

WINTER 2009



GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

A publication of the Padnos International Center and Area Studies





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WELCOME TO THE NEW GLOBAL CONNECTIONS!

Mark Schaub, Padnos International Center

Jacques Mangala, Area Studies

Padnos International Center and the Area Studies programs are pleased to present the first issue of the expanded Global Connections magazine, the international newsletter for Grand Valley State University faculty, staff, and friends. The new Global Connections is the result of closer collaboration between GVSU's Area Studies programs and the Padnos International Center, which will no longer publish separate newsletters but will henceforth join forces in providing you with articles and information about the exciting projects by GVSU people around the world.

Why join forces?

Padnos International Center and the Area Studies programs are at the forefront of international education at Grand Valley and play a pivotal role in internationalizing the University. The four area studies programs—Latin American Studies, Middle East Studies, African/African-American Studies, and East Asian Studies—collectively put out two issues of the Area Studies newsletter each year, while Padnos International Center published two issues of Global Connections each year. We noticed that many of the articles and topics from the two publications were similar, reflecting the compatibility of missions between Padnos International Center and Area Studies. Merging the two publications is, by all accounts, the right thing to do: it helps us save on scarce resources and eliminate competition and duplication while freeing some of the valuable staff time dedicated to designing and editing the publications. We hope this to be a successful endeavor as we seek to explore and develop more synergies between both sides of Lake Ontario Hall.

What's new?

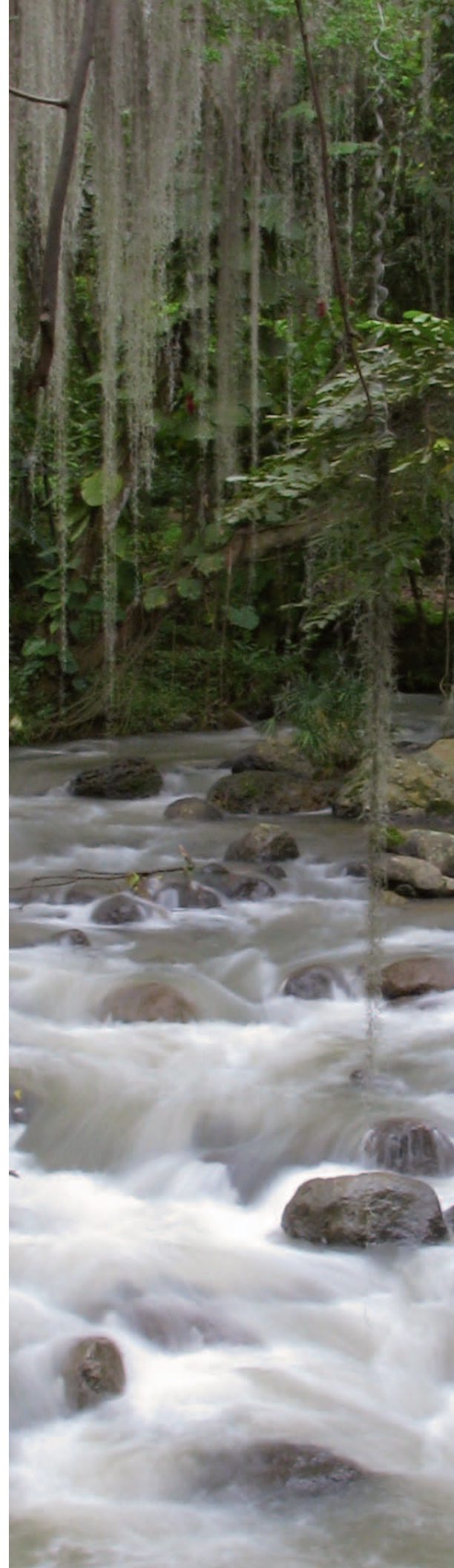
The expanded Global Connections will offer a more integrated view of international activities at Grand Valley. While the reader will recognize the same design and features, the new Global Connections has gained in length and depth. The additional number of pages should allow for a broader coverage of and reflection on various aspects of international education that the Grand Valley community is engaged in.

You can help!

Global Connections is an eclectic publication, with pieces by students, faculty, staff, and others from around the world. It has pieces on research projects, on classes with an international focus, and on study abroad. It represents a range of perspectives and views from many different cultures. We'd like to add your voice to this mix: send us your essays, articles, photos, and ideas!

Send submissions to:

Global Connections, c/o the Padnos International Center, 130 Lake Ontario Hall, c/o Liz Smith, or email smithliz@gvsu.edu





Notes From a Small Village in Uganda

Kylie Cherpes, Global Perspectives major

Arriving on the shores of Port Elizabeth, South Africa the first week of May 2008 was the beginning of a dream. My friend Jodie and I had a month and a half of backpacking ahead of us with only one goal: to use as little as possible while seeing and doing as much as we could! Our hiking boots ended up covering the soil of seven different countries, and our eyes witnessed the sunrise and sunset over both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

The invaluable skills learned while traveling on a whim through changing cultures ultimately opens the mind to the beautiful differences in the world. If there was one thing in common everywhere we went, it was the generosity of those who had the least but shared the most. The kindness shown to us by our brothers and sisters from a different land stayed on my mind throughout our journey; and this humanity would continue to be felt in my heart as I continued on my own journey to Uganda.

After a twenty minute ride in a bus meant for fifteen and packed with twenty, I arrived at Kikaaya Village in the Bulenga District, Uganda. Walking through the ruts left behind by trucks full of bananas after a day's rain, I watched shoeless children run through the litter lain streets. The village was poor, but the people were happy; you could tell from the smiles and laughter of the adults as their children waved incessantly until you acknowledged them, calling after you "Muzungu!" I would learn from my students later that week that "Muzungu" was what Ugandans called foreigners, and literally meant "one who walks in circles." I would learn a lot from my students in the coming months as we discussed everything from Women's Rights and New Values for Boys to HIV/AIDS and the stigmas that come along with it.

