IUB Inaugurates New Constitutional Democracy Center

From Afghanistan to West Africa, from the Balkans to the Middle East, people around the world are struggling to use constitutional democracy to deal with the problems that afflict divided societies. How can constitutional democracy offer meaningful self-government to citizens of plural societies characterized by deep ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other sorts of divisions? The future of Iraq, for example, depends on whether Sunnis will join with Kurds and Shiites to make the new constitution work.

"No issue is more significant to the well-being of the world's peoples," says John S. Hastings Professor of Law David C. Williams, a constitutional law scholar at the Indiana University School of Law—Bloomington.

To promote constitutional democracy, IU Bloomington is establishing a new interdisciplinary unit, the Center for Constitutional Democracy in Plural Societies (CCDPS), founded and directed by Williams. CCDPS aims to bridge the world of ideas, through research and study, and the world of affairs, through advising and supporting key players who seek to reform their home countries through constitutional democracy. To do this, the center will host productive discussions and exchanges between two groups of participants: on the one hand, university scholars who have expertise on the theories, strategies, and comparative perspectives of democratization, and on the other, political leaders and reformers who possess unique insights and information as citizens of their societies and institutions. Both groups not only learn from each other, but the scholars and leaders of one country can learn from their counterparts of another country.

Associate directors of the center are Amos Sawyer, former interim president of Liberia and research scholar and co-director of the Workshop in Political Theory and Policy Analysis; Susan H. Williams, Walter W. Foskett Professor of Law specializing in constitutional law and feminist legal theory; and Edward O. Delaney, a prominent attorney with special expertise in electoral law, the role of the bar, and international practice. Current members of the center are Senior Fellows Tun Myint, research associate of the Workshop; Visiting Fulbright Scholar Rovshan Ismayilov, a constitutional scholar from Baku State University in Azerbaijan; and research fellows Ngun Cung “Andrew” Lian from Burma, who is a doctoral candidate for the S.J.D. degree, and Mukhit Yeleyev from Kazakhstan, who is pursuing a doctoral degree in law.

IU and School of Law—Bloomington already have substantial relationships with democratic leaders and educators in Burma and Liberia, as well as ongoing exchanges with leaders and educators in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. Given the academic, multidisciplinary strengths and area expertise of its current membership, the CCDPS will initially concentrate on deep case studies of these four plural societies, all seeking constitutional reform and facing continuing constitutional change. These are also countries where the United States has strong interests in promoting stable democracies. A major thrust of the center will be to offer training to the reform leaders of these countries in constitutionalism, parliamentary process, and legal ordering.

continued on page 24
Intercultural Communication Training continued from page 13

Last year, ICIC hosted two visiting scholars. Visiting Fulbright scholar of English Sofija Mićić of the School of Medicine at the University of Belgrade, Serbia and Montenegro, carried out contrastive analyses of medical terms in English and Serbian in preparation for a bilingual English-Serbian medical dictionary and a textbook of English for medical purposes. Lorena Suarez Tejerina of the University of León in Spain worked on her Ph.D. dissertation examining “The Role of Evaluation at the Macro-Structural Level: A Corpus of English and Spanish Book Reviews Submitted to a Contrastive Study.” For 2005, ICIC has invited two more Spanish scholars, Miguel Ruiz Garrido of the University of Jaume I de Castelló, and María Pilar Mur Dueñas from the University of Zaragoza.

Each year, ICIC’s international internship program brings graduate student interns from abroad to work in the center during the summer. This year, ICIC hosted two interns from Åbo Akademi University in Turku, Finland, Mirva Lehtonen and Yvonne Westergård. Both students used the internships to count toward completion of the English language component for their M.A. degrees, as required by their university. Interns in this program learn office skills, practice their English, and experience American culture in the workplace. In January 2005, IUPUI Chancellor Charles Bantz signed an agreement to collaborate with Åbo Akademi University on a student exchange program. The agreement provides for an exchange of students and faculty from one semester to one academic year between both universities.

—RMN

For further information, see: www.iupui.edu/~icic

Constitutional Democracy Center continued from page 7

CCDPS’s inaugural event was a working conference, Constitutional Reform: Burma, Liberia, and Azerbaijan, co-hosted by the center and IU’s Institute for Advanced Study, with additional support from the law school, that took place August 2–12, 2005. Democracy reform leaders from these countries gathered with members of the center to deliberate, for the most part, in private working sessions, and share resources, scholarship, and experiences germane to democratic constitutional reform. Invited participants included Erkin Gadirov, senior lecturer at Baku State University, Azerbaijan; Lian Sakhong, chair of the Ethnic Nationalities Council and co-chair of the Federal Constitution Drafting Committee of the Union of Burma; U Thein Oo, an elected member of the Parliament-in-exile and co-chair of the Federal Constitution Drafting Committee of the Union of Burma; and, from Liberia, David Jallah, dean of the School of Law, University of Liberia, and Philip Banks, former Minister of Justice.

Of his hopes for the conference, Williams says, “A constitution must grow up from within a country. That’s the only way it can work and the only way it can survive. We are working with people who we believe are going to make a difference... It will be the first time [they] will have gotten together. We hope it will give them a better sense of what they can do to help each other as their individual democracies emerge.”

—RMN

For further information on CCDPS and its activities:
courier.law.indiana.edu/beta/index.html

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