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SPOTLIGHT

Hundreds of Oklahoma Children Meet Turkmenistan at International Children's Fair

Firyuza Babayeva (Muskie 2009) and **Jahan Saparmamedova** (Muskie 2009) represented Turkmenistan at Oklahoma State University's International Children's Fair in November, introducing elementary school students to their country and culture. The two Muskie fellows wore Turkmen dresses and decorated their booth with the Turkmen flag, a carpet, scarves, bags and other objects brought from Turkmenistan. Using a simple PowerPoint presentation, "we talked about the location of Turkmenistan on the world map, discussed the nature, animals, and showed the pictures of what kind of people live there, and talked about Turkmen children and how they're similar and different from American children in terms of culture, traditions, and style of life," Ms. Babayeva explained. Following the presentation, Ms. Babayeva and Ms. Saparmamedova played games with the children using images of important objects in Turkmen culture, such as the horse, carpet, melon, and camel. "After the game, if we had some time left, we would encourage them to draw pictures of Turkmen jewelry. There were some examples on the table and every child could choose the one he/she liked to draw," Ms. Babayeva said. "Principals and teachers were thrilled with the level of cultural experience their students were receiving at this young and impressionable age."

"My favorite part of the event was the fact that in just three hours, I could educate around 400 children about my culture," Ms. Babayeva writes. "Even though we were tired because we were receiving groups without any break and repeating the same things over and over, I enjoyed working

with the children a lot. Talking about my culture to children in a way that I'm not used to (meaning explaining everything in a simple language and always in comparison to American culture) was a rewarding experience for me. I am glad that I had the opportunity to be part of a wonderful event."



Jahan Saparmamedova (Muskie 2009) (left) and Firyuza Babayeva (Muskie 2009) (right) with visitors at the International Children's Fair.

Law Student from Uzbekistan Helps Chicago, New Orleans Residents Navigate Legal Issues

Helping others understand the American legal system is an effective method of learning for **Tatyana Lee** from Uzbekistan (Muskie 2009), a student at the Illinois Institute of Technology's Chicago-Kent College of Law. Through pro bono work, "I have a unique opportunity to get more information and broaden my knowledge about the judicial system and procedures in the United States," Ms. Lee explained.

As a volunteer at the Circuit Court of Cook County's Self-Help Web Center, Ms. Lee assists visitors in completing court paperwork, such as fee waiver applications, complaints, answers, and summonses. She also helps litigants use the Center's online research stations to access the resources created by Illinois Legal Aid Online, and provides information about the court process and other related issues. Many visitors are "lost and scared," Ms. Lee says. "They do not fully understand what is going on. They bring their summons and they do not know why they have received it." The Self-Help Web Center, which aims to serve as a starting point for litigants who must navigate an unfamiliar and complex court system on their own, is staffed primarily by Chicago-Kent law students working on a pro bono basis.

Over her winter break, Ms. Lee also provided free legal aid to low-income and homeless people through the Homeless Advocacy Project of Southeast Louisiana Legal Services. She traveled to New Orleans with 18 other Chicago-Kent students as part of the Student Hurricane Network. Ms. Lee volunteered with a unit that helps homeless clients, many of them Hurricane Katrina survivors, obtain government ID cards and benefits, handles complaints of police harassment, and fights illegal barriers to voting, school attendance, and other civil rights.

Working closely with her clients gave Ms. Lee a greater perspective on homelessness. "The thing that struck my mind is that she did not look like a typical homeless person," she wrote, describing a particularly memorable client affected by Katrina. "She was well-educated and had a master's degree in literature. I realized that you never know what might happen to you at any moment."



Tatyana Lee (Muskie 2009) of Uzbekistan at a legal aid office in New Orleans.

While Ms. Lee originally started volunteering to grow professionally, improve her English and develop a network, "once I got involved... I just tried to do as much as I possibly could do to help those people. No matter what my original plan was, the most important thing is the result. Even if I helped only one person, it means that the world gets one more happy person."