Teaching at five different secondary schools to students whose primary language was Lugandan, I was to provide reliable information to the students who had no resources to do so for themselves. The students did not have books, pencils, or paper, and some came to school wearing the same uniform many days in a row. Eager to expand their horizons and excited to be able to provide better for themselves and their families, education was their hope for the future.

Although teaching was my main focus I also worked for an HIV/AIDS Home Counseling Program. On Mondays and Thursdays I would load up my backpack with rice, posho (corn maize), sugar, beans, and soap and head out to visit some of our clients. The clients lived in villages nestled in the many hills surrounding Kikaaya (my village); making for a long day of walking and giving us some good exercise from carrying such heavy backpacks.



All of the clients we visited had been diagnosed with HIV. Due to the sicknesses that accompany the virus most of them are unable to work and therefore live in dire poverty. Oftentimes they are living in houses only by the goodwill of their neighbors, and when we ask them what they are eating it is almost always a strict diet of the cheapest foods on the market. The foods that they can afford to eat have little or no nutritional value and with their health already at risk, this is a very serious problem.

Not only are their food choices slim, another threat is the fact that their water resources are often miles away and contaminated. To battle waterborne diseases they are supposed to boil their water or use WaterGuard. Boiling water to drink becomes a difficulty when two pieces of firewood are 500 Ugandan Shillings (about 40 cents) on an income that is non-existent. The WaterGuard tablets, which in some places are dispersed for free by the government, also have side effects. As I have read on my water purifying tablets, the use of such tablets is not recommended on a regular basis due to health factors. As you can see, in Kikaaya Village, the cost of living and only meeting basic needs can be very expensive to those who have nothing.

To add to the predicament that most of our clients were in, I must include the fact that many of the families we visited were led by single mothers. These women were often taking care of nieces, nephews, and the children of their own children. One of the houses we visited, which was maybe 20 x 20 feet, was home to 16 people, a mother and her children and grandchildren. Some of her daughters had been married very young and had returned home from abusive and non-supportive relationships with young children of their own. The woman could not afford to send any of her children to school anymore, and although some of them were definitely old enough to work they did not. It was frustrating to see this woman having to go out and scavenge for food and resources for her very extended family every day. Most of the time when we went to visit her she was off working in a garden somewhere, while all of her children sat at home, using but not contributing anything to the household.

It was our responsibility as counselors and educators to speak to the clients and their families about sanitation, HIV/AIDS prevention, the negative effects of stigma, and ways to improve their daily lives. Creating these ties within the community and continuing to support these people over a long-term basis led to an increase in the effectiveness of our message; the people knew that we cared and were more receptive to the reliability of our resource information and thus were more likely to use the information. It was my hope that as we continued to visit these families and encourage them to work together as a family unit, it would improve the standard by which everyone is held accountable for the health and well being of themselves, their family, and friends around them.

I came home from my trip to Africa with fifty dollars left in my bank account...but I would do it all again in a second; Africa has given me experiences beyond material worth. There are few words that can express the experience of a lifetime and if I had to chose but one, it would be gratefulness; I have not only learned about another way of life, I have lived it.



The Middle Class and More in Santiago, Chile

Joel Stillerman, Latin American Studies

My family and I arrived at Santiago, Chile in July of this year to begin a one year stay in the city. I am here with the support of a GVSU sabbatical and a U.S. Department of Education Fulbright-Hayes fellowship to study middle class consumption and inequality in Chile's capital. The project expands on my work on consumption and retail in Chile developed over the past several years. The middle class plays an important role in Chile's public culture today. Because of the society's growing wealth, cheap imports, easy credit, and government policies designed to reduce poverty over the past two decades or so, the middle class has expanded to about 45% of the population according to recent census and other official data. Journalists, market researchers, and some scholars view members of the middle class as driven by a desire to imitate, or eventually form part of, Chile's elite. Finally, in the midst of nation-wide municipal elections in October and preparations for the 2010 presidential elections, the middle class is an important "player" in political campaigns.

While many Chileans are interested in the middle class, few have a clear idea of how to define or study it. Most international scholarship on the middle class prefers to talk about middle classes or middle sectors, and insists that the middle class is as much a political or cultural project as a social group clearly defined by incomes, professions and education. I decided to follow the lead of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, who argued that we can predict an individual's taste in consumption goods based on their parents' income and education, their own education, and their occupation. Bourdieu also argued that our taste in goods or services is also a means of judging others in an endless symbolic conflict among class fractions, each with different profiles in terms of their family background, schooling, and education.

With Bourdieu's model in mind, I decided to examine two Santiago communities, both identified with different "types" of middle class groups. Most Santiaguinos will tell you that Ñuñoa, in the eastern part of the city, houses the "traditional" middle class, highly educated but not necessarily materialistic. In contrast, residents identify La Florida with the "new" or "emerging" middle class, believed to come from more modest backgrounds, enjoying less educational attainment, and being more prone to conspicuous consumption. I wanted to talk to and spend time with families with school aged children in these two communities to determine the relevance of Bourdieu's ideas in Chile. After considering various alternatives, I decided to talk to parents whose children attend two different schools in each community, one a mainstream private school and the other an alternative school.

To date, I've completed twenty interviews, many with parents in an alternative school in Ñuñoa with long term ties to the University of Chile. I have made some contacts in a second school in Ñuñoa and another one in La Florida, but have not yet set up interviews with those groups. In addition to interviewing parents about their housing and school choices, I have been photographing their living rooms to have visual data on distinct decorative styles. I have also attended some fundraising events and parties, and have used events at my daughter's school (located very close to Ñuñoa) as a source of informal data to contrast with the schools I am studying formally.

