursue their education as Central Eurasia specialists in North American universities.

The collapse of the Soviet Union provided an opportunity and the encouragement for an unprecedented expansion of teaching and research on Central Asia, and the tragic events of 9/11 and their aftermath have been a further stimulus to the expansion of programs. It is ironic that these developments occurred at a point where, at the University of Washington and some other institutions, existing programs had suffered from key

retirements and diminished institutional support. The early 1990s saw the decline of the once pre-eminent Tibetan program and the disappearance of regular instruction in Mongolian and Manchu. Fortunately, the prominent Central Asianist Prof. Ilse Cirtautas, in collaboration with other UW faculty, continued to maintain a program that offered a variety of languages and course options. Still, with so much of the program dependent upon a single individual, and without large numbers of students in it, there was a constant danger that Central Asia would be marginalized in the face of higher departmental priorities.

A related challenge is exemplified in the continuation of the Cold War division of the world embodied in US Department of Education Title VI programs. While the Title VI Centers are now very much encouraged to teach Central Asia, and in fact there has been a substantial increase in funding for relevant language fellowships, it is not clear where the aspiring regional specialist should find his or her appropriate program or departmental home (see more on this below). It is extremely rare that an institution has resources and enough faculty to create an autonomous Central Asia program, and, as we

know, Central Asia in any event does not constitute a unified, historically defined cultural region. So at the UW, as elsewhere, instruction on Central Asia is located in several departments.

Given this situation, it took a fairly high degree of entrepreneurship and creativity on Ali's part in order to construct a first-rate doctoral program from resources at the UW and even further afield. Ali was first attracted to the UW's NELC by Professor Cirtautas' courses in language and culture, as well as by NELC's intensive summer program, which in the early 1990s offered all the major Central Asian languages. As a returning graduate student, his first task, language training, was facilitated by native knowledge of Turkish. An opportunity to teach in a US Information Agency / Portland State University education project in Osh, Kyrgyzstan, in 1995 was a valuable first in-country experience. Of particular interest was the opportunity in Professor Cirtautas' courses to focus on Kyrgyz literature, ranging from the epic *Manas* to the prose of Chingiz Aitmatov. Apart from the Turkic languages, he added Tajik and began the long road to mastering Russian in our Slavic Department. One of the secrets to the breadth of offerings through NELC was the regular presence of visiting faculty from Central Asia, among them the Uzbek poet Muhammad Ali and the Kyrgyz scholar of linguistics Gulnara Jamasheva. NELC continues to be at the core of Central Asian studies here: in both academic year and summer programs students are studying Uzbek, Uyghur, Kazakh and Kyrgyz. Title VI Center funding now makes possible individualized language instruction "on demand" in cases where only one or two students may want a language. NELC courses in all the major languages of the Middle East and on the region's cultures are oversubscribed; the new replacement hire for Persian has a strong interest in seeing that the program continues to accommodate students whose focus is Tajik.

Regularly scheduled meetings of student study groups provide in effect a permanent core seminar for Central Asianists, with a wide range of topics, such as medieval Uzbek poetry, Kazakh funeral rituals in China, Kyrgyz musical traditions, and Tajik-Uzbek diplomatic relations. An annual conference dedicated to the memory of Nicholas Poppe is an opportunity for students to present their academic research. Although lectures by visitors are no substitute for regular interaction with faculty specialists on the region, the program here benefits from a steady stream of distinguished guests. The

Seattle-Tashkent Sister City Association, one of the oldest sister-city arrangements in the US, sponsors a significant number of Central Asian visitors to Seattle and has maintained a close relationship with the university.

Even without a single departmental home here for graduate students like Ali wishing to study Central Asia, several programs bring together scholars who are interested in the region. In addition to NELC, degree options are available at the master's (MA) level in the Jackson School of International Studies' interdisciplinary program in Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies, at the PhD level in the Department of Asian Languages and Literatures, and in the Graduate School's Interdisciplinary PhD Program in Near and Middle Eastern Studies. After spending a year in the interdisciplinary program, Ali decided to choose a more "traditional" field in history. Graduate students who stay in the interdisciplinary program, however, have been very successful in obtaining teaching positions.

