



Afghan faculty at Kabul Education University work with IU faculty to revise the master of education in TESOL program.

AT THE INDIA GATEWAY:

KEEPING AFGHAN CONNECTIONS ALIVE

A PROMISING DECADE-LONG EFFORT IN AFGHANISTAN TO PROVIDE ADVANCED TRAINING IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH TO INSTRUCTORS AT AFGHAN UNIVERSITIES WAS CUT SHORT BY SECURITY CONCERNS THAT BROUGHT IU PARTICIPANTS HOME.

The U.S. and Afghan teams were separated with more work to be done. The India Gateway provided a way to continue the job. Afghan professors and government officials and IU faculty met at the gateway in Gurgaon in spring 2017. Over four days, they evaluated the success and impact of Kabul Education University’s master of education degree in Teaching English to Speakers of Other

Languages (TESOL) and brainstormed future directions.

IU connections in Afghanistan began in 1966, when then-IU Chancellor Herman B Wells visited Kabul University. He was asked by USAID to review that university’s administrative and educational support structures after a call for help from Kabul’s rector, Touryalai Etemadi. The next six years

produced an active faculty and administrative exchange in both directions and a growing Afghan community in Bloomington. That project ended with student and political unrest in 1972.

Mitzi Lewison, professor of literacy, culture, and language education in the IU School of Education, revived IU’s interest in Afghanistan educational development when she undertook a Fulbright partnership grant to Kabul in 2005. That led to HEP, the Afghanistan Higher Education Project, a joint USAID project with the University of Massachusetts to improve the training of secondary teachers at the 18 public higher education institutions across Afghanistan. IU hosted Afghan faculty working toward master’s degrees and sent IU faculty and consultants, led by Lewison and current School of Education Dean Terry Mason, to Kabul to assist in the design and implementation of revised English, mathematics, and science education programs at these universities.

Since 2012, IU has led the next stage, a project to establish a master of education in TESOL

at Kabul Education University. “The program was designed to mirror a program that we had here at IU,” Lewison said, “with some changes for Afghanization. We followed guidelines from the ministry. A ministry board, all Afghans, presented each part of the plan with their recommendation: ‘This one sounds pretty good,’ or ‘this one needs to change.’ We wrote up the changes and presented them to the ministry for approval. As IU faculty and Afghans together, we hashed out a sustainable program.”

Arlene Benitez, interim director of the IU Center for International Education, Development and Research (CIEDR), described one example of a change. “A tradition in the IU program (which goes back to the days when CIEDR was the social studies development center) is citizenship education. We built in ideas of active citizenship and education for democratic citizenship. They were really interested in that, but they also really wanted the subject to fit better with their own traditions. We changed the course to include service-learning, and that satisfied everybody. We got to meet our goals of teaching educators that the role of teachers is to raise and create active citizens. The service-learning idea of giving back to the community and working with the community was still

integral. Later, the instructors who had been our students noted how valuable they found the service-learning component to be and how that was something they were now trying to incorporate into more of the courses they were teaching.”

In 2014, before the formal evaluation of the program was complete and while students were still taking courses toward their degrees, the Indiana participants had to leave for security reasons. But that did not end the effort. “They are running it by themselves,” Lewison said. “They made it work.” Afghan participants had not been able to see the final evaluation, and the U.S. participants wanted more details about what was working and what remained to be done. Travel restrictions to Afghanistan kept the groups apart. The India Gateway provided a solution. “Afghans can easily get a visa into India; it’s a longer process for us than it is for them.”

Afghan instructors, other program participants, and government officials traveled to the India Gateway to meet with Lewison and Benitez. Afghans got to see the positive evaluations of the program that had been prepared by IU and an outside evaluator. The U.S. participants got to hear about the 57 instructors who completed the master’s

program and are now teaching back at their universities; the promotion of many to faculty leaders; and their increased ability to attend conferences, use technology, and design new materials and courses.

“It has been slow and incremental change,” said Benitez. “At the meeting they gave us a long list of teaching methodologies and new materials they’ve found and all of these ways that they have changed as instructors, which would not have happened if this program didn’t exist.” They also learned how much more they felt needed to be done: curriculum revision, new equipment and library and digital resources, training more K–12 teachers in English, and more networking and long-term partnerships.

High on the list of wishes and dreams for the future of the program is providing Afghan professors who have completed a master’s program in English with a route to the Doctor of Education degree (Ed.D.). CIEDR has prepared a concept paper that would adapt an existing Ed.D. program in the IU Department of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education. Admission standards and course requirements would remain the same. Courses would be taught by IU faculty in a combination of online education and annual

two-month class sessions at the India Gateway. Although there are logistical issues to resolve, Lewison and Benitez see the largest obstacle in funding. “Funds are available for small projects and very large projects, but the cost of this project is in no-man’s land somewhere in between.”

Key to the conversation at the gateway was the “element of trust,” Benitez said. “We have been with them for a long time, so they are not going to hold back. It was not the kind of meeting you have when you’re talking to someone for the first time.”

Lewison said, “Many of the faculty who had gone through our programs are now in leadership positions around the country, and the master’s program is still going. It’s amazing because so many development projects that happened there did not keep going after international partners left.” ■

Arlene Benitez

Interim Director, Center for International Education, Development, and Research

Project Director, South Sudan Master’s in Education Program

Mitzi Lewison

Professor, Department of Literacy, Culture, and Language Education