Muskie Fellow Works with Sister Cities Committee to Share Kazakh Culture with Arizonans



Altyнай Танашева (Muskie 2009) (right) with a fellow Kazakhstani student at a Tucson cultural festival.

Altyнай Танашева (Muskie 2009) didn't wait long to become involved in community activities after arriving in Tucson to study law at the University of Arizona. In October, she represented Kazakhstan at the annual Tucson Meet Yourself Festival, which aims to present the living traditional arts of as many of Southern Arizona's folk and ethnic communities as possible. As Almaty, Kazakhstan and Tucson are sister cities, Ms. Tanasheva worked closely with the Tucson-Almaty Sister Cities Committee and other international students at the University of Arizona to showcase Kazakhstan's national costumes.

"On the day of the festival we were excited and so proud to be there representing our culture," Ms. Tanasheva writes. "We had a display with Kazakhstani rugs, hats and souvenirs. People surrounded our display like bees because of our bright and eye-catching costumes. Everyone wanted to take pictures with us and try on some of the Kazakh national hats and jackets."

Each country then presented their costumes on stage for a contest, and even though the group from Kazakhstan did not win, Ms. Tanasheva enjoyed the experience. "It was so much fun being part of this festival, doing something together with other Kazakhs," she reflected, "and realizing how diverse and interesting Tucson and its community are."

Muskie Fellows Win International Education Week Photo Contest

Otar Kantaria of the Republic of Georgia (Muskie 2009) and **Andrey Rybalov** of Russia (Muskie 2009) were awarded prizes in Georgia State University's "Crossing Paths, Crossing Cultures" photography contest. Held during November's International Education Week, the contest invited international students to submit their favorite photographs taken in the United States, while students in GSU's study abroad programs submitted pictures from their time overseas.



Otar Kantaria's (Muskie 2009) winning photo.



Andrey Rybalov's (Muskie 2009) winning photo.

Mr. Kantaria, who is enrolled at GSU's Andrew Young School of Policy Studies, won first prize in the People category. His photo, taken in Atlanta's Piedmont Park, was inspired by his volunteer experience at the Atlanta Pride Festival in October. "I found it an amazing opportunity to contribute in making a difference in the community," Mr. Kantaria reflected. "[The photo shows] a little bit of freedom, tolerance, and acceptance within the concrete walls of the city and the minds made of concrete."

Mr. Rybalov, a fellow Andrew Young School classmate, won first prize in the Daily Life category for his photo taken during a trip to an outdoor art festival in Nevada.

It was "a huge week-long gathering in the desert, to which hundreds of artists and art lovers from all around the world dream of coming," he explained. Though Mr. Rybalov had never considered himself an artist, when he heard about the festival from a friend, he decided he had to see it for himself.

While a desert sandstorm took Mr. Rybalov's camera out of commission, he managed to take the winning photo with his cellular phone. "The festival was so colorful and extraordinary-looking," he said. "My broken camera covered in Nevada's grey sand is on my bookshelf. Every day, watching American sunsets, the colors of which are so different from European, I think I might need a new camera and some free time to explore America not as a public policy scholar, but as a photographer."

North Carolina Communities Learn About Azerbaijan

Since arriving at Appalachian State University to study public policy last fall, **Galib Abbaszade** (Muskie 2009) has reached out to develop relationships between his native Azerbaijan and American communities in and around Boone, North Carolina.



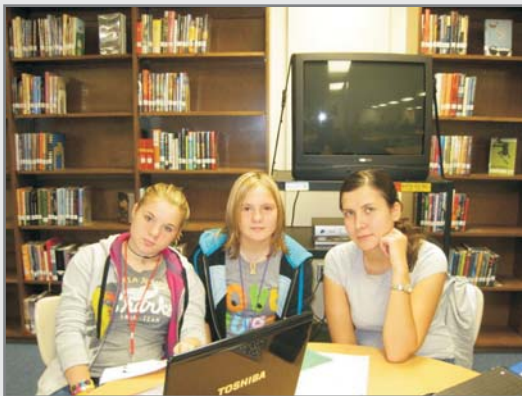
Galib Abbaszade (Muskie 2009) presents about Azerbaijan at Blowing Rock Elementary School.