Central Asia-specific language and culture courses naturally are not enough. No serious student of Central Asia can avoid studying Russian and Soviet history and politics or avoid taking courses on Islam and the Middle East outside of Central Asia. In Ali İğmen's case, technically his main field was Soviet history (his dissertation is entitled "Building Soviet Central Asia, 1920-1939: Kyrgyz Houses of Culture and Self-fashioning Kyrgyzzness"), but he developed a strong specialization on the modern Middle East, with course work supervised by several members of the History Department and NELC. Ali's work on Soviet history was strengthened by the expertise of his main adviser, Prof. Glennys Young, who currently supervises another graduate student working on early 20th century Central Asia, Gregory Tomasin. Only one of the history faculty, Prof. Waugh, devotes substantial time to teaching about Central Asia, even though his main area of expertise is early modern Russia. One of the strengths of a university known for its area studies faculty was the opportunity here for Ali to study as well with China specialists who work on minority issues analogous to those encountered in Russian and Soviet Central Asia. Thus he was able to add course work with anthropologist Stevan Harrell, a specialist on minorities of China, and distinguished visiting faculty such as historian Jonathan Lipman, who writes on Chinese Muslims. Since Central Asia has long been an interest of members of our Geography

Department — W. A. Douglas Jackson, now emeritus, and Craig ZumBrunnen — there were also opportunities for coursework in that field, so critical for an understanding of ecological and resource management issues today.

Effective graduate programs must provide their students and recently minted PhDs with opportunities to interact in professional settings with future colleagues; departmental support made possible Ali's participation in a number of conferences around the United States. Central Asianists obviously benefit from interdisciplinary and transnational programs; two such projects sponsored here in part by our Center for the Humanities provided venues for him to present his work. One is an ongoing project "The Modern Girl Around the World," which provided a forum for presentation to a diverse audience of a key part of Ali's dissertation on the Kyrgyz actress Sabira Kümüşaliyeva. This transnational project deals with issues of ethnicity, nationality, and gender. A second opportunity was a recent conference on "Islam, Asia and Modernity," whose presenters included distinguished scholars from around the world, among them Partha Chatterjee and several prominent Central Asianists. Of particular importance for shaping the final stages of Ali's dissertation work was his participation in April of 2003 in the Eurasia Program Dissertation Development Workshop, organized by the Social Science Research Council and the Center for Russian and East European Studies at the University of Michigan. At this conference, Bruce Grant of NYU agreed to become a formal member of his defense committee. In general, these workshops have been a valuable forum for good graduate students working on Central Asia to interact with their peers and with select faculty experts. This can

help break down the sense of isolation one sometimes feels when working within a relatively small program.

The landscape for Central Asian studies here is changing, and for the better. Title VI funding has supported new courses (for example, on the transition economies of Central Asia¹ and on the Central Asian states since independence); a major new endowment to honor retired history professor Herbert Ellison is going to extend considerably what Title VI does. Several faculty affiliated with the Russian, East European, and Central Asian Studies Program have funded research projects on Central Asia, and a US State Department grant for a collaborative project with Uzbek institutions teaching comparative religion has strengthened existing exchanges. Finally, patient negotiation with the administration is beginning to pay off with new faculty appointments, including the recent hirings of an anthropologist specializing in Islamic movements in Asia and, starting next year, a historian with a high level of Central Asia expertise. There are commitments for additional appointments that may well strengthen the "field" and should guarantee the continuation of key language instruction.