While it is still early, I have noticed some interesting patterns. There is a great deal of tension and debate regarding how to prepare children for Chile's highly competitive higher education and job market. Parents in the alternative school I am studying have tried to "opt out" of the rat race evident in many private schools that focus heavily on standardized test scores and college placement test outcomes. They prefer to give their children an experience in a socio-economically and religiously diverse school that places the accent on personal development rather than academic achievement. These same parents, however, are unhappy with the school's academic performance, and supplement it with private music or language lessons or (in one case) a language immersion experience in London during summer vacation. Many parents come from multi-generational families that attended the school and have close ties with elementary and high school friends as well as other parents. There is an important split between long-term residents of the area, many of whom had highly educated parents with strong connections to high culture, and newer residents for whom the move to Ñuñoa represents a step up to a "safe," centrally located, and appealing community. Home styles and decorative motifs vary considerably but do seem closely tied to individuals' education and that of their parents.

I will present some preliminary results of my work at the Sociology Department in a newer university, Universidad Diego Portales, where a number of colleagues are looking at the middle class from different angles. Mike Savage, a highly visible British scholar who is also an expert on Bourdieu, will comment on my paper (the pressure is on!). Several of the members of that department are recent PhDs from British universities, and hence their ties with the UK are strong.

I am also involved in a "side project" with colleagues at the Urban Studies Institute of the Catholic University of Chile, where I am a visiting faculty member this year. We are examining public attitudes regarding two shopping malls in La Florida, and hence there is some overlap between that project and my own work on the middle class. We have been conducting ethnographic observations in one of the malls, and have learned numerous ways that young people and families use malls without spending much money. We are interested in gaining a more intimate portrait of these two malls, and hence are exploring ways to get to know some of the shoppers. The Institute has been a great place to work as it hosts some excellent scholars on housing, segregation, urban history, and poverty, and our interests and outlooks complement one another well. That's all for now – stay tuned for updates!



On Leaving Your Baggage Behind

Glen Sandberg, Communications major

My first images of Cairo this past May, looking out from the airplane window, were the bright green lights that dotted the black night landscape below. By that point, I was exhausted from a solid day spent traveling, including three flights and an 8-hour layover in Amsterdam. As the jet gradually descended over the city, I peered half-asleep out my tiny window fascinated with the green lights, though white and yellow ones outnumbered them.

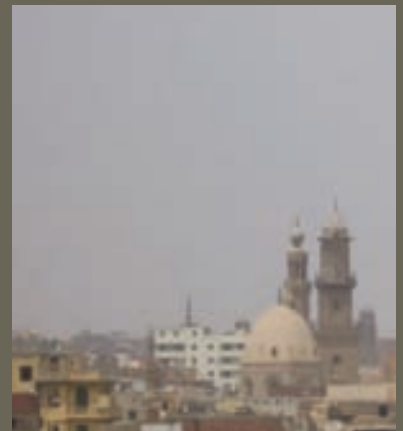
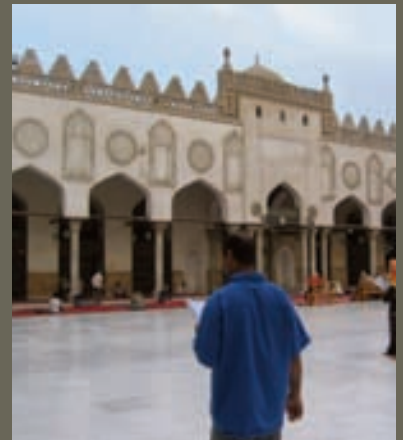
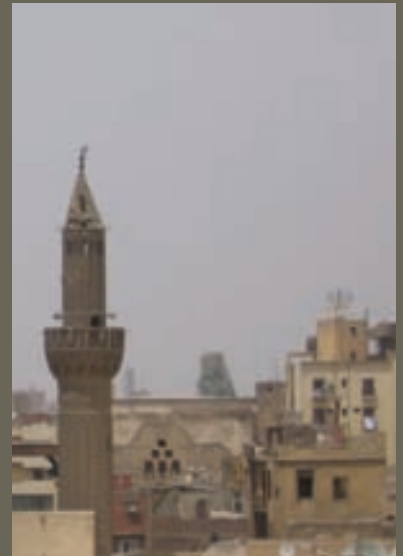
When we were low enough that I could make out the dark outlines of countless buildings, I thought dreamily to myself how wonderfully sprawling and urban Cairo would be. Very soon I realized what those brilliant, abundant green lights were: they lit up the city's innumerable neighborhood mosques, adorning the minarets from which the call to prayer would be heard each day. Already my discoveries had begun, minutes within Egyptian airspace.

The first 48 hours in Cairo were not the smoothest. At the baggage claim, one piece of my luggage did not arrive. After a few frantic minutes of receiving instructions from helpful airline employees and providing my information, I calmly accepted the circumstances and let my hosts take care of me. It was around 3:00 in the morning local time, I was beat, and our group had to get to our hotel downtown, about 25 minutes away.

Negotiating my baggage situation at the airport provided me no time to exchange a little bit of money. In Egypt, it is customary to give baksheesh, or a small tip, when others provide basic services. Such was my luck that night to have no small change to give the frail, elderly doorman who took the bag I did have up to my room at the Victoria Hotel. When he kindly held out his hand in the doorway and I realized his request, I could only mutter, "Sorry," and after brief hesitation offered a 10-cent Euro piece from Holland. That he considered for a moment, but refused it with a raised hand and a polite smile before turning to leave. I had violated a rule, but my host was gracious.

Those first 48 hours were busy and tense and I still wore the same clothes that I had worn on the plane, but on the third morning my luggage was delivered to the hotel. I joked that I had finally arrived, but really, my hosts had simply taken care of me. It was that fact that guided me for the next five weeks in Egypt. Traveling abroad, studying abroad and living abroad, I was on somebody else's turf. I was foreign, I was inexperienced and I was awkward. I knew only a little of the language, but even less of the Egyptian colloquial Arabic. Early on, quite out of necessity, I had to put my trust in Egypt, or more so in its people, and allow it to take care of me. I think that attitude served me well, as I became a guest of Cairo, Luxor, Alexandria, Siwa and elsewhere.