In December, Mr. Abbaszade visited Blowing Rock Elementary School's Culture Day and made presentations about Azerbaijan for four classes. He also gave a presentation for undergraduate students at Appalachian State and donated books about Azerbaijan to the university library.

Mr. Abbaszade is also working to establish a sister city relationship between Boone and a city in Azerbaijan, engaging Mayor Loretta Clawson of Boone, the Boone Town Council, and the Embassy of Azerbaijan in the process.

Business Fellow Helps Ukrainian Sisters Adjust to Life in Texas

Oksana Oriekhova (Muskie 2009) from Ukraine has been an active community volunteer since beginning her studies in business administration at the University of Texas-Arlington last fall. Through the Hearts and Hammers organization, Ms. Oriekhova helped repair windows in the home of a 94-year-old Dallas area grandmother and has also contributed service hours to Mission Arlington. Her main volunteer project, however, has been helping two Ukrainian teenagers adjust to life in the United States.



Oksana Oriekhova (Muskie 2009) (right) with the Ukrainian teenagers she tutors.

When Anya, 17, and Tanya, 16, moved to Texas to live with their adoptive family in August 2009, they knew little English. Ms. Oriekhova is helping the girls develop their language skills and make a successful transition to American life as volunteer through the local school district's VIPS program, which aims to improve student achievement.

She has developed a close relationship with the family, accompanying the girls to their morning ESL class at the local high school and visiting their home for holidays, and sees a notable difference in the girls' outlook.

"The first time I met the girls they could barely talk and understand English," Ms. Oriekhova reflected. "They were homesick and didn't have any desire to study and communicate with their parents and schoolmates. After some time they made new friends at the church and school and while being surrounded by new friends, their English became much better. They started to actively talk with their parents and peers. The girls were excited to share their stories about Ukraine, about new friends they got in the U.S., movies they watched, and sports they played." Anya has since received an award for her outstanding performance at school, while Tanya actively engages in class discussions and has a new favorite class, Texas History.

"I hope that my interaction with the girls will help them to become a successful part of society and to integrate into American community and culture," Ms. Oriekhova said. "I learned and realized some things from this experience. If you are sincerely sharing your love with someone and trying to help, you will get back even more love."

Stops on Western Illinois University's "Language Boulevard" Include Russia, Ukraine

Ilya Markov (Muskie 2008) of Russia and **Olena Prokopenko** of Ukraine (Muskie 2009) are among the international students from over 55 countries enrolled at Western Illinois University. To encourage cultural exchange and understanding, the university conducts an annual Language Boulevard event during International Education Week, allowing students and local community members to get acquainted with countries as diverse as Germany, Portugal, Japan, and the United Arab Emirates.

In November, Mr. Markov and Ms. Prokopenko volunteered to represent their home countries at the 2009 Language Boulevard, providing first-hand information about the history and features of the Russian and Ukrainian languages, national symbols, and traditional meals and costumes. They also engaged in dialogue and were able to debunk some of the common stereotypes associated with Russia and Ukraine. The Western Illinois University Center for International Studies thanked Mr. Markov and Ms. Prokopenko for reaching out to the local community, broadening students' outlook, and contributing to the efforts of the university to maintain a healthy cultural climate.

Mr. Markov and Ms. Prokopenko are studying economics and public policy, respectively, at Western Illinois University.



Olena Prokopenko (Muskie 2009) and Ilya Markov (Muskie 2008) at their Language Boulevard table.

Muskie Fellow Volunteers to Teach University's First Russian Course in Twelve Years

For the first time in twelve years, Georgia Southern University (GSU) has a Russian language and cultural course thanks to the volunteer efforts of **Saida Akbarova** (Muskie 2008) from Uzbekistan, who is a student in GSU's graduate education program. Ms. Akbarova teaches the three-credit course as an adjunct faculty member on a volunteer basis, introducing seven undergraduate and graduate students to the basics of Russian and the cultures of several countries where the language is widely spoken, including Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova.



