Mongolian Activist Visits Indiana

When she lectured as a guest of the Mongolia Society in February, Burmaa Radnaa spoke with fierce conviction of the ideals of citizen activism in a newly emerging democratic society. As founder and chairperson of the Mongolian nonprofit, nonpartisan, advocacy agency, Women for Social Progress, Radnaa has witnessed firsthand the power of democracy in action. "Citizen involvement in politics is the key to our movement's success," says Radnaa. "We are learning by doing."

Learning by doing, in the case of Women for Social Progress (WSP), means conducting voter education campaigns, monitoring local and national politicians and government agencies, analyzing election laws in an effort to advocate change, and providing forums for discussing societal issues related to gender, inequity, education, and politics. Their initial, formative effort was a voter education project to prepare voters for the 1996 elections. The project spanned three years and was the first-ever nonpartisan voter education campaign in Mongolian history.

Thanks in part to WSP's efforts, the Democratic Coalition won a parliamentary majority in the 1996 elections. The voter turn-out was a reported 90 percent, due in no small part to Mongolia's long history of obligatory voting under Communist rule. But the will of the people is not to be underestimated, says Radnaa. "We have a tradition of voting in Mongolia," she says. "Our problem is not getting people to vote, as it is in the United States, but rather, our problem is having the voters be informed." WSP's "Smart Vote" campaign stresses the ideal that running the government is up to individuals, rather than the ruling parties. The present WSP campaign focuses extensively on the concepts of government ownership, soft campaign money, and campaigning by platform, not influence. They publish a voter newsletter, provide an election handbook, and run the nation's first issue-driven voter hot-line.

"WSP aims to advocate and fight for the rights of women. Our objectives are huge, but our progress is evident."

- Burmaa Radnaa, Founder and Chairperson, Women for Social Progress

Comprised primarily of volunteers, WSP's mission demands long hours and tireless commitment. Radnaa didn't begin receiving a salary for her work with WSP until August 1997, over three years after the organization's original $6,000 funding commitment from the Global Fund for Women. The organization scrapes together just enough funding to maintain a locus of operations in Ulanbattar, but Radnaa is quick to point out that the organization would not continue to thrive without the work of volunteers throughout the isolated nation. She and others travel regularly to the rural provinces, meeting in the streets if they have to in an effort to continue to encourage voters to stay informed on the issues that relate to their everyday lives.

Of special concern to WSP are issues directly concerning the women of Mongolia. "In the years following the collapse of communism, we have suffered from huge unemployment, increasing alcoholism, and increasing reports of domestic violence," says Radnaa. A market economy is developing—slowly, but surely, she says—but in the interim, citizen morale can be quite low. With 76 percent of the population under the age of 30 and a high birth rate, Mongolians average four children per family. There

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IU Receives Mellon Foundation Grant for Area Studies Librarianship

A $164,000 grant from the Mellon Foundation will help Indiana University launch a new program to prepare doctoral students in area studies for positions as research librarians. The participating post-doctoral fellows—who have already studied a certain area of the world extensively—will learn aspects of librarianship under the guidance of an experienced area studies librarian. The knowledge they have already acquired in their doctoral studies, whether in literature, history or the social sciences, will provide the foundation upon which to build the information and instructional skills necessary for them to become area studies librarians.

"At a time when interest in global studies is gaining scholarly importance and widespread popularity, area studies librarians play a critical role in helping others to understand the world's cultures," said Suzanne Thorin, dean of University Libraries. IU's goal, she said, is to increase the pool and the talents of those entering the profession of area studies librarianship. For more information, contact Martha Brogan, director of collection development and university bibliographer, IU Libraries, at (812) 855-3403; or by E-mail: mbrogan@indiana.edu.

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especially strong about this last issue. "Studying abroad transforms students. It changes perspectives and adds tremendous value to the educational experience." Sideli herself traveled during her junior year in college—to Madrid—as part of her academic work in Spanish.

In addition to her elected position with SECUSSA, Sideli will continue to be involved with the LesBiGay Special Interest Group she currently co-chairs. The focus of the group, with whom Sideli has been working since 1993, is to create resources and build awareness of issues specifically related to lesbian, gay, and bisexual students during their travels abroad.

“One of the great things about NAFSA,” says Sideli, “is that it is a very energizing organization. Ours is a very sharing profession, and NAFSA helps us create and maintain the networks we need in our work.”

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are no unemployment or welfare benefits. Abortion is legal and free, but rarely practiced, as family planning and sex education programs are just now emerg-