A tourist brings all their baggage with them; their preconceptions, their expectations and their own cultural biases. A guest is willing to leave some, or better, all of their baggage behind, in order to experience a place and test what they think they know. Like missing an actual piece of luggage, it will initially mean a feeling of vulnerability and loss of control, but it will bring about learning, perseverance and trust. Where someone else should be the pilot, it may be best just to look out from the window to see what can be seen.



GVSU Launches Chinese Studies Major

Peimin Ni, Department of Philosophy/East Asian Studies



After years of preparation, GVSU has officially launched its Chinese Studies major program. China represents one fifth of the world's population and has the world's oldest uninterrupted culture. Throughout much of its history, China was the most culturally, intellectually, economically, and technologically dominant civilization in Asia and the world. With the recent developments in China, the country is exerting an ever-broadening influence on the world community. The Chinese studies major not only allows one to have a better understanding of the Chinese culture but also new perspectives on our own culture and enriched self-understanding.

GVSU is proud of our strength in Chinese Studies. We have faculty members who specialize in Chinese language, literature, history, politics, philosophy, religion, economy, business, society, communication, and other areas. Over the years we have also established a number of reputable faculty-led study abroad programs and exchange relations with higher learning institutions in mainland China and Taiwan. This strength puts GVSU in a unique position in the region to offer such a major and become a regional center for Chinese Studies. GVSU graduates have found government jobs that require substantial knowledge and life experience in China, been admitted into prestigious Chinese Studies graduate programs such as Harvard, the University of Hawaii, and the University of Hong Kong, and received full scholarships to conduct graduate study from our sister university in China, ECNU. Since 1995, we have had at least twenty GVSU graduates who went to China to teach English, continue their study, and even to establish their own businesses there. With the newly established Chinese Studies major and the increasing presence of China in the global arena, GVSU is looking forward to providing an essential foundation for anyone interested in pursuing a career that may involve knowledge about China, such as business, law, international relations, social work, or the humanities.

Housed in the College of Interdisciplinary Studies, the Chinese studies major provides students a cross-disciplinary basis for understanding its rich cultural resources, its importance in the contemporary world, and the complexities of U.S.-China relations. At the core of the program is a strong emphasis on language, culture, history, philosophy, and politics. Elective courses from different departments and disciplines can be combined to build a strong and personalized understanding of China. A study abroad requirement assures students a firsthand experience with the language and culture. This enables students to have a broad vision and open mind as educated persons and responsible citizens of the world.

Degree Requirements

The requirements for the B. A. in Chinese studies are: 33 semester hours (24 required, nine electives), with 6 of the 33 earned in studying abroad in mainland China or Taiwan.



A GVSU Alumni in China

Jaenelle T. Kelly, East Asian Studies minor

If someone had a time machine and decided to go back four years and tell my sophomore-in-college self that I would end up living in Shanghai, China as a graduate student on full scholarship after finishing my degree at GVSU, I would tell them to go eat their hat and laugh in their face. Back then, I was in college because it was “the right thing to do,” not because I actually had any desires, goals or dreams. Nowadays that's all changed, obviously, for I'm typing this article from my laptop sitting in my dorm room at East China Normal University with my B.A. from GVSU sitting on the top shelf of my desk.

Funny how life works.

Even in the hustle and bustle of Shanghai life, I can't forget where I came from or how I got here. Just last night, my friends and I -all GVSU alumni- stumbled across another American at a restaurant we're guilty of frequenting. Turns out that one of the only other Americans there in the restaurant happened to be a GVSU student as well! Here we are, thousands and thousands of miles away from Allendale and yet GVSU students just can't seem to get enough of Shanghai. Half the numbers on my cell phone that belong to laowai (foreigners) are GVSU alumni also. Some of us studied abroad together, others just happened to drop in after a GVSU study abroad participant told them all about Shanghai. But one thing's for certain: it's GVSU that got us all here, and it's GVSU that I have to thank for where I am today.

In 2005, I had the pleasure of going with Professors Peimin Ni and Geling Shang on their three-month study abroad to China. I took classes, visited so many different places (and not always the tourist's view either!), made new friends, and not only did I get a good look at the world, but I got a good look at my own culture... and myself. To say it changed my life is an incredible understatement. I fell in love with not only the Chinese culture, but the land itself from the beautiful mountains and rivers to the breathtaking architecture of hundreds of years ago. I was introduced to a brand new land and, in a developing nation such as China, a completely different way of living and seeing. My outlook on the world had entirely changed and when I returned to America, I was happily a different person than before, but I missed China terribly. I found myself both aching to return as well as clinging to the lessons I had learned from my classes during my time in the Middle Kingdom. The dreamless me had been replaced with a new me, full of ambition and hopes, hopes to not only return to Shanghai but to further my education and become a professor myself. I was inspired both by my professors, and my own experiences, to devote my life to this dream.



I was fortunate enough to make lasting friends not only with students, but with the faculty themselves both at GVSU and at ECNU during that trip; friends that would welcome me back to Shanghai in 2007 when I repeated the trip both to fulfill remaining academic requirements as well as to be an assistant to Professors Ni and Shang. My friends at ECNU, both student and faculty alike, had remained in contact with me and it is because of them that I am where I am today.

During the winter of 2008, I was approached by a very good friend of mine who works in the International Students Office at ECNU with an offer of a full scholarship for graduate school. Excited and overjoyed, I immediately contacted Professor Ni and Professor Shang, asking them for their advice and support. It is through their good graces and encouragement that I am sitting here now at ECNU, typing this article out for you all. I was asked to invite other GVSU students to join me in my postgraduate experience and two of my dearest friends, one who also went on both the 2005 and 2007 Shanghai trip and another who only attended the 2007 trip, are also with me here, studying Chinese language for one year and preparing for the demands of graduate school classes... in Chinese. That's definitely something I never saw myself doing!