One of Saida Akbarova's students interviews Ifoda Abdurazakova using Skype's video calling software.

Ms. Akbarova is employing technology creatively to engage her students and maximize their exposure to the language and cultures studied. In a recent lesson, she arranged a 30-minute video Skype interview for her students with Ifoda Abdurazakova, a 2008 Muskie fellow also from Uzbekistan, who is studying international affairs at Ohio University. The students greeted and introduced themselves in Russian before interviewing Ms. Abdurazakova in English about her country's food, clothing, music, marriage traditions and its political and economic situation.

"It was a great experience for the students, as they broadened their understanding of Uzbekistan and communicated with a representative of the country they have learned about," Ms. Akbarova said. She hopes that as her students further develop their language skills, they will be able to conduct similar interviews in Russian.

Ms. Akbarova developed her own lesson plans for the course from scratch while interning in summer 2009 at the Center for Excellence in Teaching (CET), the professional development office for educators at GSU. Studying the faculty's developmental models for teaching "broadened my views on the way students might learn," she said. "Teachers create a research-based learning environment where students are actively engaged in mastering the course content and in developing essential skills by working in self-managed teams on guided inquiry activities." Ms. Akbarova hopes to create a professional development center based on the CET model at the Uzbek State World Languages University after

she returns to home to share these new approaches with teachers in Uzbekistan.

Muskie Fellows Share Caucasus Cuisine at International Dinner Night

Over 100 students, faculty and community members at the School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont got a taste of the Caucasus when **Irine Surmanidze** (Muskie 2009) from Georgia and **Zamira Abbasova** (Muskie 2009) and **Ramina Murshudova** (Muskie 2009) from Azerbaijan helped organize an international dinner night highlighting Caucasian cuisine in October.



(From center, left to right) Irine Surmanidze (Muskie 2009), Ramina Murshudova (Muskie 2009) and Zamira Abbasova (Muskie 2009) prepare Caucasian food with help from other SIT students.



Chefs Ramina Murshudova and Zamira Abbasova are smiling after their hard work.

The event, organized through the International Students Association, aimed to raise awareness about the cuisine and food culture of the countries in the Caucasus region. Both international and American students volunteered to help the Muskie fellows decorate the cafeteria and cook stuffed peppers and tomatoes, lentil soup, eggplant with walnuts, rice with carrot sauce and khachapuri, a cheese bread. After the dinner, guests watched video presentations about the culture and cuisine of the region.

Ms. Surmanidze and Ms. Abbasova are studying international affairs and Ms. Murshudova is studying education at the School for International Training.

Muskie Messenger

ALUMNI UPDATES

Using Skype, Kyrgyzstani Law Student Reaches Out to University Back Home



Baktygoul Koubanytbekova (Muskie 2008) was amazed by the issues her fellow students raised in classes during her first few weeks at Columbia Law School. "Back in Kyrgyzstan we are very limited to the statutes and regulations," she said. "[In the US] it's more about critical thinking and applying the norms of international law." She adapted quickly, earning a 3.57 GPA her first semester, but wanted to do more.

"I thought it would be great for the students back home to experience the same challenge that I was experiencing," said Ms. Koubanytbekova, who received her master of laws degree from Columbia. With just a simple web camera and an internet connection, she shared her insights in real time with 60 students in Kyrgyzstan.

Ms. Koubanytbekova and a friend who was teaching a spring 2009 international law course at International Ataturk-Alatoo University in Bishkek got approval from the dean to incorporate biweekly online discussions into the curriculum. Using Skype, a free video telephone application, to talk to the students from her apartment in New York, Ms. Koubanytbekova covered subjects like the conflict between Russia and Georgia, the status of Kosovo, and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, which she believes are discussed from a different perspective in the U.S.