Does a vigorous Central Asian studies program require a single departmental home? The experience here suggests such need not be the case. In fact, one may argue that the strength of the field lies precisely in the interdisciplinarity without which the Central Asia area specialist cannot begin to encompass the diversity of this huge and fascinating region. A further lesson here is that inter-institutional cooperation is not only desirable but essential for the strength of the field. Our students can only benefit by creatively engaging the expertise of faculty at other universities.

¹ See CESR vol. 4, no. 1 (Winter 2005) for an article about the University of Washington's course on this subject.

Overview of Activities in Central Asian Studies at the University of Chicago, September 2000-Present

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Since September of 2000, I have been a Lecturer in Uzbek and Central Asian Studies in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilization (NELC) at the University of Chicago. My primary duties are to teach Uzbek language courses, as well as several courses per year within my main areas of interest, on topics pertaining to Central Asia. My work is an integral element of the Central Eurasian Studies Committee (CESC). CESC was established in 2002 as an interdisciplinary, interdepartmental academic committee, bringing together several area studies centers and some twenty faculty members. I am currently the committee member in charge of curricular organization for Central Asian studies. In May 2003, CESC held a planning conference to establish a permanent program in Central Asian studies at the University of Chicago, with the participation of a number of eminent specialists in the field. CESC maintains a website at <http://centralasia.uchicago.edu>. In this article, I would like to give a brief overview of some of the activities carried out by our faculty towards the development of a program in Central Asian/Central Eurasian studies at the University of Chicago.

Courses

The lifeblood of Central Asian studies at the University of Chicago are the language courses, some of them funded by US Department of Education Title VI grants, which are offered through area studies centers. The primary Central Asian language taught is Uzbek at the first-, second-, and third-year levels; the second and third years can also be considered literature courses. In addition, Kazakh, Tajik, Georgian and Lak (a northeast Caucasian language) are offered periodically, and Armenian language and culture courses are offered every year. There are plans to offer Tibetan and Mongolian in the near future.

There have long been a number of popular academic courses on topics relating to Central Asia at the University of Chicago, including (but not limited to) the history courses taught by Prof. John Woods on the Mongols, Timurids and Safavids; Prof. Adam Smith's courses in the archaeology of

Eurasia, such as "The Archaeology of Eurasia: The Caucasus and the Central Steppe," and "Eurasian Complex Societies;" Prof. Bruce Craig's courses on the Mamluks; and Prof. Ronald Suny's "Nations and Nationalism in Eurasia." In the near future, there are plans to implement a sequence (two-three academic quarters) on Central Asian History and Civilization, to be taught jointly by several faculty members.

In addition, there have been a number of visiting appointments conferred to scholars in fields related to Central Eurasian studies. These include historian Michael Khodarkovsky, who taught "Islam in Central Asia" and "Islam in the Caucasus," and senior archeologist Boris Marshak, who taught a course on "Cultural Contacts along the Silk Road."

My own teaching contribution to the development of Central Asian studies at this university consists of the three levels of Uzbek language, and five standard academic courses on Central Asia, including three history courses and two culture courses. These courses are usually cross-listed in several departments, such as NELC, History, Anthropology, and Music. They have become a core body of courses which are taught on a recurring basis, with the goal of strengthening interest in Central Asia. "Introduction to the Turkic Peoples of Central Asia" covers the history and cultural anthropology of Central Asia from roughly the time of the Scythians to the present day, with an emphasis on the Old and Middle Turkic periods (roughly 200-1200 CE). The focus is on the formation of Turkic, Iranian, Mongol, and other ethnicities in Central Asia prior to the rise of Chinggis Khan's world empire. "Contemporary Central Asia" is also an introductory course on the history and cultural anthropology of Central Asia, but this time with an emphasis on current affairs, and on the more recent history (17th-20th centuries) of Central Asia. The focus is on the post-Mongol states in Central Asia, and the ensuing gradual Russian and Chinese conquests in the region, culminating in the Soviet and post-Soviet modern periods. "Introduction to the History of Central Asia" focuses on the *early* history of Central Asia, from about 400 BCE to 1100 CE, and interactions at