Now my days are filled with Chinese language both on the streets of Shanghai and in the classroom. Part of the requirement for my postgraduate program is to take a Chinese proficiency test known as the Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (frequently shortened to just HSK) and attain at least a level six to enter my postgraduate classes in the following year. We spend three hours a day, five days a week in the morning in our Chinese classrooms filled with students from all over the world: Japan, Korea, Kazakhstan, Russia, Vietnam, and France just to name a few. Our only common tongue half the time turns out not to be English but Chinese instead. Life has settled very much into routine here and even though our studies are demanding, the routine is a comfortable one and I am happy here at ECNU.

Even still, I have not forgotten GVSU. My Thanksgiving day dinner will be spent at the apartment of another GVSU alumni, and it's likely that the other GVSU alumni will also be there, mainly from the 2005 trip. Shanghai has almost become another safe haven for students and alumni alike of GVSU. I still talk with my classmates from the two study abroad experiences, especially the 2005 trip. We've become like a family in our home away from home, and each of us remembers GVSU with a smile.

Shanghai has offered not only me but other GVSU students a fantastic opportunity. We came here originally as wide-eyed students not really knowing what to expect on a study abroad experience and now we've all settled here in Shanghai and are making lives for ourselves. Some teach English, others are furthering their education. But no matter what, this much is clear: GVSU has a definite global link to Shanghai, and that connection will only grow stronger, not weaker, over time.



In the Peruvian Amazon

Jim Penn, Latin American Studies

During the summer of 2008, five GVSU students conducted research on forest resources in the Peruvian Amazon with Jim Penn, assistant professor of the Geography and Planning Department. The independent research (GPY 499) field experience took place in the rainforests and villages of the Peruvian Amazon. Students studied the distribution, abundance and population characteristics of forest species of high economic and ecological value. The students conducted forest censuses, measured and marked trees of different age classes and mapped the census quadrants and transects using GPS units with the help of several local assistants. Two students from the local university in Iquitos (Universidad Nacional de la Amazonia Peruana-UNAP) also participated. The course began with training exercises including a visit to experimental agriculture sites with Agronomist Mario Pinedo of the Instituto de Investigaciones de la Amazonia Peruana (IIAP). The daily work with local field assistants provided students with a strong intercultural experience, as well as their time spent in rural villages, towns, and the city of Iquitos, Peru.

Student Interns With the Michigan Migrant Legal Assistance Project

Markanetta Jones, Latin American Studies minor

During the spring semester of 2008, I worked as a law intern for the Michigan Migrant Legal Assistance Project, which is an organization in Grand Rapids that provides free legal services to low-income migrant workers in the state of Michigan. As a political science major and Latin American Studies minor prior to coming to MMLAP, I had some knowledge of the difficulties facing migrant workers in the United States, but my internship experience has given me an even greater sense of awareness of the magnitude of the problems that are facing Latino migrant workers in West Michigan. Many migrant farm workers suffer from poverty, unemployment, language barriers and lack of access to public services. Others are subjected to inhumane treatment, racial discrimination, physical and verbal abuse, and sub-standard living conditions in labor camps.

As an intern, I had the opportunity to visit several agricultural labor camps in order to inform migrant workers about their legal rights, to investigate any problems facing the workers, and to monitor the housing conditions on the farms sites. Many of the individuals in the labor camps lived in dilapidated housing units. At one labor camp, the workers lived in small trailers with broken doors and windows. During a visit to another site, the employer-provided housing did not include bathroom facilities, so the workers had to use a community bathroom that was located outside in a building with cracked floors, dirty walls, and a single light bulb. I also met individuals who had not received adequate wages for their pay but refused to report the minimum wage violations because they feared losing their jobs or facing deportation.

After working for MMLAP, my desire to practice law and to advocate for the protection of the rights of migrant workers in the United States was strengthened. My internship helped me become aware of how vulnerable low-income individuals and migrant groups are to mistreatment in our society. I was also provided with the opportunity to directly observe many of the issues facing undocumented workers in West Michigan.



Reconciling Turkish Identity at a Transitional Moment

Robert Stewart-Ingersoll, Political Science



I had the opportunity to travel to Turkey over the summer to participate in the Council on International Educational Exchange's (CIEE) faculty development seminar, "Identity, Community, and Culture in Contemporary Turkey." I went knowing that Turkey is experiencing significant changes, both in terms of its place within the international community and its political dynamics at the domestic level. As someone interested in the roles that regional powers play within their neighborhoods and the processes that lead to alterations in human rights behavior within states, I viewed the visit to Turkey as a tremendous opportunity to get an on-the-ground view of a country that represents both. What I found was that in addition to (and partially because of) these dynamics, Turkey is being forced to reconcile a number of conflictual points about its identity.

Perhaps no single moment captured my entire experience better than one that occurred during the evening that my friends and I sat in a hotel lobby watching the Turkish national football team play in the semi-final game of the European Cup. It was the furthest that Turkey had ever gone in this revered event. And now, Turkey was confronting the powerful German team. We were about a block away from Taksim Square (a central hub in Istanbul), where there was a massive crowd watching the match on enormous screens that were erected for the event. As we wandered around the square earlier, the excitement about this moment was unlike just about any other sporting experience I have had. The fact that Turkey had come this far held a real significance for the throngs that were flooding the area.

The "a-ha moment" came in the middle of the game though, when Turkey scored a goal. The crowd in the square absolutely erupted, and the cheers lasted for quite a while. But just as they finally died down, they were replaced by the call to prayer coming from the nearest mosque. This sacred melody was something that I had become accustomed to over the course of my stay. But this time was a bit different. It was just one of those moments in which everything that had been running around in my mind during this trip seemed to coalesce. The countervailing forces of secular and religious, modern and traditional, European and Islamic identities just seemed to blend together in a way that was harmonious and comfortable.

Throughout my experience, I was struck again and again by how much Turkey finds itself at a crossroads. Given its geographical placement at the intersection between "East and West" as well as "North and South," this has always been the case, to some extent. But there is a tangible sense that one has in being there, that this is a country that is itself facing a crucial moment. Turkey seems to be filled with a sense of its own potential, but cognizant of its past failures to attain it. It is confronted with serious questions about how best to formulate policy to succeed in becoming an increasingly stable, prosperous, and influential state in the coming years. But along with these questions, something deeper is at stake. As the name of the seminar implied, there seems to be an important reflection period going on in which the very identity of Turkey is being evaluated. And this reflection is occurring in at least three important and interwoven areas: its modern-secular vs. traditional-Islamic orientation, its Middle Eastern vs. European regional placement, and its military-statist vs. liberal democratic operating political philosophy.

The first of these areas of introspection falls along a set of deep and sometimes conflicting identities. On the one hand, since its founding in 1923 under the leadership of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the Republic of Turkey has been devoutly secular and committed to its inclusion within the community of modern states. There is no doubt that Atatürk wished to break the Turkish nation away from what he perceived as the backwardness of the Ottoman Empire, which included its being the standard bearer of the Islamic Caliphate. The reverence that Turks everywhere genuinely feel for their founding father and their commitment to his vision for their country is obvious. Atatürk's face is ubiquitous in Turkey. We saw him in the form of his statues, portraits, and his face superimposed over the Turkish flag, just about anywhere we turned.

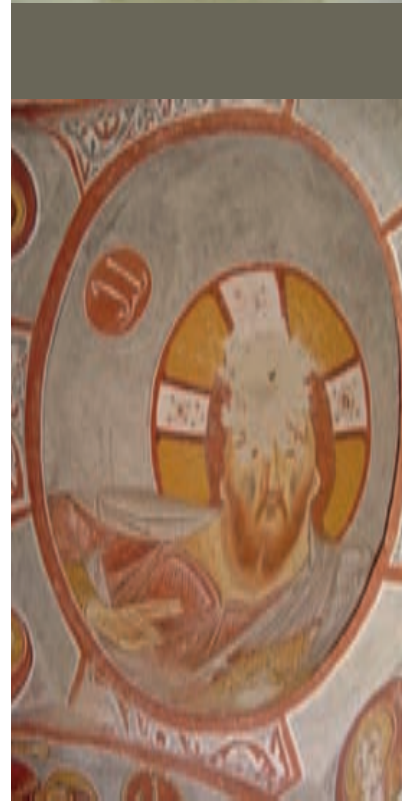
On the other hand, Turkey is the heart of what was the Ottoman Empire, and a society which is very much rooted in the Islamic faith. There is both a significance to the place and a sense of traditional identification that coexists along with its modern side. I felt this each time I visited a mosque, shrine, or a building that marked the legacy of Ottoman times. I heard this when we spoke to people about the important place that Dervish orders hold in traditional Turkish society. I saw this in the wide range of styles of clothing that I saw particularly women wearing on the streets. Finally, I understood the scope of this identification of Turks by the election of the AKP (an Islamic party) as the governing party of Turkey.

While it is an all-too-common perception in the West that these identities are in pure conflict, it is not entirely clear that they are in Turkey. Is there a tenuous balance between its modern-secular and its traditional-Islamic side? Absolutely. It is this delicate balance that makes the ongoing debate that many of us have heard about over whether or not women should be allowed to wear head scarves on university campuses so volatile. It is this fear that drives many committed to a modern Turkey to vehemently oppose the reintroduction of such symbols of the past. But I must admit that a balance does seem possible when one views it first hand. In fact, it is this delicate balancing act that could prove to be a positive model for other states in which Islamic resurgence is occurring.

This was clear when we met with Haluk Ozdalga, a Minister of Parliament, the Chairman of the Turkish Parliament's Environment Commission, and a member of the AKP. While a common assumption here might be that an Islamic party would shun the "West" and attempt to cordon off Turkey from Europe, the opposite is true. MP Ozdalga insisted that the environmental improvements that he is leading, and the numerous other changes that Turkey is attempting to make to achieve membership in the European Union are absolutely essential. He believes that EU membership is critical to ensuring that democracy is protected from future returns to the military's practice of cracking down when it seems to be losing its firm grip on the state, it is essential for the long-term economic and political stability of the Republic, and it is important for Turkey's maintenance of its critical position within the Transatlantic Community. We asked him how his party reconciled this pro-European position with the accusations that have been made that it was attempting to press an Islamist agenda upon Turkey. His response was quick and firm. "It is an absurd idea that Turkey could ever be a religious state. It has never been in history, and it will never be."

His words and tone seemed to echo those of so many individuals with whom I came into contact with there. And the thought that I kept coming back to was this. Is this so different from what many democratic societies like our own deal with? The idea that religious identification of individuals is somehow sufficient to be a direct challenge to democracy does not ring true in the United States. Why should it necessarily in Turkey? That Turkey is struggling to find the delicate balance between this set of identities is clear, but so is the fact that such a balance can in fact be struck. Further, the appreciation of the importance of such a balance is a positive sign.

One of the central areas of promise for Turkey in the coming years is its potential for an increasingly prominent role within its several neighboring regions. This issue gives rise to the second key area of Turkey's introspection. The question of where one should classify Turkey's geographical and cultural placement is one that dates back over a long period of history. It is also one that is taking on an entirely new resonance as international security dynamics seem to be playing out more and more along regional lines, where certain states (regional powers) have an increasing level of influence. Turkey is a regional power in the Middle East already. It is one of the largest military and economic powers in the region, and it plays a critical function in the management of security issues there. This can be seen recently in its mediation of negotiations between Israel and Syria. It was also apparent in its denial of U.S. forces access to Turkish territory on their way to invade Iraq. But its potential as a regional power does not end with the Middle East. Rather, it holds just such a position within at least two other regions: Central Asia and Europe. Whether or not it provides a sort of push back to the increasing power of Russia within Central Asia is a matter that will be determined over a longer period, and will depend on many different factors.



Europe, on the other hand, is very much the focus of some of the most important discussions in Turkey today. Turkey began formal discussions with the European Union on accession as a new member in 2005. It may be common in the U.S. and Western Europe to view Turkey as being situated inside or on the border of the Middle East. But Professor Sevilay Kahraman of the Middle East Technical University told us, “We perceive ourselves as part of the European society - at least since the 19th Century.” She pointed out that at least since it joined NATO, it has been a part of the European security community. The bid for EU membership then, is a way of formalizing its more complete membership within the community that it perceives itself to be a part of. Rather than erasing its identification with other regions though, this is yet another example of the complexity of the Turkish identity.

The Turkish government has taken concerted steps to bring various practices and policies in line with the requirements for EU membership. While it has made significant strides, it clearly has much further to go. Its long-standing conflict over the status of Cyprus (already an EU member), its legacy of human rights abuses, and the powerful role of the military in its government are some of the key stumbling blocks that Turkey has some level of control over. The necessary transformations for EU membership require that Turkey reconcile its geographical place as a European or Middle Eastern state, or some combination thereof. They also necessitate a confrontation with the third area of reflection that it is currently undergoing - that is, what sort of operating political philosophy guides its government. Is it a liberal democracy that values liberty and human rights in the interest of the individual Turkish citizen; or is it a semi-democratic system whose military holds the real power and imposes order when and how it sees fit in the interest of the state? The answer to this question is an essential step toward the EU.

While one cannot possibly underestimate the critical importance of the Cyprus issue, this topic occupied less attention in my discussions in Turkey than others. The role of the military within the government however, was at the forefront of many people’s minds. The AKP was facing the judicial branch this summer on charges that it had violated the Constitution’s establishment of a secular Turkey by moving to allow headscarves on university campuses. This was widely perceived as what was commonly referred to as a “judicial coup.” Instead of overthrowing the government with force, the military was attempting to remove the AKP through legal means.

What was striking was the nearly uniform opposition that we heard to this move, even from those not generally in support of the AKP. It was viewed as threatening to the democratic future of the country. Most of the speculation that was occurring while I was in Turkey was over what the AKP would do if the court ruled against it, or whether the military would accept a ruling in favor of the governing party. The military after all, has a long legacy of overthrowing governments it opposes. But as Professor Elisabeth Ozdalga of the Middle East Technical University told us, there is a sense that the Turkish economy is too integrated with the international community for the military to resort to its old practices. In the end, the AKP was fined but not banned, and the military has indeed not taken any overt action against the government. One could view this as a source of optimism for Turkey’s accession hopes, as well as for the political future of Turkey more generally.





Aside from the military's general role in government, long-standing human rights practices stand in the way of Turkey being a liberal-democratic, European state. Thus, past and present human rights were the subject of many conversations we had. We met with Dr. Levent Korkut, Director of Amnesty International, Turkey, who cited significant improvements in recent years. The Kurds have been afforded more freedom of cultural and linguistic expression, most heavy forms of torture have been banned, Turkey has ratified all international human rights treaties, and submitted itself to being subject to the European Court of Human Rights. On the other hand, he points out that a number of minorities continue to lack protections against curtailments of their freedoms, laws continue to exist and are enforced that grossly limit freedom of expression, and the Kurds specifically continue to be repressed. Dr. Korkut argues that the Turkish people have never had the opportunity to participate in the construction or selection of a national constitution, and believes that such an exercise, which includes the development of minority protections, is a critical step for the political development of Turkey.

It is likely that such a process would force Turkey to confront not only its contemporary human rights problems, but also those of the past. From the killing of over 200,000 Greeks and the forced displacement of around 1.25 million more from Turkey, to the systematic extermination of as many as 2 million Armenians, Turkey's early history is stained with violence on a massive scale. Given the fact that people can be prosecuted and have their livelihoods wrecked for insulting "Turkishness", these are topics that are very difficult to discuss with Turks. And yet, such an honest confrontation with its past would seem to be critical to Turkey's internal as well as external reconciliation. This step has not happened yet. But we heard indications that it is beginning, including particular attention to the atrocities that were committed against Greeks in the 1922 Smyrna (now Izmir) Massacre. That Turkey's human rights record and practices require further reconciliation and that this necessitates a confrontation with exactly who the Turkish state is is undeniable. So is the fact that it is gradually doing so in a fairly profound way.

Turkey stands at a unique moment of transition in which there is a great deal of promise. It is emerging upon the international stage with a potential level of influence that it has not enjoyed in centuries. It is engaged in a process that could lead to its finally being recognized as a European peer at a level that has eluded Ottoman and Turkish leaders for a very long time. Such recognition would confirm an important part of the Turks' self-identity. It would provide validation for the potential coexistence of Islamic society and the modern, secular state. And it would mean the attainment of the democratic promise that has been made to the Turkish people for roughly a century. It is an exciting moment. With continued Turkish perseverance, and openness on the part of Europe, Turkey may just find a balance to its complex and rich set of identities and as a result, attain its tremendous potential.

A Polish Perspective:

Rafal Morawczynski, Visiting Polish Scholar

At the bus stop by the Grand Rapids' Meijer, I was asked by a couple about the arrival of the bus. Hearing my foreign accent they asked, "Where are you from?" "I am from Poland," I answered. Their reply surprised me: "That's fine to see a European here." They were Portuguese. Most probably they had not been to Poland before, nor had I been to Portugal. But as visitors to the US, people from Europe define themselves as Europeans as if there was anything like "European" in terms of common norms, traditions, or culture. Rather it reminds me of the neighbors you meet on holiday some long distance from home. You have not talked to them for ages, but suddenly you and they feel very close.

Chicago's Famous Polish circle: It used to be the Polish quarter for ages. Now it is mostly Mexican. St. Stanislaw Church still provides Polish Mass at 8.45, but it is more Spanish than Polish. I managed to find documents there stating that my grandfather was baptized there in 1893. It knew it must have been there. It was probably the first Polish church in Chicago. Like a hundred thousand others, my great-grandfather migrated out of the part of Poland which in the 19th century belonged to the Austrian Empire. It is why Chicago is nowadays said to be the second largest Polish city in the world. My grandfather came back to Poland with his family long before the First World War.

September 11: If this terrible attack had happened in my country the anniversary would be celebrated much more personally. Plenty of candles would be lit, the mass media would make a kind of deep national mourning. It is ours, this Slavic way of keeping historic memory vivid. In the USA it looked differently to me. In front of GVSU's DeVos Center, there were a lot of small national flags placed in the lawns. With respect and sorrow, but much more constrained. I think families, friends and others don't express themselves the same as we do, but tragedy is painful in the same way everywhere. At Ground Zero in NY I saw construction of a new building. The American spirit: Don't give up.

Roads everywhere: For me America consists in a very big part of roads, cars, and infrastructure surrounding highways and people always on the move. Flying by car on I-55 into Chicago's Loop was an absolutely dramatic experience. The Pontiac G6, with a typical engine for the US, but much more powerful than anything on Polish wheels (and most European roads) flew many yards above the earth surrounded by lines of red fire speeding off in every direction. In the small towns of the Midwest the central point is sometimes occupied by gasoline stations.

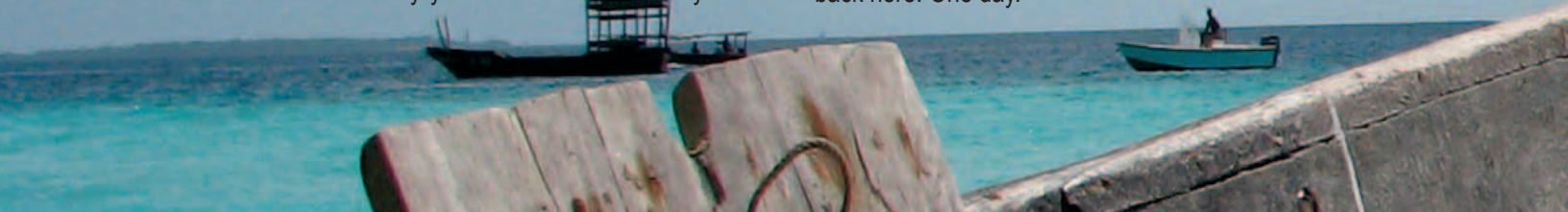
America is modern, new, updated, and for me, too much. Instinctively I was looking for something very old, rotted, decayed and ruined. In Grand Rapids I loved the Heritage Hill District, with its one hundred-one hundred fifty year old houses. OK, maybe

not the middle ages, but in the end quite old. Old enough to smell the kind of atmosphere which makes you feel temporary, limited, just passing through. You can feel it in high doses in European cathedrals. I loved walking through Heritage Hill before Halloween. All of those outrageous characters; ghosts, witches, and ghouls, seated or more often hanging in front of their houses looked pretty appealing in that old setting. What I was looking for in American towns were their centers, too. I was sometimes lost crossing some Main Street, which usually looked identical to others places, not like "Main Street." Many city centers I saw in the USA lacked this focus. Sometimes they become business areas like in Grand Rapids, sometimes over-commercialized like in NY, sometimes abandoned like Springfield (MA), sometimes turned into star cities like Chicago.

The Jewish quarter in Brooklyn: In some sense I felt like I was in Poland before WWII. Some part of my country, my home town, my neighborhood and myself was cut out suddenly and painfully 60 years ago. I know of that culture mostly from friends of my parents, uncles, aunts, grandparents. My home town was predominantly inhabited by Jewish people. I saw that again in Brooklyn, NY.

Elections: The elections are over, and all the emotion and partisan bickering have blown over like a summer storm. I like the American way of organizing democracy. Two parties, two sides are necessary for competition to exist. But two are enough to juxtapose opinions and ideas. It is like Hegel's dialectics. From Democrats to Republicans, from Republicans to Democrats; it is a good way to construct balanced progress. I like the opportunity the American people have to rule their own communities, with sheriffs and judges and Boards supervising towns and courts and universities and other official bodies to be elected. These elections were very thoroughly observed in Poland as in almost every other country, but in Poland for special reasons. The agreement between the Polish government and the administration of George Bush on the missile system which would be built in Poland provokes much controversy in my country. But for many sad historical reasons the USA was always perceived as a strong supporter of Polish independence. Newspapers and experts were pleased to notice the real interest of both candidates in the future of Central and Eastern Europe. Still, almost 20 years after the Iron Curtain fell memories are resurgent in Poland, Czechoslovakia or Lithuania.

America, until recently the country known to me only from Western movies, "Bonnie and Clyde," and the "closing bell" of the economic report from the Bloomberg Group, is more familiar to me today. At the airport in Chicago I thought to myself: "I'll come back here. One day."



Events

Chiaroscuro Film Series

January 18-April 26

UICA

www.chiaroscurofilmseries.org

Passport Fair

February 18

Padnos International Center

www.gvsu.edu/pic

Michigan Model Arab League

February 19 -21

Kirkhof Center

www.gvsu.edu/mes

Fête de la Culture Français

February 21

UICA

www.gvsu.edu/mlf/frenchfestival

LAS Conference on the Americas

March 20 - March 21

Wealthy Theater/

EberhardCenter

www.gvsu.edu/las





GLOBAL CONNECTIONS NEWSLETTER

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PADNOS INTERNATIONAL CENTER

The mission of the Padnos International Center is to engage the community of Grand Valley State University in meaningful international experiences which foster an appreciation and awareness of diverse cultures, people, and ideas.

PHOTOS

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SUBMISSIONS

The bulk of Global Connections content is unsolicited. We continually seek content for publication. Submissions can be sent via email smithliz@gvsu.edu. Submissions are due June 1 for the Fall semester edition and October 1 for the Winter Semester edition.