While on a short vacation back to Kyrgyzstan in March 2009, Ms. Koubanytbekova met with the students for an in-person lecture on democracy and good governance, which generated lively debate and resulted in mock elections for student leadership. She and the students also discussed plans to develop mock trial and moot court programs at the university.

During her Muskie fellowship, Ms. Koubanytbekova focused on human rights, criminal justice reform, and the rule of law and interned with the American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative. She returned to Kyrgyzstan in September 2009 and is seeking opportunities to lecture at public and private universities in addition to her new job working on anti-corruption and legal reform projects with the Millennium Threshold Account Program.

"It's such a great honor to be a Muskie fellow... but it's also a huge responsibility to share the experience and knowledge you've gained with others back in your home country," she reflected. "To fulfill that commitment, you do not have to wait to be back at home, rather, you can start it as early as possible."

"There are those who may never have the chance to come to the U.S., but they do have the chance to talk to you and get the slice of knowledge they can by working with you side by side."

ALUMNI UPDATES

Knowing Their Rights: Muskie Alumnus Advocates for Hospital Patients

In 2008, Dr. **Kemal Goshliyev** (Muskie 2006) returned to the Central Skin and Venereal Disease Hospital in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan with a master's degree in public health and a commitment to improve the institution he had worked at for over 10 years. The hospital is the leading institution of its kind in Turkmenistan, with the goal of restoring, maintaining, and enhancing health through superior care, and provides assistance to similar hospitals across the country. Dr. Goshliyev enjoyed his work, but was concerned with the issue of patients' rights, something that he had explored in depth as a master's student in the United States.

Dr. Goshliyev received a Muskie fellowship in 2006 to study public health at Western Illinois University. "After completing my graduate program in the USA, I returned back home full of enthusiasm to work here. My educational experience, strong motivation to improve health care services and the attitude of a Muskie fellow compelled me to [return] to the hospital," Dr. Goshliyev explained.

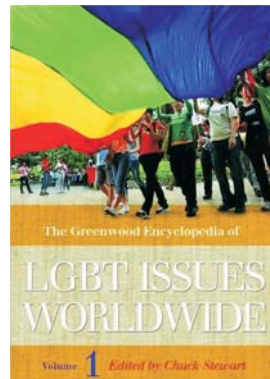
In 2009, Dr. Goshliyev received an IREX-administered Careers for Alumni in Public Service (CAPS) award, which provides a stipend to Muskie alumni working in the public service sector in their home communities. He used it to deliver twelve presentations to 28 health professionals on topics such as patients' rights, health care administration, health care management, and preventive measures for sexually transmitted infections. Dr. Goshliyev also mounted the text of the World Medical Association's Declaration on the Rights of the Patient in the hospital's lobby. The Declaration states that unnecessary medical treatment violates patients' rights, an idea that was new to many patients. In addition, he also measured health professionals' attitudes towards patients' rights before and after his seminars. He noted "significant positive changes" in attitudes towards patients and his "audience believes now that maintaining patients' rights [is] much more worthwhile."

"CAPS allowed me to advance and demonstrate my leadership potential in public service," Dr. Goshliyev reflected. "I am proud to be a Muskie fellow...I feel dedicated to the public service, which makes my life more meaningful for me." Dr. Goshliyev saw the CAPS award as an opportunity to share some of the knowledge, skills and practices that he acquired during his fellowship in U.S. More importantly, he saw it as a chance to help his patients: "I started to advocate for the rights of the patients when they did not even know that they have them."



Dr. Kemal Goshliyev (Muskie 2006) speaks to health professionals.

Alumnus Engages on Key Issues



Viachaslau Bortnik's (Muskie 2008) chapter on his native country of Belarus was published in the Greenwood Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) Issues Worldwide in December 2009. The three-volume set has an ambitious scope, with the goal of offering the most recent international overview of key issues in the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered individuals. While HIV/AIDS has been a major media focus, the publication aims to create a broader understanding of the status of LGBT individuals in over 70 countries.