various periods between Huns, Kök Turks, Soghdians, and Chinese. "Introduction to the Musical Folklore of Central Asia" is an exploration of Central Eurasian cultures, with respect to ethical, aesthetic, cosmological, magic-spiritual, and other cultural domains, via the medium of traditional folk music and art music. "Shamans and Oral Poets of Central Asia" is related to the musical folklore course, but focuses on the musical and lyrical aspects of the performances of shamans, oral poets, and other related specialists in Turkic, Mongolian, and Iranian societies of Central Asia. Also featured in this course is an exploration of various magical, spiritual, or religious traditions that have shaped the musical folklore of Central Asia. There is an emphasis on the healing traditions of Central Asian peoples, and the role of musical and poetic performance therein.

Central Asian Studies Society

In 2000, a number of University of Chicago students formed a student organization, the Central Asian Studies Society (CASS). The purpose of this organization is to promote Central Asian studies at the University of Chicago by sponsoring and organizing special events. Some of these events have included performances by the Bukharan Jewish Ensemble Shashmaqom, Kyrgyz performer Elmira Köchumqul-qizi, Kazakh oral poet Äbdighani Jienbay, the Bengi Ensemble from Turkey, and local Mongolian musicians, as well as three Central Asian film festivals featuring Kyrgyz, Kazakh, and Uzbek films. In addition, we maintain an ongoing lecture series of visiting scholars from Central Asia or US scholars in the field. The organization grew from five members and a pizza budget in 2000, to almost 100 members and a budget of \$5,000 in 2003.

It has become somewhat of a tradition for CASS students enrolled in Central Asian history courses to present their papers at the annual Middle East History and Theory Conference (MEHAT) at the University of Chicago. Thanks to their efforts, and to the participation of scholars from Central Asia and from other universities elsewhere, the existence of two or three Central Asian studies panels at the MEHAT Conference has become standard. And at the 2002 conference, the keynote address itself pertained to Central Asia.

Outreach

The Center for Middle East Studies (CMES) maintains an active and strong outreach program

under the direction of Mr. Rashid Hossein, and some of the outreach activities in recent times have pertained to Central Asia. Audiences range from local high school students to the United States Department of Homeland Security's Citizenship and Immigration Services. Lectures have been on such topics as "Iran and Central Asian Society and Culture: An Introduction to the Middle East and the Islamic World," "Central Asian Islam," and "Current Affairs in the Islamic World — the US, Afghanistan, and the War on Terror."

Future Prospects

The Central Asian studies program at this university benefits from being young and dynamic, but also tries to accomplish its objectives without disturbing established *modus operandi* which predate its inception and development. Until recently, a number of students who wanted to learn Uzbek language (and in the case of some students, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Tatar), could not do so because their available language course time slots were already filled up with other mandatory courses. Some had to wait until their fourth year before beginning study of Uzbek, which was not ideal. However, as Central Asian studies became more firmly established as a subfield within the NELC concentration, and it became better known to the student body that languages such as Uzbek and Kazakh can enable one to receive FLAS funding, enrollments began to increase markedly at all three levels of language instruction.

Currently, the Center for Middle East Studies is the main sponsor and the "home" of our Central Asian studies program. This is consistent with developments in Central Asia itself, where the movement away from "Soviet" identity has, since 1991, increasingly taken the direction of a renewal of ties with the medieval heritage of the region. The formerly Soviet states of Central Asia are implementing programs of cultural revival and renewal drawing upon this Turko-Islamic past, which serve as a vibrant backdrop for the dynamic programs of economic, technological, and sociopolitical reform that are taking place at dizzying speeds. The rich and turbulent historical heritage of this region, as well as its multifaceted array of modern identities, and its unique and progressive interpretations of older ethical values, make it a fertile and viable field of study for current and future generations of students.