School of Education Receives Award to Train ESL Teachers in Afghanistan

Indiana University’s School of Education (SOE) in Bloomington has been awarded a two-year Fulbright Educational Partnerships grant through the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs. The grant allows the school to collaborate with the Afghan Education University (AEU) in Kabul, Afghanistan, a recently established pedagogical institution of about 130 faculty and 2,000 students. Through the project, a team from the school will train Afghan educators with updated materials and pedagogy in teaching English as a Second Language through a program of curriculum development, faculty enhancement exchanges, teacher education workshops, and library development.

The SOE grant is a direct outgrowth of the strategic plans developed at a recent IUB conference that brought together Afghan and Afghan American scholars to discuss the reconstruction of higher education in Afghanistan with the minister of higher education and other Afghan education administrators (see International News, May 2003). The minister announced then that a new initiative making English the language of instruction in higher education institutions—as well as the language of wider communication from middle school on—was critical to rebuilding the nation’s crippled higher education system.

Co-directors of the project are Mitzi Lewison, associate professor in the Department of Language Education; Zaher Wahab, special assistant to the minister of higher education in Afghanistan, responsible for academic affairs at AEU; and Islamuddin Muslim, the AEU on-site project coordinator. Explains Lewison, “The partnership will focus on ESL instruction and on understanding issues of language, culture, and schooling in Afghanistan.”

The ultimate goal of the project is to develop new materials, update current pedagogical practices, incorporate appropriate technology, and produce a revised English curriculum for AEU.

In April 2004, the first year of the grant, Lewison and colleague Mary Beth Hines, chair of the language education department, will travel to Afghanistan to work with Wahab and Muslim to observe current teaching at AEU. The team will conduct a needs assessment of current ESL practices and materials at AEU and hold a faculty workshop. They will also administer the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), as well as interview and select the four AEU participants coming to IU in the fall semester for coursework and workshop training. At IU, these four participants will work together with the IU core language education faculty team headed by Lewison, Hines, Martha Nyikos, Faridah Pawan, other SOE faculty associated with the project, and instructors from IUB’s Center for English Language Training to draft a preliminary handbook of ESL materials to be used by AEU.

In the second year of the grant, two advanced IU graduate students from the language education department will join the four AEU faculty in Kabul to team-teach and conduct workshops using the preliminary draft of the handbook, assessing its effectiveness, and incorporating necessary revisions. The revised handbook will form the basis of further workshops at AEU conducted by the AEU faculty to train up to 240 Afghan ESL teacher trainees drawn from local and regional pedagogical institutes.

To help AEU develop a library collection that will support a quality ESL instruction program, the partnership grant will also provide for the donation of 8,000 English language text and reference books on education, ESL, English, linguistics, and literature, provided through the Sabre Foundation.

In endorsing the aims of the grant, Afghanistan’s Minister of Higher Education Sharif Fayez said, “The IU–AEU affiliation and collaboration will be a major step forward in our reform efforts to revitalize the higher education system in Afghanistan.”

Lewison and Hines are eager to make their first trip there. “We are really excited to get the project started,” says Lewison. “I view it as

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IU East Offers New Language and Culture Program in Costa Rica

Indiana University East’s Division of Humanities and Fine Arts is offering an overseas study program in Costa Rica during the summer of 2004. During the three-week language and culture immersion program, students will attend classes at a local institution, live with a Costa Rican family, and travel throughout the country. The course is from late May until mid-June.

“We chose Costa Rica for its rich variety of cultural and environmental resources,” said Luz Mary Rincon, IU East’s assistant professor of foreign languages and creator of the new overseas program. “This opportunity will enhance the students’ educational experience by allowing them to live in a Latin American culture and expand their professional career options.”

Rincon, who has been at IUE since fall 2002, is the campus’s first full-time professor and coordinator of the foreign language program, and she teaches both Spanish language and culture as well as French language courses.

IUE students will earn 3 credits for the course and have the opportunity to earn additional credit hours by enrolling in other courses focused on Hispanic culture and civilization. Courses will be delivered through the Heredia regional campus of the Centro Panamericano de Idiomas, which is approximately 30 minutes from San Jose, the capital of Costa Rica. Students must demonstrate basic knowledge of Spanish and get permission from the instructor. The fee of $2,000 includes 3 credit hours of tuition, airfare, accommodation, meals, and excursions. Non–IU students may take advantage of this opportunity provided they meet the minimum requirements.

Rincon, who will lead the students to Heredia, says there is great interest in the course, which she expects will quickly fill at 15 students. She is very enthusiastic about the new program, saying, “My students are very excited about it and feel more comfortable just because it is an IUE-based program.” She also sees the program as providing a more authentic cultural experience because of its location in a semi-rural area where students will live with local families.

For more information, e-mail Luz Mary Rincon at lrincon@indiana.edu or call the IU East Foreign Language Department at (765) 973-8609.

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seeds for a larger, more substantial program.”

The Fulbright Educational Partnerships Program fosters linkages in the humanities and social sciences between U.S. and foreign academic institutions. These grants support curricu-

lum, faculty and staff development and collaborative research, and outreach activities that have a multiplier effect and long-term impact. The program currently extends to all world regions, although eligibility of countries within each world region varies for each competition.

—RMN

exchanges.state.gov/education/partnership