In November, Mr. Bortnik also assisted with translation during an Internal Revenue Service (IRS) workshop on taxation held by Sarah Hall Ingram, IRS Commissioner for Tax-Exempt and Government Entities, at a conference in Moscow. The conference, organized by the Supreme Commercial (Arbitration) Court of the Russian Federation, drew representatives from the U.S. Court of Appeals, IRS, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the U.S. Tax Court who specialize in tax disputes. Ms. Ingram presented Mr. Botnik with a special commendation for his translation services.

During his Muskie fellowship, Mr. Bortnik studied public administration at American University in Washington, DC.

ALUMNI SHORTS · ALUMNI SHORTS

Andriy Klymchuk (Muskie 2003) and fellow alumni **Anna Onyshchenko** (Muskie 2003), **Gennadiy Grebllov** (Muskie 2004), and **Sergiy Makogon** (Muskie 2003) from Ukraine have led efforts to establish a Chartered Financial Analyst (CFA) Ukraine Society. In February 2010, CFA Ukraine was accepted into the worldwide network of 137 member societies of the CFA Institute, a global, not-for-profit association of investment professionals that awards the CFA and Certificate in Investment Performance Management (CIPM) designations. The CFA program is a self-study, graduate-level program for investment professionals. To earn the CFA charter, one must pass three levels of exams and meet other requirements.

ALUMNI SHORTS · ALUMNI SHORTS

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Submission guidelines:

If you are interested in making a submission to the Messenger, please send all text and pictures to <muskie_messenger@irex.org> by June 1, 2010.

ECA and IREX reserve the right to edit submission content. Not every submission will be printed.



Bureau of Educational
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ALUMNI OPPORTUNITIES

US Government sponsored exchange alumni are eligible to take part in various Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) supported conference and training activities. In addition to events that support large audiences, individual alumni may apply for small grants that fund the organization of community service activities, conferences, publications, Internet-related activities, research trips, training programs, the creation of associations and other activities.

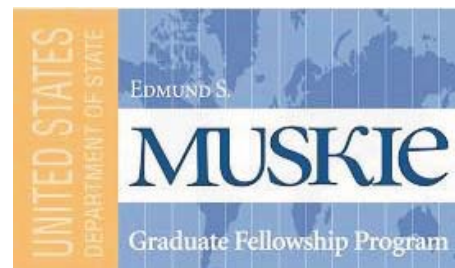
ECA Alumni Programming for Edmund S. Muskie Graduate Fellowship Program Alumni

State Alumni Website: The State Alumni website is an online community by and for alumni of US Government sponsored exchange and training programs. As of May 2004, the website has over 8,500 registered users. The content of the site is updated every day and alumni are encouraged to submit information to the website for posting. Features of the website include: calendar of upcoming alumni events, job listings and career development information, searchable database of alumni and US host families who have registered at the site, grant opportunity listings, live online discussions, discussion forum, alumni news, alumni resume database, articles written by alumni, feedback form/online survey, live online guest speakers, photo gallery, and the Alumni ListServ. <<https://alumni.state.gov/>>

The ECA Alumni Small Grants Program (ASGP): Alumni may apply for a grant of up to \$3,000 to conduct a community development or professional development project. Fundable project ideas include coordinating a community service project, launching a pilot program at an NGO or organizing a training program for professional colleagues and/or other alumni. Applications are accepted on a rolling basis. <<http://www.irex.org/programs/asgp/index.asp>>

Project Smile: Project Smile is a community development program aimed at helping youth, the elderly and the disabled in Eurasia. Each grantee will receive up to \$250 to perform public service in their home city. Applications will be accepted on a rolling basis. <<http://www.irex.org/programs/smile/index.asp>>

Alumni Events: IREX and the US Embassy organize monthly alumni events in all 12 countries of Eurasia. These events include workshops, conferences, trainings, roundtable discussions, happy hours, movie nights, seminars and lectures. Larger scale events include job fairs that allow alumni to have their resumes reviewed, learn about the current job market in their home country, and meet with potential employers. IREX local offices and the Embassies encourage alumni to actively participate in the development and implementation of such events.



Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs